**Ginevra: from margin to center**

by **Shameless_Dakini**

**Summary**

Ginny Weasley After the Battle and Beyond - a slowly growing Hinny romance with some plot and adventure. 
Ginny as she develops, changes, and achieves in various arenas, negotiates her relationships (platonic and romantic)

**Notes**

Mostly canon. Unbeta'd 
Rating mostly for language and discussions of rape, assault, and war atrocities though none are depicted or occur to any characters within the story. Please let me know if I should add to/change my warnings
Focused on Ginny without Harry for a long time before we see any real romance. Can be seen as mildly Harry bashing and Molly bashing- but have attempted to contextualize and will do more so later- but mostly focuses on character depth and growth.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Mostly canon. Unbeta'd
Have a few behind-the-scenes canon moments.

Rating mostly for language and discussions of rape, assault, and war atrocities though none are depicted or occur to any characters within the story or in the framework of the story. Please let me know if I should add to/change my warnings

Can be seen as very very mildly Harry bashing and Molly bashing in Ginny's internal monologue in this chapter alone- but have attempted to contextualize and will do more so later- but mostly focuses on character depth and growth and all bashing is through the perspective of a slightly frustrated or Growing Ginny as she wrestles with becoming an adult woman in charge of her career and destiny

After the grief and pain that came with burying loved ones, she and Harry had-somewhat unofficially- come back together.

Well, at least physically.

It wasn’t really a time to properly date or grow and learn about each other, much less DTR. He had responsibilities and so did she. For all that it was a “do nothing” summer- she was extraordinarily busy.

At first she was simply the sibling most in charge of caring for her Mum and George. Everyone else was needed outside the home. But soon she was helping her mum brew potions and cook patient meals to send to a largely understaffed but overflowing St. Mungos. Ginny was also remotely assisting Neville and Charlie who had become defacto Project Managers for the reconstruction of Hogwarts. On the afternoons Fleur came over to assist her mother- Ginny walked over to the Lovegood residence to help her friend and her father put back together their beloved home.

And Harry-

By summer he was finally, Harry Potter: THE-Boy-Who-Lived. Harry had always risen to or surpassed the inordinate responsibility thrust upon him; but he had always worn his title and power with discomfort. Now, the title, the responsibility, and the inherent power were now easily melding into his broadened strong shoulders with a startling grace. He now confidently and with purpose went to tri-weekly meetings with Kingsley and the few remaining ministry heads as they attempted to spear-head a new government from the ashes. When asked, he actually considered
and agreed to a few of public speaking requests. His speeches were heartfelt, inspiring, but nuanced and message-heavy inspiring in his listeners a spirit of hope, justice and honor. He had learned to delegate, argue his points with conviction and confidence instead of emotion and was overall wiser in the ways of the greater world.

Never particularly emotive before, she was frankly amazed and in awe at the silent emotional conversations he and Ron had as they took care of Hermione and each other- casually trading I love yous, and negotiated the business of helping set the world to rights. No one batted an eye when they shared a bedroom to sleep, when Ron and Harry moved around Hermione like protective blankets, or when any serious question was prefaced by quick and silent conversation between the three.

She thought that when Hermione and Ron went to Australia for two weeks, she and Harry would have a moment to talk, re-learn each other as more than bodies, and figure out what exactly they were to each other. But there was no time, he took his godfather responsibilities seriously visiting Teddy religiously, was insistent on picking up Ron’s share of George-Minding, and swept off with Bill, the Goblins, and Percy for a few days to discuss financial matters and apparently the state of the Wizarding Economy.

Once Ron and Hermione returned, things got busier. Hermione and her parents were adjusting to the shock of their ordeal. Hermione had not spent real time with her own parents in years but was still rather frail emotionally and physically and almost broke down again at the idea of being alone – even if it was with her parents. Having always considered her a sister, Harry fulfilled his brotherly duty and moved in with the Grangers and conducted his business from there for the remainder of the summer while Ron visited almost daily.

This emerging adult Harry was inexplicably sexy in persona. After a summer of feeding under Molly Weasley’s watchful eye Harry was re-filling out his lean frame quite well too. After Fred’s funeral she had practically thrown herself at him in her bedroom. A heated deep song was followed by some exploratory petting-but Harry was too shy, a bit inexperienced and too noble to take advantage of her grief. Later there was time for the occasional make out in the garden when they were day weary and had unexpected privacy, a quick re-exploration if he was daring, his firm hand squeezing hers in assurance as he flew in and out, or lingering heated kisses if they happened to catch each other towel clad coming out of the shower—but really nothing solid.

Her send off at Kings Cross was perplexing. Hermione was having a ‘difficult’ day and so it was just Harry, her parents, and Percy. His decision to join the send off party had given her hope that there would be some….resolution, some declaration, some notice of what this was where it was going…something. But instead she had gotten a hug, a chaste kiss on the forehead, and a murmured “I’ll miss you.”

She felt 12-years old again waiting for him to notice her, waiting for him to acknowledge her in some capacity. She was never one for inaction so she was partially in hate with herself for simply letting this happen. She wasn’t exactly sure what to do here. She contemplated owling him, but she couldn’t quite figure out what exactly she would say. The chasm grew as neither party owled each other. The more she thought about it, the more she realized they couldn’t simply go back to those sunlit days snogging under the trees by the late of her 5th year. What exactly was their relationship now? For that matter, what would their relationship eve be like? More of what she experienced this summer? Is that…what she wanted? No. definitely not- at least not with Harry. He could never be a simple teenage boyfriend. He was all or nothing.
Over the summer she had grown to see a sister in Fleur. In the scant time they had to chat—as they negotiated her mum and Weasley family duties, and Fleur’s burgeoning career as Harry, Ron and Hermione’s unofficial press secretary—Ginny had grown to admire the strong, competent and assured woman her sister-in-law was. Even more, Ginny was impressed with the depth of understanding, respect, love and equality Fleur and her brother had. Of course she knew that her parents marriage had all those things too but they were older and a bit more traditional. Realizing how well Bill and Fleur knew each other emotionally, and the brief insights she had via Fleur about various conflicts or concerns the couple negotiated in their marriage filled her with awed respect.

Ron and Hermione, for all their early relationship shyness and pitfalls were headed that way too. Ron knew Hermione thoroughly—her fears, her insecurities, her flaws—even the ugliest, biggest ones and Hermione knew his. They argued they bickered but it was evident that they wouldn’t stop being themselves for the other. Ron would never stand in the way of Hermione’s inevitable triumphs. (Arguably Harry knew this about Ron and Hermione as well)

Fleur once said was entirely herself but more with Bill. Everything she wanted out of her life, be it her job, her hobbies, her friendships, her family, was even more fulfilling because Bill was sharing it with her. Unconsciously she realized that that was what she wanted if she were to get married. Ginny and Harry were nothing like that. They were nowhere near that—nor did it look like they were headed there anytime soon. Of course she loved him and all that but at what capacity?

Demelza asked her once if she resented him breaking up with her or not being asked to go with him like Ron and Hermione. After days of contemplation she realized she didn’t—not really. She was never upset with Harry for ending things and leaving. In fact, she knew that was simply him living up to his duty and what he had to do. And in regard to not asking her…

Ron and Hermione were Harry’s first family, extensions of his heart, his sword and shield if she were being dramatic. They had been since they were 11. The-Boy-Who-Lived wouldn’t have survived the past year emotionally much less physically were it not for them. In comparison, she was a teenage girlfriend of a little over two months. She would have been the exceedingly awkward but fondly cared for intrusion among them. So no, she could pretend all she wanted that him leaving or not asking her was a huge insult but it wasn’t the heart of the issue.

She had once sworn to herself that she would never again give anyone else the power to make her feel untrue to herself. To prevent her from living her own life, her own choices and her own dreams and desires. Now when she thought of her relationship a vague sense of dissatisfaction and resentment at herself bubbled, that she was in someway not being her truest self. Ginny Weasley took action, she didn’t let a boy leave her in limbo.

Sure, she loved him, but then what?

She even admitted to Demelza, Neville, and Luna one terrifying night last week that she wasn’t sure if loving him and having a vague idea that he loved her back (presumably) was enough for her.

Nora Loved Torvald and she still left.

But Harry isn’t Torvald Neville reminded her.

But whenever she thought about a future with Harry…some small part of her still felt trapped, as if
there was an invisible box being drawn around her.

“Is it Harry or the thought of turning into your Mum?” Demelza had asked after a pause.

Ginny shuddered. She loved and respected her mum, she really did. But her mum, the choices she had made, and the life she led were not what Ginny wanted. Her mum was considered and she had always considered her mum progressive and feminist. But, Summers with Hermione, learning about Mrs. Granger, exposure at Hogwarts and an expanse of literature and critical writing, and even dating Dean had made her realize that her mum was progressive and feminist for a pureblooded witch of her age. In addition, her mum’s love and desire to mother Harry especially after Fred took precedence to pretty much everything.

“Can you imagine how insufferable she would be if she thought we were really dating? Thank god I didn’t tell her when we did” Ginny said

“She would start discussing marriage the second I graduated!”

“We’re English. He’s the most eligible Bachelor in Britain. Its pretty much required every middle aged housewife turn into Mrs. Bennet” Neville quipped.

Ginny shot him a dirty look.

“Only Middle aged housewives with daughters Nev, the rest are a-flutter about their inappropriate feelings coupled with desires to feed him” Demezla corrected. After a pause,

“He does make a good Darcy.”

Ginny rolled her eyes. They were getting off topic.

“How? He grew up an orphan in second hand clothes. He is polite and his shyness comes off as awkwardness not vanity or pride occasionally with more sarcasm than Ginny,” Neville asked confused.

“But only we know that” Luna replied slowly

“Well not the orphan part- but the clothes and everything else. I imagine the Jocosta-fantasied housewife thinks him as the infallibly polite handsome young man who defeated Voldemort with a vast fortune and title”

There was a pregnant silence.

Demelza and Neville, burst out laughing and fell off their shared armchair. Ginny hovered between horror and amusement mouthing “Jocosta-Fantasied”

“Wait he has a title?” Demelza asked still snorting.

“Er…not exactly, his family apparently has a seat on the Wizengamot and loads of land or something in Godrics Hollow. And I think his parents were bonded after their wedding at Godrics Alter or something- and only super posh families I know have done that…And no, I have no idea about the fortune-but the last living Black family Heir willed all his fortune to Harry too so I imagine pretty large” Ginny answered. Demelza blinked at her owlishly.

“Erm…wait, remind me again why we’re not shagging him? I mean-you’ll have more fine carriages than Jane Lizzie!” Demelza choked out still laughing.

Ginny threw a pillow at her face, which unfortunately, Demelza caught. Ginny sighed
dramatically and plopped on the ground next to them. After a few minutes of silence all of them gazing at the ceiling of the Gryffindor tower ceiling, Neville rolled over and propped up on his elbows and said tentatively-

“Because….because only story books say Love is an end all be all?”

Luna who was visiting and still sitting in her armchair shook her head,

“All consuming Love assumes within it trust and satisfaction and the being your truest self part which is apparently worth all whatever one may sacrifice. Ginny may love Harry, but she doesn’t think it’s enough. Or at least right now not enough to fulfill her as a person.”

Ginny nodded and sat up and put her arms around her knees resting her head on the side of Luna’s armchair.

“I don’t think I’d be unhappy with him, just….eventually discontent.

I don’t know what frightens me more- the vision of me standing sadly at a stove looking like a bitter-version of my mother with untold number of Potter brats while Harry Ron and Hermione change the world for the better one amazing feat at a time…”

“Oh?” Luna prompted.

Neville and Demezla were watching Ginny carefully.

“Oh…” Ginny began,

“Or being….happy just enough…content just enough that I’ll get complacent and won’t realize I haven’t been true to all of me or fulfilled the rest of me-That I’ve swept away pieces of my dreams and adventures for the bigger dream of Harry and won’t realize it until it’s too late.”

Ginny swallowed the lump in her throat. She wasn’t close to tears but voicing ones greatest fears did tend to be emotionally painful. All the while, she did realize that a lot had changed in a year- her greatest fears did not involve Tom Riddle taking over or getting tortured by the Carrows.

Much later that night in expanded bed in the boys dorm she was now sharing with Neville, she did cry. Ginny was a silent minimalist crier. She didn’t sob or weep or gasp gulps of air. A few tears traveled down her cheeks as she gazed in silence.

She turned to Neville and whispered that the second vision was the more terrifying.

“It would be the subtlest, sweetest of possessions…and this time no one could save me,” Neville, who understood the magnitude of such a statement pressed a kiss on her forehead and wrapped her in his arms.

“You a too strong, too vibrant, and too loved by the rest of us- that we would simply let you fade into someone you are not. I would fight for you, Demelza and Luna would fight for you. Hell your brothers would fight for you if you were becoming someone we knew you hated or giving up on things you loved,” Neville said.

More tears blinking out of Ginny’s eyes.

“Ron wouldn’t.” she said with difficulty.
“I don’t think he would notice at all- his first priority are Hermione and Harry….My...my family didn’t notice the last time I wasn’t me. And besides, they love Harry.”

She replied wracked with the pain of voicing her most secret sadness.

“Then I will fight for you.” Neville whispered brushing away her tears with his thumb.

“Not for your life but you. Who I know you to be. You are my closest friend in this world. Demelza and Luna’s too. I’m sorry I didn’t know you then or fight for you then, but I would fight for you and notice if...if...what was it you said? If you were losing yourself and drifting away in the dream of Harry. ”

“Promise?” Ginny squeaked nuzzling closer.

“Promise. Besides you can’t just get married and have Harry’s babies remember? You have a long list of tasks to do before you can even think about Love” Neville said referencing the list she had given to him two years prior at the beginnings of their deep friendship.

Ginny smiled, burrowed further under the duvet and with a small sigh, closed her eyes to sleep.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Ginevra's List

Chapter Notes

Some of my head cannons about the Wizarding World manifest through this story. The Wizengamot for example I envision as at least having 1/3 of its members as hereditary/House of Lords-esq. The way it was depicted in the movies and described in Ootp gave me this impression.

I also got the impression in the books, in the described dress, and also by the space Hermione inhabits that in addition to ridiculous anti-muggleborn bias, the Wizarding World is perhaps a bit behind in notions of feminism. The pureblood ladies seemed surprisingly traditional and perhaps this was a class issue and gender issue wrapped together but I've taken it a tad bit further.

Ginevra’s List

of things to do
to
Horrify Pureblood Witches
(and possibly her mum)

Shag a Muggle.

Shag *lots* of Muggles

Become the First woman to get MVP status in the UQF

Own a garage full of high end racing brooms

Develop an antique Custom broom building hobby -like posh old wizards

Become the first Witch to feature on the Cover of Quidditch Weekly for non sex appeal purposes

Learn what is and acquire Brazilian Wax

Start a company run by Witches

Travel to different countries without your family or a husband- by yourself (that’s right mum!)
Learn Judo

Become fashionable- not like Pansy with just expensive clothes, but develop “a progressive sense of personal style and taste”

Own loads of very pretty and very expensive lace pants and bra sets

Walk around in lace pants and heels

Buy a sex toy and keep it in the house (that’s right mum!)

Live to see the Harpies win the Quidditch English Cup

Go to university

(save money or get a scholarship!)

Get O’s in Transfiguration OWLS and NEWTS and earn McGonagall’s respect

Obtain/have a sexy boyfriend

Regain sexy boyfriend

Ride a motorcycle (No, Neville NOT necessarily one that flies!)

Learn how to have kinky sex (learn what constitutes kinky)

Get something pierced that mum would cry about

Learn about wine- enough to sound posh

Become an authority in something- not like Hermione, cooler

Write to an Agony Aunt

Become financially stable without mum or dad or Bill or Percy or a husband
Harry knew his relationship with Ginny—or rather the lack of one—was in serious need of work and deliberation. He could vividly recall seeing her tired face as she held her mother immediately after the Battle. He also distinctly remembered thinking that there would be time now to talk to her, go to her, comfort in her; now, finally that the burden of his life was over.

Somehow, time had gotten away from him.

The burden of his life, the yoke he had felt so heavily for the past few years, was gone and he felt lighter—but suddenly there was an overwhelming amount to do. Even half-numb with the pain of loss and recovery was constantly on the move. There were funerals to arrange, responsibilities to attend to. The Ministry had fallen and needed rebuilding.

Kingsley was set up as interim Minister, and Hestia Jones the Deputy. Percy had been set up to assist both of them. It was completely unknown the depth of the corruption after the Ministry fell, so Kingsley, by executive order, selected various members of the Order and Order supporters to temporarily fill key positions. He patiently explained that many would think this reeked of nepotism and that Harry’s support and perhaps public assistance would go a long way towards efficiency. Harry understood but soon found that the war torn nation was quick to grasp at Kingsley’s decisive early leadership and that his public appearances were not really needed. This did not, however, prevent him from being heavily involved in the rebuilding effort.

Harry didn’t know where he found the strength to keep going, but he was driven with a conviction to make sure they did it properly. That money buying power, insidious prejudice, and tradition for tradition’s sake wasn’t left unchecked for injustice and the inequality to easily take hold again. At the very least, he needed to help fix the damage caused by Riddle and set to right various mistruths and misconceptions. The details of the Horcrux hunt were kept vague as were the Hallows. But Snape’s true loyalty, Mr. Lovegood’s relative innocence, the Malfoys, what happened at Gringotts, etc. that had to be seen to.

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The domestic front posed more challenges. For the first time in his life the Burrow that summer was not a happy place. Much to Harry’s relief, the elder Weasley siblings and daughter-in-law knew what to do and how to manage the utterly heartbroken Weasley parents. Andromeda Tonks was forced to come live at the Burrow with her godson in the immediate grieving period. Charlie took it upon himself to see to the funeral arrangements for not just Fred but Remus and Tonks as well. Despite the grief that hung, the house was still a hive of activity and still unofficially a sort of
headquarters. Mr. Weasley, Bill, Fleur, Amos Diggory, Hestia Jones, Mr. Diggle, Charlie, Percy, and of course Harry, Ron, and Hermione often had impromptu meetings in the kitchen with Kingsley, sorting out the urgent Ministry business late into the evening.

More personally, Harry was surprised and then ashamed at his surprise that Percy efficiently and effectively saw to the immediate legal and administrative tasks Harry had not anticipated. Percy nervously informed Harry that he filed and finalized Harry’s official Godfather/Guardian paperwork, filed an injunction against any impending legal action from Gringotts and the Ministry (“It’s best to be safe, Harry”), and acquired an iron-clad restraining order for the Press, augmented by the liberal allowance of restraining charms.

Amid all this, Ron and Harry found themselves faced with a responsibility and problem that they never saw coming. When Hermione had first snuck into their bedroom, pushed the beds together, and calmly informed them she couldn’t sleep without them—the boys eagerly grasped at her initiative. They too needed the comfort and could admit that they missed the presence of the other bodies. It soon became evident, however, that Hermione was suffering from what Ron discovered in his sudden and avid research was Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

As was habit, the two young men took it upon themselves to care for her and kept the situation relatively quiet. Ron threw himself into the task of acquiring information and educating himself and Harry about PTSD and also the after-effects of Cruciatust Torture and living a life of constant panic. A discreet and ambiguous note to Madam Pomfrey brought them vials of Dreamless Sleep Draught, Calming Solution, and Pastes or ointments to deal with cuts, burns, and scars. To their absolute horror and shame, they never realized the extent of Hermione’s scars, the diversity of her torture (more than just the Cruciatust Curse), and the depth of its impact on their strong, brave, always-competent friend. Harry and Ron too were rather scarred, but the presence of arm and leg hair, and the sheer fact that they were men caused a radically different social reaction to their scars than Hermione’s. In the post-war calm Hermione became frantic whenever she found herself alone, broke down completely when she caught sight of her more gruesome scars, and randomly grew vacant and disinterested.

With broken hearts and steely determination Harry and Ron, though likely suffering from some form of PTSD themselves, made sure to see to Hermione’s every need. Boyhood embarrassment or emotional reluctance was banished. Ron and Harry took turns standing in the bathroom chatting loudly as Hermione bathed to distract her from herself. (In those early days she deemed her battle ridden body "hideous," and even urged Ron to leave her and find someone more attractive.) Ron on occasion helped her dress and brush her hair. Harry read to her softly every night before bed. Her tears and breakdowns on difficult days were met with calm comfort. Though they had never been particularly physically or emotionally open before, the boys showered Hermione in affection. Harry was surprised no one commented on his bear hugs, kisses on the forehead, or the arm secured around her shoulders when she sat. He idly wondered what Rita Skeeter would have to say now. Ron and Harry were often found discussing the next course of action, the assessment of particularly good or bad days, and potion dosages in low tones with great maturity.

Hermione slowly returned to her normal self by the end of September. In August, Harry thrust two all-expenses paid trip tickets at Hermione and Ron to fly to Australia and retrieve her parents. Their return and insistence on Muggle group therapy vastly improved everyone’s mental state. Harry thought that he understood and basked in the depths of friendship and love after seven years. Therapy and the recovery months open up new depths. By that Christmas, well after Hermione had returned to herself, he realized that the three of them were closer than ever.

Harry did catch a little break sometime before his eighteenth birthday. The new emergency government had organized and recovered enough that Harry found himself without pressing
business for a full week. He remembered his promise of later and Ginny and hoped to finally have
time to talk to her. He was living at the Burrow, so was she—they used to understand each
other so well—it should have been easy.

It was not.

She too, was ridiculously busy. He saw her slowly coaxing George out of his shell, spurring her
mother back into action, and subtly steering her silently grieving father who too often threw
himself into work to avoid the pain. Her strength and resilience had always astonished him, but
more so now because he knew how taxing it was to take care of a loved one. She was also as
busy as he was in rebuilding the world. He was startlingly embarrassed to realize that she had
found needs and problems to fix he hadn’t even thought of. St. Mungo’s, the Lovegood’s house
—he was so ashamed), feeding the hundreds of Squibs and Half-bloods who were recently
homeless, and making potion deliveries with her mum for those discharged from St. Mungo’s, and
sorting out the paperwork and reclamation efforts of the thousands of Muggle-borns who had fled
and were now returning.

When he found her for himself, it seemed like they both wanted nothing more than to revel in each
other’s touch. Before, he hadn’t thought he would be alive after her mission to experience kissing
Ginny again. He vividly remembered thinking of her face, her cupids bow lips, and her blazing
look before he died and after that he just had to kiss her. He wanted to touch her everywhere.
But… she looked a little worse for the wear. Her brother had just died, she was too thin, and there
were dark circles under her eyes and a few faint suspicious scars on her lower back and around
her wrists.

For all his emotional growth and ability to comfort Hermione, he found himself at a loss with what
to say to Ginny. If he asked her how she was, she replied she was fine. Harry used that line so
much he knew an evasion when he saw it. But he had no idea how to talk to her; he had so many
questions, but it seemed unfair to ask them when he wasn’t ready to answer the questions he saw
in her eyes as well. He felt like a brute for wanting nothing more than to rip her clothes off and run
his hands and lips all over her, and also a coward for somehow becoming semi-mute in her
presence. So, there was nothing more he could do than kiss her fervently, hug her tenderly, and
squeeze her hand and hope she understood all that he was feeling.

And then he got busy. Again.

They still ran into each other and he kept telling himself after, but before he knew it he and her
family were sending her off on the Hogwarts Express. She looked…hollow and he wondered if
she would be going back at all if it weren’t for her mother. He didn’t know all the details, but from
what bits he could piece together from the imprisoned Carrows, McGonagall’s… insistence on
therapists at Hogwarts this year, and other chatter, he knew Ginny Weasley had had a difficult and
dangerous time last year at school. He was once again in awe of her silent bravery. She had not
said a word about what happened or protested going back.

She brightened considerably when she saw Neville on the platform. They had a quick unspoken
conversation of looks and with astonishing coordination Neville squeezed her shoulder, heaved
her trunk, and marched off towards the train. Harry found his chest bursting with jealous
possessiveness and also… regret. He wanted to have silent conversations with her, carry her trunk,
and share small touches that held hidden meanings.

Harry had run into Neville a few times over the summer, aligning on various rebuilding efforts.
Harry also knew that many of his classmates viewed Neville as another leader and protector—for
he had done just that for the students of Hogwarts all of last year. Taking on other students’
detentions, rescuing some Slytherins from their house mates, other detention rescue missions, and managing the growing population of the Room of Requirement was no small feat.

Harry was jealously annoyed that Neville, who had always been much larger than Harry but with a soft pudgy boyish-look, was now a sculpted strong-shouldered man. And he was blonde with tidy hair. Agonized, he could admit that Neville had taken far better care of Ginny (not that she needed it) than Harry had in the past year and that he probably knew her better too. He had always thought he and Ginny were so perfect, so compatible because she seemed to understand him completely. He was now doubting if she felt that way about him—did he know her, get her as easily? Did Neville?

He suddenly wanted to hold her and run away to a secluded compartment and ask her if he made her happy. Ask her if he made her as deliriously content as she made him or if he was just an… obligation. Was he an ex-boyfriend who suddenly assumed too much? She was too conscientious and forthright to ever intentionally betray anyone, but maybe her heart had grown closer to someone else (Neville) this past year?

Those things happened. It was allowed. She was after all, only fifteen when they dated, and that too for only a brief while.

He must have looked upset as she was looking at him anxiously. He glanced around and realized people were already looking their way, some openly staring. Mr. Weasley was looking at them warily. Did her parents even know that they had dated—were dating? Were they dating? They had never discussed it properly. He had the impression her family had a vague notion. Mr. Weasley was still looking and now so was Percy with a confused expression. He hastily pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead and told her he would miss her. She looked startled. Maybe he wasn’t supposed to do that in front of her parents? With a sick dread he wondered if maybe perhaps they didn’t approve! Before he could agonize further she was on the train, waving, and then their party was leaving the platform. Mrs. Weasley pulled him into a one-armed hug and murmured something soothing about missing Ginny and then, they Disapparated back to the Burrow.

Hestia Jones was waiting for them when they arrived back at the Burrow to discuss the French Ministry’s offer of financial assistance and Auror teams—and once again, thoughts of Ginny were paused for after.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Back to Ginny, now in Hogwarts!
This chapter is way less deep/angsty or introspective. A bit relaxed and silly actually.

She was sleeping in the boy’s dormitory. In Neville’s bed really- for pretty much the entire term. The fact that no one really gossiped about it was more a testament of the respect her classmates had toward Neville and maybe her. Or perhaps they understood that sleeping in the girls dormitory was too painful- the blank emptiness of being the only girl of her year to have survived. After all, all the houses had suffered losses and everyone knew at least one person who died. Or perhaps the world actually did know that Neville is gay, and two best friends and survivors of the last year at Hogwarts sharing a bed in comfort is nowhere near juicy enough gossip for Hogwarts.

Her last year at Hogwarts was perplexing and filled with the raw stumbles of a new emerging social consciousness on the grounds and among the houses. Dean and Seamus, her now dorm mates returned this year and decided to “give it a better go and take their NEWTS.”

After the first tentative weeks of awkward starts, and courteous “pretending she hadn’t basically moved in,” she returned from class one day to the boys engaged in serious interior décor. Somehow, from god knew where, they levitated a large chest of drawers into the room. Neville’s bed in the far corner had been moved and transfigured to more comfortably accommodate two. There were also, she saw trying not to laugh, pastel colored throw pillows added.

The boys were standing staring questioningly at the chest that was placed awkwardly in the corner between the wall on the far side of Neville’s bed. Dean looked around at the only two empty beds, eyed them speculatively, caught her looking and then snapped his attention back to the chest schooling his features blank.

Ron and Harry did not come back. Ron and Harry were living half in flat in London and half still at the Burrow assisting Kingsley reform the ministry, studying at the Auror Academy, and doing whatever else heroes of the war do. Ron, she knew via Hermione, was working in tandem with her other brothers to assist a bereft George with the shop and discussing finances and investments and something about “restructuring” with Bill. Her mother mentioned that Ron and Harry were still attending once-a-week muggle group therapy with Hermione and Mr. and Mrs. Granger. (The Grangers insisted)

Ron and Harry were also, thus far never discussed in the dorm – at least in her presence. She didn’t really know why- she didn’t think she ever indicated she was anything but happy for them. She was happy for them, and proud – especially of Ron who had becomes such a…a well, man in the past 6 months. He seemed to have returned from a two-week sojourn to Australia in August with Hermione assured in himself and his purpose. A purpose that apparently included taking care of George, learning the ins and outs of entrepreneurial finance, dedicating himself to his Auror studies, and loving and taking care of Hermione and Harry. Well, the last bit wasn’t really a new purpose but simply a mature reaffirmation of something he’d known but not openly acknowledged since 11. Though, she did overhear him before she left saying something about "the love of a good woman.."
“We can move the beds,” she said coming out of her musings. “Ron and Harry are obviously not coming back and if we move and compress the beds to the far corner we can center our beds and not have the squeeze in the dresser.”

This apparently was the go ahead.

Dean suggested they get a rug and perhaps a bookshelf to “center the space” and Seamus redressed and opened the windows on Harry and Ron’s side of the room that had thus far stayed shut. Ginny woke up late the next morning to an empty dormitory and a large shower caddy at the foot of the bed filled with rather girly bath products.

Where Ron and Harry’s beds used to be now stood a short shelf sitting under the window, the large chest and her trunk, and coat rack hanging with a bathrobe and dressing gown. On the far side of the room, adjacent to her chest stood what looked like a half painted Japanese style screen. Pinned to it a note: *For privacy changing and because Dean wants to practice painting it*

Apparently the boys had further decorated and redecorated after she went to bed. Overflowing with a surprising new feeling of affection and gratitude Ginny used her new gifts to rush through a shower and sneak out to Hogsmede and the kitchens. She wanted to show her appreciation.

That evening all sitting comfortably on Neville’s transfigured bed she and Neville broke bread with Dean and Seamus over shots of whiskey and Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans and dirty jokes. (She grew up in a house of boys, naturally, she had the most jaw dropping jokes)

“Are you like this with Harry?” Dean asked attempting to flick a bean into Seamus’ mouth. Next to her, Neville tensed and Seamus sent Dean a warning look.

“Like what?” she asked, genuinely perplexed.

She was neither tense nor upset or…anything really at the mention of Harry. The fact that she had no idea what they were to each other and also how she felt about him anymore was a separate issue….to be discussed and rehashed often with Neville Demelza and Luna.

“So….open, um..Brash. You were far more uh...demure.. when we dated” Dean replied.

She briefly wondered if these were the criticisms of a snubbed lover (er, well, boyfriend she learned…a lot with). But no, he had taken their breakup and her (tragically short) relationship with Harry relatively well. She felt she was at the height of maturity that she and her former boyfriend could frankly discuss that they dated because they were both ‘hot and fun and willing.’ Perhaps if they were older they simply would have shagged instead of *dating*.

She had no idea if Dean or Harry talked that year but *she* had remained friendly with Dean. No, Dean was not asking with any pernicious or jealous purpose- simple curiosity was written all over him. Besides, he and Luna were shagging now. For comfort and affirmation of life, and the "purging of a shared trauma" - not love, Luna had explained in her distinct way

“You seemed too nice and easy to startle! Trying so hard,” She replied only half joking. Somewhere beside her Neville was scoffing loudly at “demure.”

“Its true, I did-you’re incredibly popular and had two boyfriends before me! You were my first girlfriend! And I was in a constant state of terror that Ron would stab me in my sleep. He made no move to hurt Harry though!” Dean laughed.

Ginny rolled her eyes. She was buying time- she wasn’t really sure how to respond to that comment. She also didn’t want to verbalize that Ron probably knew that *Harry’s virtue was more in jeopardy than her’s in that relationship.*
“That was Ron’s dream come true! Wouldn’t you want your infallibly polite and shy best mate-who is also, by the way, ridiculously busy with deeper life concerns, like defeating evil, to date your sister?! Wouldn’t have time to song! He’s probably sad you broke up last year” Said Neville deftly. Ginny shot him a quick grateful look.

If the news that Ginny and Harry were “still” broken up was surprising- the other two boys did not show it. Or perhaps like everyone last year, they assumed that was an external technicality. Broken up in name only.

Realizing it was now okay to mention their names, Seamus gazing analytically said,

“He is very polite, but she and Harry have a similar sense of humor”

“What?” yelped Dean, “I don’t think I’ve ever heard Harry be this um…” he trailed off looking uncertain

“Foul-mouthed, rude and surprisingly dirty?” Neville supplied helpfully tossing back his drink.

Seamus sniggered and Dean nodded.

Ginny snorted “You lot lived with my brother for six years! You’ve probably heard half these jokes!”

Seamus shook his head vehemently and claimed Ron had nothing on her dexterity of curses and collection of truly impolite jokes. She wasn’t the twins’ sister for nothing.

“Also, he and Harry were always too busy with…other stuff to really ever…” Seamus trailed off

“Spend time discussing the nuances of which bird has the best tits or cock-sucking lips?” she interjected knowingly.

Dean and Seamus nodded sheepishly.

“Alright then, who?” She asked tossing them two chocolate frogs. At their confused looks she clarified “Who has the best tits and lips?” Dean and Seamus seemed hesitant.

“Oh come on, you just heard me say some perfectly inappropriate jokes- don’t be shy now! I won’t get offended.”

“But this is about…girls you know personally…” Dean explained uncomfortably.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Okay sure, this is objectifying as hell and yes this is not really what you think of women blah blah blah understood signed sealed and delivered – now spill!”

They still seemed reluctant.

With a great sigh she leaned forward and confided

“Fine. This is a huge girl secret- I can’t believe I’m telling you this- on the bathroom wall in the girls dormitory is a list of the most shaggable Hogwarts blokes and the uh..the finer attributes of their bodies”

The boys gaped and cried out their surprise. Neville snorted into his pillow and almost rolled off his bed.

“So.”
“So.”

“I share you share. Fair is fair,” Ginny said smirking.

“We want to preface that these views are in no way..” Seamus started

“Yea! Yea I get it, now spill- best tits.” Ginny cut him off.

“Well, I assume that has to be Lavender doesn’t it? Or Parvati and her sister” said Neville looking suspiciously at a bean.

Ginny looked contemplative, “Makes sense. Hey! Do you think twins have the exact same boobs?”

Neville and Ginny looked at each other and cocked their heads in serious thought.

“Padma’s are bigger” Dean blurted, and then looked frankly shocked at himself for this admission.

Ginny and Neville looked at each other and nodded, as if they had just ticked off an item on their to-do list.

“Fascinating. So Lavender?” Ginny prompted getting back to the main issue.

Seamus and Dean looked at each other.

“Well actually…..” Seamus began, he paused to take a fortifying breath and continued, “She has the biggest knockers of our year but general consensus did not have her for um…the best tits.”


“Hermione” the boys huffed out hollowly. They looked suspiciously at Ginny and immediately pressed on,

“You can NOT share this with anyone not even your other brothers!”

“Definitely not her brothers! Imagine if Ron found out!”

Neville chuckled, “Wouldn’t even use his wand I reckon, just tear you apart limb to limb!” he said.

Seamus shot him a dirty look.

“You’re worried about Ron?” Ginny asked incredulously “You should be worried about Hermione!”

“Oh yes, because I randomly run into conversations with Hermione and ALSO happen to bring up how her knockers are Maxim -perfect,” Dean said sarcastically,

“No, its way more likely your brother finds out and uses his ridiculously large arms to kill me and then turns to Harry to help him not get in trouble for it”

Ginny giggled. “I don’t know that Harry would help, he sometime forgets Hermione is a girl”

She was rather pleased that Hermione rated so high sexually. While almost always a confident
girl, Hermione had confessed to Ginny she felt boys (Ron most importantly) viewed her like they viewed McGonagall – utterly sexless.

“Yes he would, he views Hermione as his big sister. Like entirely! I made a comment about ‘all she was hiding’ when she wore that dress to Slughorns party and he thwacked me on the head hard and told me to stop ogling The Chosen One’s sister!” Seamus shared.

The Night progressed and Ginny confided that the Girls Bathroom List was somewhat continuous and much to her discomfort-filled with Bill and Charlie Weasley towards the upper part of the wall.

Cho Chang apparently had great legs and Seamus and McLaggen were considered to have the nicest arms. Ron's herculean biceps were only recently given their due attention. The Patil Twins were all around most beautiful and “wife” material. Dean had sexiest lips and best abs. Lavender Brown had best ass, and hypothetically “best lay.” Ron, to Ginny’s dismay, had best chest. She was, much to the confusion of Dean and Seamus, elated to discover that she was considered to have the best “cock-sucking lips” and “fittest body.” She and Neville actually fell into hysterics over her lip-related title, as only Neville knew that she was concerned about her blowjob performance style and technique. (Not due to bad experience- she had none, simply cautious anxiety for...the future) Harry and Neville, naturally, had the best asses on the male side. Harry also had prettiest eyes.

She didn’t share with anyone but Neville that the very top bits of The Wall still bore the names James Potter and Sirius Black for almost ever category. Neville was positively gleeful about this news, and Ginny’s subsequent embarrassed discomfort about it. He opined that it was perversely fascinating to know that your ex-boyfriends dead father was also considered to have “Hands that Make you Wet Just to Look at,” and "Post-Shag Hair," and "Thin but Sensually Sexy Lips" (as opposed to Plush Kissable Lips)

An already red Ginny added to Neville’s delight when she told him that Sirius Black was listed as most shag-able, best body, and most desirous tongue. A title she felt more uncomfortable with because she seriously agreed with it.

Even Azkaban-hallowed, depressed, long-haired and tattooed, Sirius Black was incredibly attractive. Even clueless Harry had casually mentioned to her when they were dating how carelessly attractive Sirius was. She spent that summer in Grimmauld Place becoming rather good friends with Sirius as they bonded over a shared sense of humor, a love of late night hot cocoa, and escaping her mum's cleaning demands or overbearing nature. He was her first, real, inappropriate fantasy. Sure, she had a star-struck crush on Harry when she was 11, but at 14 and 15-the roguish, charming, full-bodied adult, downright sexy Sirius Black captivated her budding sexual awareness. She was pretty sure no one, not Hermione or Tonks and definitely not Sirius, knew she was secretly lusting after him that summer.

“Naughty Ginny Weasley!” Neville had gasped in mock affront as Ginny flushed scarlet.

“You can’t tell anyone!” Ginny had squeaked while vainly succumbing to embarrassed giggles.

“His Father and his Godfather!?? Really my dear, how delightfully kinky”

“Shutup! He can NEVER know!” Ginny had said in horrified tones. Neville agreed,

“No one can know, those Jocasta-fantasied housewives would drive you out of England!”
That evening was the turning point. Dean and Seamus went from skirting-the-issue classmates to real dorm-mates and eventually very good friends. Living in the boys dormitory was a pleasant exercise in simple friendship. While her serious and truest concerns and contemplations were shared with Neville and Demelza and Luna- it was lovely to be “one of the lads.”

Seamus gave her this dubious honor at an after hours party in the Ravenclaw common room in November. Ginny, high off a Quidditch victory that turned bittersweet because Ron nor Harry nor Hermione had remembered the game -had beamed with pleasure and quipped she was probably the manliest among the men there anyway.

For all her growing up in a houseful of men and having been impossibly close to Fred and George- Ginny had never actually been “one of the lads.” Her mother, delighted at finally having a daughter, forced her into gender specific clothing, bought her (when they could afford it) dolls and tea sets, and insisted on a level of manners and domestic awareness the boys were never required to have. She loved her dolls and tea sets and dresses but she also hated that her love of dolls deemed her unfit at Quidditch in the eyes of boys. She was always going to be the baby sister to Bill, Charlie and Percy. Fred and George were a tad too old and a tad too…everything until she turned 12 and grew a sharp and wicked sense of humor, the confidence to flaunt her mischievous streak, and overall further developed a personality that two 16 year old boys could rapport with.

Her family assumed Ron was her closest brother because they were inseparable when they were younger. Ron&Ginny were paired off mentally and spatially at family events, toys and hand-me-downs, and anytime the family buddied up. She never had the heart to tell her mother that she could actually count the number of real interactions Ron and she had as a distinct unit from the moment he sat on that train. She wasn’t resentful, she loved Ron- but he was Harry’s man- his best mate, his knight, his brother through and through. He couldn’t be all that and continue to be the Ron of Ron&Ginny.

This also meant, as pointed out by Seamus, that Ron (and Harry) never became lad’s lad. They didn’t have the opportunity when they were in school. Privately, Ginny mourned for the boy who wanted to desperately to be normal but was robbed of even this at the first place he called home. Being “one of the lads,” involved a great deal of creative sexual humor and commentary, a great deal of drinking whenever possible, discussing birds, and constantly boasting or attempting to one-up each other. None of these things were new. In fact in all of this she excelled- pieces of this were her relationship with Neville and Demelza. In fact Neville even once complained that Demelza and Ginny contemplated and discussed the mechanics and seductions of their hypothetical sex-lives more than most men he knew. (It was true, Ginny was almost positive she had sex and sexual thoughts on the brain way more than Harry when they dated) A lot of this reminded her of her time with the twins and made ache for Fred. But none of this, she had ever experienced with boys her own age.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

I promise the Hinny will come

Chapter Notes

Yes I blatantly and shameless borrow the American collegiate football system's set up for American collegiate Quidditch teams as well. Would love comments and constructive kind critique!

It was the end of term and there was a semi-secret party in the first two of Godric’s Chambers (The series of secret rooms entered via a trapdoor, now no longer holding Devil’s Snare or a troll and very well lit- they weren’t able to get the door to the third room open)

Ginny was tipsy. It was two nights before the start of Christmas holidays and Ginny was determined to imbibe.

She was technically “drowning her sorrows” in an attempt to procrastinate packing and large life decision-making. Earlier this week had been her session of the re-instituted Career Counseling appointments. McGonagall deemed it necessarily to take a more detailed approach in light of all that had happened. Ginny, who felt guilty for not having a definitive idea for her career took to reading career and further education pamphlets disconsolately. Nothing seemed to fit exactly. Nothing except Quidditch.

At Neville’s urging she re-examined her old list of dreams. During her session McGonagall pointedly asked her if she was limiting her options because she was subconsciously being guided by what her family or peers (Harry and Hermione) had done. Slughorn unconsciously struck the final blow at his official Christmas party two nights ago when boasted of her remarkable magical ability and power to some somebody.

“I dare say she will follow her brothers into Gringotts, or the Ministry, her brother Percy is apparently the one preventing us from falling further into Depression- or perhaps” he said with a knowing smile at her, “She will follow her dear Mr. Potter into the Aurors!”

Female Aurors were rare, something that Tonks had impressed upon Ginny as an egregious oversight. While the statement was technically a compliment a part of Ginny died at the wording – wondering if all people saw of her was a girl trailing Harry or her brothers.

Here her list prevailed.

Far more jaded than when she originally wrote it but far more aware of how precious dreams and future aspirations really were- she focused on the serious elements of her list.
It soon became obvious that many of these aspirations still held true!

She still deeply yearned to go to university, become independent and financially stable, travel the world, and explore things no one in her family did before. Her assiduous research before her chat with McGonagall exposed her to the depth and breadth of opportunity she could have if she chose to go to University. The brochures also promised that not knowing what exactly you wanted to do was perfectly normal at University.

No one in her family had gone to University. Hogwarts was already a very exclusive education and University was an incredibly expensive option. University required a high level of NEWTS, delayed adulthood and put off earning potential for 3 additional years of learning. Assuming of course that at the end of it, you didn’t decide to become a Healer or an Auror or something that required another 3 years of school.

Bill and Charlie could have both gotten into a program- but anyone with NEWTS enough to go to University had NEWTS enough to get a prestigious or well paying job, ensuring a comfortable middle class life.

University qualified wizards did tend to rise very high in the Ministry or start their own companies or organizations, however magical University education had always been the privilege of the wealthy. But oh, the wizarding world was changing…She wasn’t Hermione level academic but she did enjoy learning and was on course to do quite well in her NEWTS. Unlike Hermione she didn’t have a burning cause or passion dictating her future career nor did she love academia for academia’s sake to simply go into further studies and research.

All these theoretical musings and desires came to a head when MgGonagall informed her that her marks, (Discounting the last year and assuming she maintained her current average) qualified her for various University scholarships!

“You have to go” Neville demanded, “What’s the worst that can happen? An incredible life and educational experience, guaranteed higher job opportunity after.”

“Its not that simple- the scholarship takes care of tuition- but books, lodging, food, clothes even! All for what? To better myself when I can start earning now!?! What will people say, prancing off somewhere instead of helping rebuild Britain after the War…” she argued

“People can go bugger themselves, bettering yourself and your opportunities is a worthy cause! You’ll be better able to contribute to society as a result! We can’t just have posh wankers be the University educated! You’ve wanted this since you were 13 you can’t NOT do it”

“….but the money” she said miserably

“Sod the money, I’m giving you the money-NO! I don’t want to hear it. I love you too much to let one small thing hold you back from your potential! I mean it Ginny. What happened to being your truest self?! I won’t let you walk down a path of half-hearted jobs you don’t care for, and to then get married, quit, have kids and realize that you’re 45 years old and have not a done a damn thing you aspired to except maybe become Mrs. Harry Potter!” Neville cried vehemently.

Ginny sighed and stared at Neville. He was completely serious and she knew he would demand she take the money. Her heart swelled with affection for this wonderfully insightful, sweet, amazing friend.

(Neville definitely had the money to give. Neville too was the sole heir to a pretty large fortune that up until recently was managed by his Grandmother. The Longbottom fortune, lands, seats on the Wizengamot and Warlock Council were far less discussed because he was NOT the Boy-
Who-Lived and his various old relatives still occupied the estates and sat in the governmental seats. Ginny suspected the Longbottom fortune was actually an order of magnitude greater than Harrys.)

“Mrs. Harry Potter is not on the list,” Ginny said admitting defeat. Huffing out a sigh, Neville drew her into a hug and rolled his eyes. They both knew that ‘Mrs. Harry Potter’ was always secretly on the list though never penned.

From the crook of his arm Ginny said, “Okay. Okay…but What about Quidditch?”

“Oh…shit. I…I dunno but you play at Uni right?”

In addition to McGonagalls news about University, Madam Hooch recently told her the general scouts had seen her play and captain the first two games of the season and were impressed. (AAAAAh!!)

Female Quidditch players were also rare- not as rare as female Aurors but not ten a knut either. Sure, the Harpies were an all female league but as a result they were incredibly difficult to score a try out for. Additionally, they faced ridiculous pressure and discrimination so the players they signed had to be objectively the best and often times better than many of the male players simply to get signed on.

Getting signed was only half the battle- salaries and sponsorships for female players were 70% less than that of male players. While male players were lauded or increased their star power and sponsorship ability if spotted with romantic interests and dalliances, female players were subtly or openly shamed. Brands, player support, and in the end money affected all of this. Stable relationships as a result were essentially non-existent.

But she was getting ahead of herself- supposing she scored a try-out for the Harpies and supposing she made the team- it would be for the reserve team.

Quidditch players rarely got signed on to play at the all-england- professional level right out of school. Players who received team contracts spent 2-3 years on the official reserve team (with shit pay but all the responsibility) before moving up. Or they played a couple seasons as the top player at the lower-level club leagues before being drafted by a professionally ranking team. The risk of career ending injuries while a reserve or playing club were also possibilities.

“I don’t know. I’ld have to ask Hooch and maybe…talk to the scouts? Or someone in the industry. Charlie will know, I’ll have to ask him over Christmas” Ginny replied but her head was already in overdrive.

If she qualified with her NEWTS and her Quidditch skills, she could play for the University team. But the Uni-Teams at UCL, Oxford and Sorbonne were shit and everyone knew it. Only the Americans University teams were comparable to professional play. American Universities….now that was a thought. While she had contemplated University study, she had never once contemplated in a place as far as the United States.

The Quidditch leagues of American Magical Universities were incredibly competitive. The American Universities made enormous amounts of money off their Student athletes and the coaches for these teams were often “retired” professional coaches. As a result student players were treated almost like professional athletes. The Uni-Teams furbished players with brooms, kits, comprehensive one-on-one training with retired people who played their specific position, food programmes, apparel, and often times additional living stipends. But would she even qualify for an American University Quidditch Team? Could she really get a proper education playing for an American Uni Team? Did American scouts even come to Hogwarts? They typically recruited
from their own country and perhaps Canada. Would they even be willing? She would ask Madam Hooch, perhaps write a few letters, and maybe even get McGonagall involved.

But even after all of that- how on earth could she afford it? Even with Neville’s insistence… American Universities were ridiculously expensive, more so than any English or European ones. Not to mention the living and travel costs of studying so far!

Oh her mum would kill her! Would her parents even let her go? She would be of age but…family pressure was nothing to sneeze at, especially if she didn’t have the economic freedom to go despite their protests! Neville might have a fortune but…this was a sum of a different magnitude. Additionally, Wizarding England and Gringotts were just holding off massive economic Depression. While Neville promised financial help out of love and loyalty- could he really afford to? She had much to consider over Christmas and apparently, extensive research too.

A shout of “Bollocks” startled her out of her musings and she turned to Seamus being berated by a group of drunk classmates. She walked over to further listen to the cantankerous debate. Seamus was confidently defending his ability to bring a woman to orgasm in under a minute to jeers and taunts. Privately Ginny suspected this was great hyperbole.

“How have you even touched a woman Finnegan?”

“There is no way you’re better than me Shay- come on!”

“I bet she’s faking!”

Seeing Ginny Seamus grabbed her arm and declared “Ginny! You be the judge! Can’t I make a girl come in 60 seconds?” in the brief pause that followed Ginny cried

“How the fuck would I know? Do I look like the cousin you’re shagging?” the room erupted in guffaws while Seamus rolled his eyes.

“No, no as a woman you’ll be able to effectively judge my technique!! In fact we’ll all explain our go-to moves and you decide who wins!” Seamus clearly thought this was a Solomonic solution.

Ginny wondered if 17 and 18 year old boys knew that female orgasm achievement varied by person or that yes, most girls were faking. On the other hand at least they seemed aware that a female orgasm existed and should be a goal...

She also then quickly wondered who among this crowd was actually having sex. She hadn’t- was she particularly behind? Demelza hadn’t either. She knew Dean and Luna had established a sort of friends with benefits relationship over the summer as Dean assisted in reconstructing Hogwarts and Luna’s house. She couldn’t imagine who else would have the time, energy, maturity, and….ability to find a place to shag at Hogwarts. Now if they had an Invisibility Cloak however….no, she mentally jerked away from that line of supposition. It wouldn’t do to get suddenly randy fantasizing hypothetical sex under an Invisibility Cloak with a hypothetical boyfriend in the middle of a party. Who may or may not have beautifully crafted hands.

Seamus quickly set her up in a chair and told her to give our number scores from 1-10 but the boys arranged themselves in clusters and started arguing about who of them should go first.

“This seems unfair, she dated Dean!”

“We didn’t shag!!”

“How can we believe you? You just said you’re getting laid how do we know you’re not CURRENTLY shagging her”
“Because Potter hasn’t killed him!”

Wait What? Ginny was suddenly jerked out of her inadvertent Invisibility Cloak related sexual fantasies when she heard the name Potter.

“What?” she yelped flustered, wondering what was happening. The people around her continued on with their conversations. Neville, she noticed turned his head towards her with a frown on his face.

“She’s Definitely not with Dean- what bird in her right mind would leave Potter?” a boy was saying

“But I reckon if you tried anything on his girl you’ll meet a sticky end!” someone else replied

“What?” she asked loudly

“Well….It’s no disrespect to you Ginny! Of course you wouldn’t ever cheat on Harry!” a Ravenclaw boy whose name she didn’t know said anxiously.

She turned and looked at the others “We’re not…dating” she stated stupidly. She felt incredibly disconnected. Were they discussing her love life?! Meet with a sticky end? Since when was Harry ever jealous or crazy? She didn’t think he even noticed such things.

“Really?” the boy asked surprised and looking at her rather hopefully. Neville frowned and squared his shoulders

Zacharais rolled his eyes and took a pull from his drink. “It doesn’t really matter” he told the Ravenclaw sounding a bit slurried but matter-of-fact “She’s a right fit bird I’ll give you that Torrence–yea you’re alright Ginny, really! not annoying and know your way around a broomstick- but seriously seriously, Trust me mate, she’s totally Potters. We can find you someone else- not The Least Shaggable Witch in all of England!” he thumped the boy on the shoulder firmly a few time and walked away.

To Ginny’s horror the boy nodded.

“I don’t. I don’t fucking belong to ANYONE, Harry or otherwise!” she spluttered indignantly but no one seemed to be paying any attention.

The room had broken out into what seemed like discussions of The Boy-Who-Lived’s sexual prowess and her apparent belonging to him. Neville grabbed her hand and she felt a small tug towards the door but she was rooted to the spot.

The least shaggable witch in all of England?!?!?

She stared at the Ravenclaw boy Torrence, he turned to his neighbors, two Hufflepuff boys she didn’t know. This one seemed less drunk and was speaking softly.

“…says she wasn’t with him NOW but she was…”

“…brothers his best mate I mean come on…practically a betrothal..”

“He’s probably got like a MASSIVE prick- I mean they say he’s dead powerful and you know what they say about…”

“you don’t want to be the Prick-Who-Disappoints after a bloke who is literally called The-Man-Who-Conquered?” (there was laughter)
Wait what?

Really? Was this a room of blokes discussing Harry’s dick? She supposed its nice and hoped maybe she’d..... No but WHAT?

“…killed Death Eaters too….. over a House-Elf!”

“…and this poor sod wants to oogle his girl!”

“Imagine what he’d do if you touched her!…”

“Death wish mate, Death wish.”

Neville was now forcibly moving her through the crowd of boys. He had a silent manly nod-filled conversation across a sea of heads with Dean and started shoving her gently towards the entrance. Ginny was too numb and overcome with this completely unexpected wealth of new information to dispute. As they moved through the crowd she caught snatches of the continuing conversation.

“ He’s a right Hero!” Ernie Macmillan was saying in a pompous voice while gesturing wildly with a half filled tumbler. “Its disrespectful really, to make passes at the love of his life! No self respecting wizard would!”

“I wouldn’t go that far, but Ernie’s right- it’s a pretty dick move, tasteless….And, the man can kill you with Expelliarmus”

“Her brother is right scary too- Harry Potter’s right hand man training to be an Auror- he’d help bury your body!”

“Can you imagine the shame a bloke would bring himself? Tried to pork Ginny Weasley- no one would hire you!”

“The Love of his life, I’m telling you, you don’t go messing up something pure like that!”

“She’s a hero, she saved my life! I’d punch anyone who tried to bugger her!”

After what seemed like an eternity, she came out of her shock to Neville leading her through an empty corridor towards the Gryffindor common room. She stopped tugged her hand out of his and looked around wildly.

“Ginny….” Neville began

“Is it true?” she demanded. She looked around situating where she was, turned and pressed her back up against the wall.

“Is….what….true?” Neville asked very evenly knowing exactly what she was asking

“I’m the least shaggable witch in England?” she asked

Neville paused and sighed. He looked at his hands, looked up at her apologetically and cocked his head.

“You’re a very beautiful witch,” he began. She took a breath angrily, seeing this he held up his hands placating and continued “and more importantly I want you to remember and know you’re incredibly respected and popular for all you have done. You’re also very funny and friendly.”
Ginny shook her head anger simmering but Neville cut her off before she could continue “BUT Its not….not true” he finished with a sad look. Ginny was so appalled and angry she didn’t know with what to pick fault with.

“How do you know how FUCKING SEXIST..” she began.

“Yes.” Answered Neville quietly looking miserable. Suddenly she lost her momentum. Her fight was not with Neville, her anger was not with Neville.

“Harry Fucking Potter” she ground out sliding down the cold stone wall to sit crouched.

Neville shook his head and moved to sit next to her “Its not actually his fault,” he said quietly. “In fact, I’d be pretty surprised if he even knew people thought this way…He always is surprisingly clueless about his own press. Also….you know better on this but, I didn’t get the sense he’s…that kind of possessive…”

He was right. Harry for all his faults, all his cluelessness, and all his lack of awareness of the more subtle ways patriarchy and pureblood elitism manifested in this world was not a chauvinist. His anti-feministic blunders, if there were any, stemmed from systemic notions or innocent ignorance- she knew with irrevocable surety that he would never consider her or any woman he dated or loved to be his in any possessive capacity. Sure he looked at her sometimes, when he thought no one was looking, like she was a brand new broomstick that he couldn’t believe he got to see, but it was definitely not…sexist possessive. Unfortunately, that didn’t make everything she just heard any less true.

“Ugh, Fuck everything” she sighed and rolled her head onto Neville’s shoulder.

Did it matter? She asked herself- Did it matter that it was unlikely she would ever get asked out or chatted up ever again? Yes! Yes it DID matter! Somehow this seemed inexplicably tied to her fears with a mundanely happy life with Harry. They weren’t even TOGETHER!! How could she know if she really loved him or not if she couldn’t date or get to know someone else?! Maybe not at Hogwarts but after- as an adult with a job and a 20 something discovering her life in London and and men and- oh fuck….

With growing horror she thought through everything she overheard and realized that she was in fact, The Least Shaggable Woman in all of England.

“So…Uni in America is suddenly looking very appealing”
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Christmas after the War at the Burrow
paid in comments!

Chapter Notes

Warnings: There are a few lines of discussion of death (non major characters) and rape and a bit of discussion about attempting to deal with attempted rape aftermath. Nothing graphic but simply discussion of acts attempted.

Also warning for language

Slight inadvertant Molly Weasley and Harry Potter bashing

Ginny was livid.

A Diary. No- a “Journal” - to call a spade a spade a fucking Diary.

They were not actually serious were they? If it weren’t for the absolute lack of laughs it could almost be a poorly received joke. But no, a Diary plain as day with an impossibly more insulting card and note nestled in emerald wrapping paper.

Distantly Ginny wondered if she was focusing on this instead of the low ache of a first Christmas without Fred. In what proved to be a stroke of pure tactical genius Ron took over Christmas logistics. Calmly, firmly, and surprisingly sentimentally, he arranged for Andromeda and Teddy, The Grangers and Hermione, Professors McGonagall and Sprout, and Interim Minister Shacklebolt to be at The Burrow for Christmas Day Supper. (Everyone but the Professors and Minister were from a few days prior)

It was never even considered that Harry would be anywhere else.

Harry, once again displaying his new found confidence and his always golden heart, spent Christmas Eve-morning volunteering at St. Mungo’s and a few hours on Christmas Day playing with the children at Grimmauld Place. The Trio’s busy schedule had not abated when Ginny left for school. Ron and Harry had private tutoring sessions and Auror training- but were still involved in a dozen other side projects. Harry had been livid when he discovered a dozen or so Greyback-bitten war orphans housed in a sterile and partially gated Ministry building. Ginny didn’t know the details but an application of an angry and motivated Harry, Hermione and Bill had resulted in the children being set up in a now beautifully refurbished and oddly child friendly Grimmauld Place. The logistical negotiations of care, financing the establishment, and also protection against the strong anti-Werewolf sentiment were apparently still being sorted. Meanwhile, Ron had taken it upon himself to better integrate the Grangers into the ins and outs of Wizarding society and with
Hermione. They organized, tentatively with Molly Weasley, a Muggle-Parent support group. The group’s first order of business had been to set up a weekly support meeting for muggle and wizening parents who had lost children in the war. Ginny’s mother as the head was a perfect idea that seemed to have had a tremendous affect on the healing process.

In light of Ron’s consideration, Fleur’s careful planning, and Harry’s gallantry- Ginny felt rather selfish about wishing she could have stayed at Hogwarts for the holiday. She had dreaded coming home. The notion of corralling her mum through potential fits of despair, being a hostess to the invited guests, keeping an eye on her elusively grieving father, Harry awkwardness, and George seemed….miserable. Here her sister-in-laws, (the legal one and the inevitable one) turned out to be her saving graces. With the help of a muggle-born therapist, Hermione and her family were doing significantly better emotionally and mentally. (Upon learning this Ginny felt this was an option George too could solicit and perhaps even the emotionally repressive Harry) Joining forces, the two women expertly maneuvered Christmas preparation and Molly’s occasional vacant looks of sadness when she encountered anything of Fred’s.

Ginny had never particularly liked being forced to help out her mother while her brothers all bonded elsewhere. Molly loved these mother-daughter moments but to Ginny it was simply yet another time she was excluded because of her gender. But this year, she found herself actually enjoying her time with her Mum in the kitchen. Her mothers increased out-of-the-house activity (the muggle parent support group, the lunches and potions for St. Mungo’s and volunteering at Grimmauld Place) gave her much to discuss with her sorely missed daughter. Ginny also found that her mother had changed in how she treated her. Her mother was just starting to speak to her like she spoke to Hermione, her opinion was actually listened to, and she was not nearly as babied, as put in the corner, and as overly protected as she had been in the years prior. This did not mean Ginny became any better at cooking. (She was middling which under Molly Weasley's superb skills was the same as being hopeless.) She also did not suddenly find a newfound interest in domestic decoration, china patterns, or the intricacies of various recipes. Therefore, Hermione and Fleur’s enthusiasm as they cajoled her Mum into teaching them various recipes and tricks was received with incredible pleasure and happiness on both Ginny and Molly's part.

Fleur was also a shrewd social organizer. She deftly handled anything to do with the Grangers who seemed a tad overwhelmed. She managed to send them on exploratory excursions with Hermione and Arthur into the local Wizarding cultural areas. A brief bit of eye contact with her husband on the stairs led to Bill directing Charlie, Ron, George, and Harry off on some day-long excursion out of the house while Bill and Percy spent quiet time with her father cleaning the shed. With startling insight (and a look exchanged with Hermione) Fleur directed baby-clad Andromeda, Harry, and the Grangers to sort through the Christmas decorations for the tree and family room. She seemed to know the Weasleys couldn’t go through the Christmas things without Fred so soon —and instead set them on a large list of exhaustive physical cleaning and organization tasks that distracted from grief.

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Christmas morning, all things considering, went rather well. The ache of those lost hung over them all but the presence of a cooing baby experiencing his first Christmas, the Grangers their first magical one, and the careful domestic distractions managed by Fleur prevented any depressive or anger-filled fits.

Well, publicly anyway.
Ginny felt as if she was having an out of body experience when she unwrapped a particular gift from her parents. No- her father had no idea nor was likely involved with the Diary. Her other gift, the pair of simple pearl-drop earrings that once belonged to her Grandma Weasley, those were her fathers choice. No, her mother instead had given her a handsome, leather-bound, almost masculine looking, slightly old-fashioned, creamy blank page filled Journal. From Vauxhall Road.

Horror-struck, Ginny stared at the unwrapped present, willing herself not to scream as Molly Weasley in an expectant excited voice said,

“There is a note inside Dear!”

Ginny’s face was blank but she felt like she swallowed crushed glass that it was slowly tinkling in her stomach. She opened the cover and on the first page in emerald green ink was a note in her mother's hand. Her mother new emerald was her favorite color- it had been so well before Harry Potter had shown up in her life with this alluring eyes, though she supposed no one would believe her now.

Ginny flinched, she bumped into George who was sitting next to her. No one noticed. Fleur and Hermione’s itinerary of controlled chaos for the morning as they plied everyone with hot cocoa and shared stories was effective. Ginny slowly read the note.

My Dear Sweet Little Girl,

I know you’re almost 18 but you will always be my darling daughter and baby. I am so proud of all that you are and everything I know you’ll become. Mrs. Granger and I went shopping in Muggle London and as we reminisced and boasted about our darling daughters I remembered it has been an age since I saw you write a story, doodle in a notebook, or write your lovely poetry. These were the happy carefree dreams and hobbies of your girlhood. While these past few years have been hard, the world a serious place, and you’re not longer exactly my small little girl- I hope you do not give up on these fancies. Pen your stories (perhaps your adventures at Hogwarts last year about your Teenaged Army) write love notes (You have grown to be such a beautiful young lady my dear. And I’m sure you and your particular suitor will soon be exchanging love again!) write your observations, your aspirations, and explore your world of words. Your Professors have always remarked at your writing ability and wit. I know you are good at quite a few things but I hope you still keep in practice this humble skill.

I am so very proud of you my dear.

Love,

Mum

Ginny couldn’t process. The note was as sweet as it was painful. It was so nice of her mum and she would have flushed at the letter is she was not so horrified. Fighting the overwhelming urge to throw the dairy away or stab it, Ginny gushed a hasty thanks and hurried to help set up Lunch. Idle hands truly were the Devil’s playthings she determined and contrived to keep herself busy and keep the present firmly out of her mind. Lunch was a cacophonous affair as was clean up, followed by the traditional albeit halfhearted and brief snowball fight and then back to the
kitchen to assist for a lavish dinner.

Andromeda and Mrs. Granger tidied the living room and moved the presents upstairs so Ginny wasn’t confronted with the odious black book until she went to change for dinner and found it staring back at her from the foot of her bed.

She meant well Ginny thought furiously. The alternative, was too cruel for her mother to have ever considered.

All my professors thought I was a good writer. Neville even said I could write sketch comedies, Ginny justified internally. True, she had never shared the greater details of her ordeal with Tom Riddle’s diary. Technically, there was no concrete way her mum could have known that she still dreaded the idea of a journal or a diary.

Ginny used to write silly rhymes and songs all the time when she was little and perform them to her family, who usually laughed in all the right places. Those all abruptly stopped after her first year. Admittedly, her first public, non-family, poetry reading had had a rather....mortifying reception. The year Ron left to Hogwarts she penned hundreds of stories, adventures she would have with Ron, pranks they would play on the Twins, and full stage comedies involving the gnomes and chickens.

Before Riddle and before Hogwarts, she hadn't known writing in a dairy and liking poetry were things people made fun of. At 11, and then 12 she hadn't questioned the presiding order that deemed girls who liked Quidditch, who were good friends with boys, and were funny did not do silly girly things like write in dairies and read pretty poetry. She had worked so hard to distance herself from her time with Riddle, to erase that quiet, sullen, mopey Ginny, that she had never returned to examine these pieces of her. She didn't ever return to writing, she stopped wearing ribbons in her hair for a brief bit, stopping making daisy chains or plucked flowers to tuck in her tresses, and her love of poetry was like a shameful secret. Only in the past two years had Ginny realized that these distinctions were bullshit; that they were the insidious dividing constructs of the wizarding Patriarchy subtly beaten into her by Riddle's snide marks and then further stressed by her various brothers' teasing comments. She now proudly wore dresses and flowers in her hair—but her love of poetry was still a secret.

Yes, of course her mum meant well. But still, Ginny somehow expected her mum to simply know better. Like how her mum snuck her gifts of poetry books!

The phrases

“it has been an age” and

“dreams and hobbies of your girlhood” popped out at her mockingly from her mother’s note.

Girlhood? Ginny snorted at the innocent phrase-her pain turning into anger. Did nobody notice that she hadn’t touched a journal or written a fanciful story or poem or comedy since her disastrous first year?

Invisible Silly Little Ginny a posh voice sounding suspiciously like Riddle's echoed in her head.

Her brothers certainly didn't notice. The only time they remembered Ginny-the-Poet was when they mocked her for her poem to Harry. She thought it was rather courageous and bold and a fun silly little poem at the time. She still thought it was a bit silly and brave- not that she or Harry ever mentioned it again. Harry probably didn't even remember it.

What exactly did her mother expect her to do? Suddenly start producing sonnets eulogizing the
War? Perhaps a heroic ode about Harry? (Oh dear!) Or a series of dramatic adventures set at Hogwarts. Ah yes, there was yet another rub, salt in the still bleeding and progressively deepening wound really—“Adventures of a Teenaged Army.” Ginny had forgotten her mother’s dismissal of her at the Battle of Hogwarts. But many months after, after the immediate grief, she slowly realized that her family really did think the DA was nothing more than a quaint Army of Teenagers running around doing small little things. Naturally, she couldn’t tell them about the tortures, the attempted rapes, the assaults, the quietly passed threats on families, and the host of other things her quaint little Army of Teenagers was actually protecting against.

But…McGonagall and Sprout were just here for dinner. They sat next to her Mum- surely, they must have conveyed that her past year, anyone’s past year at Hogwarts was not…some…some Adventure like Robinson Crusoe.

My dorm mates of 5 years are all dead Ginny thought savagely punching her pillow. Demelza had almost been raped.

Ginny had bit through her tongue twice under Cruciatus, broken her arm when chained to a wall, and was – at the time, distressingly- saved by Snape from rape and assault from Amycus Carrow…and Ginny knew she was one of the lucky ones.

Trembling she rushed to her desk and scribbled a quick note to Neville,

I need you here. It hurts too much.

Can you come for Lunch tomorrow?

Neville would assume her her pain had to do with losing Fred. She felt a wave of guilt that she wasn’t feeling sad enough about his death. Grabbing an old quilt from the closet Ginny swept out of the room. In the privacy of her mind she could admit that she was too afraid to touch the Dairy and to move it from her bedspread.

She crept down the stairs and into the living room hoping to settle on the floor next to the sofa.

“Ginnybinny?”

Oh. Damn. Percy was relegated to the couch because the Grangers were given his room. As a naturally early riser he had reasoned that taking the couch was his duty.

“Oh hey Perce…I uh…couldn’t sleep,” she lied.

Afraid he would grow concerned, make her cocoa, and gently fuss if she even hinted at the truth.

Ron and Percy had never been close. The emotionally volatile but constipated brother, and the ridiculously sensitive yet defensive brother were too different to really ever understand each other.
They both reacted to the burden of being 'yet another Weasley' in radically different ways. Ron, overwhelmed and saddled with a famous best mate had never dared to even try. Percy had been determined to over perform and carve his identity through difference. They had come a long way from the boys they had been.

But -before he left, Percy was her quietest ally. Of course, she enjoyed making fun of him with the twins as much as the next person -but before he left, he was the only brother (who wasn’t old or an adult) who didn’t hold her “girlness” against her. He french-braided, had tea with her dolls, buttoned the hook-and-eyes on her dresses, and taught her how to tie her shoes and bows in ribbons. At Hogwarts when she experienced her first period, it was a blushing but kind Percy who assured her cramps were normal and plied her with chocolate and localized heating charms. Upon ‘return’ Percy stepped back into being Ginny’s quiet sensitive loving brother with an increased fervor to love and do right by his family. Percy looked at Ginny worryingly, she thought he would want to talk. Instead, he simply rolled over on the expanded couch and lifted a quilt-clad arm.

Ginny clambered in underneath, fitting her head on his surprisingly un-bony arm.

“Thank you Percy,” she sighed. He turned his face, seemed to hesitate for a few moments kissed the top of my head and murmured,

“I love you Ginnybinny-sleep well”

Because her life was a comedy of ironic pain, this was how Harry (an annoyingly early riser) discovered her the next morning. Hair mussed, coiled in blankets, with the sneaking suspicion she had been lightly snoring and drooling- Ginny to her horror- actually nuzzled closer to Harry’s hand as he attempted to gently nudge her awake. Needless to say the ensuing silence after she awoke, regained all her faculties, and realized she was nuzzling Harry was..... exceedingly awkward.

By the end of breakfast on Boxing Day she had worked up a hearty rage and was silently seething. Neville had responded early saying he could come. Her Mum and Fleur were delighted. Harry Ron and Hermione looked vaguely surprised that Ginny would so randomly invite him but were interested in meeting up with their classmate.

Ginny often wondered how those three viewed Neville. In her hearty rage she gave in to the often stored away unkind and unfair thoughts about those three and Neville:

…that Neville was ten times the friend those three ever were to her

…that they were rather disgusting hypocrites and awful for talking to Neville or acknowledging him only when it suited them or was beneficial…she couldn’t recollect Harry or Ron actively seeking out Neville’s company in all the years..

…That she knew the look that passed between Ron and Harry, her 4th year in the clearing before they rode Thestrals to the Ministry

…that they shouldn’t dare to call Neville their friend as he was hers and she shouldn’t have to share his wonderful friendship with them.

…that none of them would have believed her or come rushing if she sent them such a scant note. (Admittedly this thought was hard to feel with any conviction as ‘them’ did include the 12 year old boy who faced a basilisk for her…)
Neville arrived for lunch and made amicable talk with her family and guests. Percy and Charlie loved Neville as he had proven his incredible talent for backroom organization during the reconstruction of Hogwarts. Afterwards, most of the family decided a walk into the village was in order and left the Burrow relatively empty. Ron and Harry lounged in front of the fire lazily eating anything they could stick on the pokers and heat. Hermione sat curled up watching them and assured Neville and Ginny that this was a Christmas tradition for the boys.

Hermione told Neville she would be joining them at Hogwarts starting January. Neville beamed, and told her that Hogwarts had missed her, and peppered her with other questions. Secretly Ginny thought Neville was much kinder than her. She was not particularly looking forward to Hermione's return. She loved Hermione but she was nervous about her return and feared her constant badgering to study, slightly controlling nature, and perceptive gaze. Ginny had many secrets at Hogwarts that would be much harder to hide with Hermione there.

“I’ll be so nice! I’ll be sharing a room with Ginny,” Hermione was saying, jerking Ginny out of her aimless gazing.

“Er..” Neville began but then looked uncomfortably to Ginny. While all of Hogwarts seemed to know Ginny was sleeping in Neville’s bed in the boys dormitory, it was not a fact that Ginny had shared with her family. There was really no need to share this extraneous fact and it would only raise questions she would rather not answer. Some of which, were not her answers to give. Neville was not publicly out. Ginny doubted if his fellow dorm mates, Harry and Ron included, knew. Sighing Ginny said,

“Actually, no you won’t Hermione. I’m sorry”

Hermione looked between Neville and Ginny.

“Why not?” Ron asked, still reclined on the floor with Harry in front of the fire. Both sprawled boys were paying attention now. She had so hoped they would continue with trying to throw bits of sausage into each others mouths.

Neville frowned and looked worried. Ginny caught his eye and tried to assure him that she would not out him without his consent and that this was on her.

“Because….Well, because I’m not sleeping in the 7th year girls dorm,” Ginny said calmly.

“Why not? Then where are you sleeping?” Ron asked looking more confused and a tad suspicious. Harry had become very still and Ginny could feel him staring at her profile.

“With Neville, in the boys dorm,” Ginny replied looking Ron directly in the eye.

“Erm..not,” Neville attempted. Ron looked like he was trying very hard not to say the first thing on his mind.

“Oh! Um…that’s .I see. Surely just..sleeping.” Hermione cut in but then trailed off. She was looking at Neville in a slightly puzzled manner and Ginny wondered if Hermione had realized that Neville would not be attracted to Ginny.

Ron overcame his internal conflict and with great difficulty managed,

“When did... you two start…dating? We like… Neville. Ginny... but… weren’t you…well, its just... it’s a bit unseemly. ” Ginny rolled her eyes, admittedly this was far less of an outburst than she was expecting from Ron. She was decidedly ignoring the boy with wide green eyes who had
She was expecting from Ron. She was decidedly ignoring the boy with wide green eyes who had not moved nor said anything.

“I’m not dating Neville Ron!” Ginny said sounding as if that was the stupidest assumption to make, “He’s my best friend! We transfigured the bed to be bigger and we’re sharing it.”

She could feel those big green eyes relax the tiniest bit, even though she wasn’t looking. In the corner of her eye she saw her brother glance at Harry with a furrowed brow.

“Have you moved your trunk and everything that side as well? Aren’t their showers….well a bit rank?” Hermione asked in an attempt to move the conversation along.

“We cleaned for Ginny,” Neville said looking relieved he could say something neutral.

“We?-oh that’s right Seamus and Dean are redoing their 7th year as well,” Hermione said. And the tension in the room racked back up. Ron further furrowed his brow and open and closed his mouth before blurting out,

“Merlin Ginny, how do you have any privacy? How do you keep it secret? Its right indecent! Dean and Seamus being able to ogle you in a towel” Ginny was pretty certain the side of her face was going to explode by wandless magic if Harry didn’t stop boring into her. She was itching to lash out and had been hoping someone would ask her “why” or tell her it was indecent but that didn’t seem coming- so forcefully she began,

“Its not a secret Ron. I’m pretty sure all of Hogwarts knows- and no one cares. Luna and the Ravenclaws all sleep in the boys dorm, All the 5th and 6th year girls share with Dennis and half the Slytherins have moved into the Hufflepuff boys dorm!. Nev’s right they did clean for me Hermione, and designated a sectioned off shower- the boys did set up a nice partitioned area for my trunk and bought a drawer-chest and a screen which was very sweet. ”

“I’m pretty sure McGonagall knows…I think….I think she understands though…” Neville added quietly.

“Understand what? That you’re all having towel-clad orgies?” Ron grumbled. He had grown more and more alarmed during Ginny’s confession and didn’t seem to be able to stop his gut reactions now. For all his growth this past year…it seemed the idea of his sister living with three men was not something he could swallow. He had always been far more conservative than Ginny in many ways. It usually amused Ginny that Ron and her Mum were secretly so similar. Not today though. Also, Ginny was pretty certain he was upset on behalf of Harry, thinking her actions were some great betrayal.

“My friend are dead Ron!” Ginny snapped, losing her temper.

“Every. Single. Girl I have lived with for the past 6 years is dead. Two of them were assaulted in my very room.” Oddly satisfied at their horrified faces, and releasing the wealth of emotions she had felt since yesterday she continued on to the kill,

“I’m sorry you find it was so dissolute that I cannot stomach sleeping alone in my dorm room anymore. Do forgive me, I didn’t realize sharing a bed with your best friend because you couldn’t sleep was the exclusive privilege of you three!– Fuck this, lets go Neville” she rose grabbed Neville and started dragging him out of the room. As she reached the stairs she half turned back and added challengingly,

“Dean and Seamus gifted me a downright Victorian bathrobe and the screen to change behind. If you’re so worried about indecent Ron, you must know that no one has seen more of me in a towel than at the Burrow.”
Next to her Neville looked pained and made an apologetic shrug towards the group in the living room. Ron was flushed red with embarrassment and shock and was looking very carefully not at Harry. Hermione looked pained but resigned. Ginny refused to glance at Harry, she knew the hurt in his eyes would break her. Grabbing Neville by the elbow she dragged him up the stairs behind her.

“Fuck” she heard Ron say emphatically behind her.

Neville stood in her room looking oversized. He glanced around the room and and then gazed at Ginny whose face was still flushed in anger. She crossed her arms over her chest and looked back at him defiantly.

“That was unfair,” Neville said in a knowing almost parental tone

“Ron deserved it,” she retorted. Neville quirked his eyebrow-

“That last bit was not for Ron and you know it.”

All the fight went out of her. Huffing she strode across the room throwing up her arms she screwed up her face and made a frustrated noise.

“Did you see his eyes? He looked like someone killed his pet. Brutally. In front of him,” Neville said

“Story of his life,” Ginny replied hollowly.

“Ginny!”

Ginny shook her head, “No, I didn’t look at his eyes because I knew…I just……I couldn’t”

Neville, knew the complicated history and situation that was Ginny and Harry. He looked unsure.

“So…has it been like this all holiday? Was that why you owled?” Ginny shook her head again.

“No, Christmas was surprisingly okay. I mean I miss Fred obviously. And my Mum gets randomly zombie-like and Dad runs out to the shed too much, more than is healthy but…Christmas was actually not that bad. No- I called because of this,”

She turned and pointed to the Diary that was still neatly lying on the bottom of her bedspread and went on the explain to Neville that it was her Christmas present from her Mum. She had him read the note. Neville knew her and her history well enough to not have to ask too many questions. He did not question why she wouldn’t touch it or perhaps he didn't notice her aversion. He asked her what she wanted to do and she told him to get rid of it.

“Normal get rid of it? Or call the devastated Hero downstairs get rid of it?” Neville asked cheekily.

“Ha-bloody-Ha”

She felt infinitely better after Neville disposed of the Diary. He insisted on saving the note from her mother though because it was meant in kindness. She and Neville hung out in her room for the better part of the afternoon until Fleur popped in and insisted they come down for tea.

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Downstairs she found Fleur and Bill sitting at the kitchen table along with Harry, Hermione, and Ron. It was too soon after her bitter-words, but no one was going to hash it out again in front of Fleur and Bill. Neville enthusiastically delved into conversation with Bill and Fleur turned to invite Hermione on a girls-day- shopping trip she and Ginny had planned for the next day.

Unbeknownst to her mother and definitely her brothers, they were going Lingerie shopping. Ginny despairingly wondered if she would ever have a boy (ahem: Harry) interested enough to take her clothes off but she was excited in preparing herself nonetheless. She was jealously bitter and vaguely disgusted that prim and proper Hermione was most certainly going to have a very receptive audience to whatever she ended up purchasing.

Her parents and the Grangers breezed in to the kitchen looking well rested for the first time in an age and amid the chatter no one noticed Harry Potter shuffle closer to her.

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly. She couldn’t help looking at him this time. He had the most painfully morose expression.

“You didn’t do anything. Its not your fault,” she murmured back.

“I’m….I still am sorry- sorry I wasn’t there and….that I didn’t ask or know…or anything. But I’m glad you have Neville he’s….he’s a good sort.” Harry said.

Ginny stared. She and Harry had never had a proper disagreement, a fight, or a missed communication when they had officially gone out. She didn’t know what making-up with him was like. She also didn’t know her way around his apologies. What exactly was he apologizing for? Was he apologizing for having to go kill Voldemort instead of sitting at Hogwarts protecting her? If so...there were so many layers of wrong there. Was he apologizing because he thought the same things Ron had said? She had intentionally hurt him with her towel comment, did he know that? Should she tell him she didn't mind him watching her in a towel?

“Don’t tell my parents. I can’t…”

“--I understand. Ron’s …also sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologize for him Harry!”

“Its okay, he really is he just… its just that….well, you are really popular and very pretty…” Harry finished.

Ginny felt her cheeks heat even as she deliberately rolled her eyes. Harry Potter possibly the most popular person in England, the most eligible bachelor, telling her she was ridiculously popular.

“You’re popular. Neville’s my best friend Harry- he’s like my Hermione,” she felt an inexplicable need for Harry to know and understand this.

While she too agreed Neville was a great, she got the sense Harry hadn’t quite understood that her sleeping in Neville’s bed was hilariously platonic. As was her newfound closeness with Dean and Seamus.

Harry said nothing. She willed him to understand so she continued,

“ He’s practically like my brother- except less naturally stupid. And Dean and Seamus are nice-good friends but they’re not as close to me as Neville.”

Harry wrinkled an eyebrow for the fraction of a second at Dean’s name.
Maybe they hadn’t been friends after 6th year. Odd, because Dean was very loyal to and defensive of Harry. Getting nervous she pressed on.

“Really, I’ll be fine! Don’t worry about me- you have so many other things going on! I’m not I’m going to be taken advantage of living with the boys! Besides, Dean’s with Luna for now and Seamus I think was chatting up some Ravenclaw girl. Also its not like would ever share a bed or something with a boy I used to song! Or who was trying to make a pass!”

Wait what? No! What nonsense was she spouting? Harry didn’t care about Dean and Seamus’ dating status! Harry nodded and looked mildly dazed.

“Right. Of course. Its not really anyone’s business….or my business” He murmured so very softly.

Wait, What else did she just say?

She wouldn’t get in bed with a boy…? No! He mustn’t think…No. No. No. she desperately wanted to share a bed with Harry Potter! Oh dear.

Ron was right, she did talk too much. Oh shit. How could she back track without explicitly saying, “YOU can get in my pants Harry! My knickers are practically your exclusive property! All of England agrees!” Even if she did have the courage to say such a thing, and was certain Harry wouldn’t freak out- she couldn’t very well do this at the table.

Harry shuffled a bit away on the bench and turned to talk to Mr. Granger.

Oh. Bugger.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Here my story deviates from Canon. The Epilogue still holds true but I take liberty with some Hogwarts & Ginny missing moments. I also add an element of plot.

Chapter Notes

1. There is an almost almost almost rape scene and mildly crude discussion of rape. Nothing graphic but definitely on street harassment or seedy-party level. If this is triggering please proceed with caution.

2. This chapter, oddly, has a footnote. The Footnote is mostly a chunk of story and background that I thought important but couldn't entirely fit into the story. Information from this footnote pops up later in chapters but is not plot important. Inspired by fantasy stories that focus on the non-mainstream of magic- I felt compelled to explore the hierarchies and cultural silos of knowledge within the Potter Universe. The footnote does however suggest at the depth and complexity of relationship between Ginny and Molly.

   Almost all of it is inspired by Enchantment by Orson Scott Card. I find his discussion of domestic magic and inherited "folk" knowledge and learning fascinating and it resonates with many anthropological studies.

It was the last night of the Christmas holiday, dinner had been hearty and happy. Ginny and the Trio had not formally made up, but the Boxing day incident was blown over. Ginny, Hermione and Ron, and Harry were lingering in the kitchen over pots of tea with Bill and Fleur, chatting amiably.

“Ginny, Harry- before I forget, I have papers from Gringotts for you two!” Bill suddenly remembered. Bill reached into his work satchel and pulled out a large and bulky file folder and handed it to Harry.

“That’s a summary of your accounts and your property and asset paperwork,” Bill said. “I’m happy to help you parse through it- It can get quite complex, especially since you’ve inherited some tangled accounts. I know you want to set up something official for the children at Grimmauld Place so I’d definitely look over the things you inherited from Sirius first.”

In his other hand Bill held a small envelope. He handed it to Ginny. He looked nervous.
“This was magically left to you by an anonymous Gringotts account holder. We don’t know much about what it is and who its from exactly. It was meant for Dumbledore, and then Harry, but was re-enchanted in the past 9 months to direct to you instead. No one can open it but you- it’s got a pretty strong blood ward.”

Hermione gasped. Everyone turned to look at her.

“Blood wards require the blood of the persons they are protecting! Or in this case, blood to seal the enchantment. Who did you give your blood to Ginny!?” Hermione asked alarmed.

Ron perked up and set his mug down carefully. Harry also sat straighter. She could see him start to shift modes. Awkwardly shy, adorably sweet regular Harry was quickly being replaced by the man Harry Potter, Trainee Auror, and responsible adult and Savior.

“No one!” Ginny said surprised.

“I have no idea what this is about! Bill, are you sure its not for Harry?”

“Very sure, the magical ledger clearly had his name crossed out and yours added. As I said, I’ve checked it exhaustively for any dark magic or trapping enchantments. I…well, you were supposed to get it when you came of age but I wanted to make sure first so I asked the portrait of Dumbledore at Hogwarts about it.”

Ginny was startled. Who on earth was writing to her? Posthumous letters involving Dumbledore? Surely, this was a Harry-related thing. She noticed her parents filter into the kitchen. Ron filled them in and their expressions grew concerned.

“What did the portrait say? We could cull the people we have in common,” Harry asked next to her. His tone was concerned but surprisingly commanding, hinting at that new growing confidence and authority.

“Dumbledore’s portrait said he wouldn’t say who the letter was from. He clearly knew. He also thought it was very…amusing and interesting that our Ginny was the final recipient. He seemed confident it was perfectly safe.” Bill responded sheepishly.

Her mum, Ginny noticed, still looked uneasy. Her dad was much harder to read but he turned towards his eldest and asked,

“You’ve checked it Bill? For everything?”
Her oldest brother nodded and said,

“Everything. Even looked up rare curses and enchantments in some books and had Fleur assess it too. Its perfectly safe and Dumbledore seemed pretty relaxed. He said he hoped young Miss Weasley would consider it carefully!”

“May I see it?” Harry smoothly interjected.

“Please do!” Her mum said looking beseechingly at Harry as Bill handed him the letter.

Ginny felt a stab of irritation and embarrassment at her mother. Her brother was a very respected and highly qualified curse breaker! Being Harry Potter didn’t trump that! She wanted to shake the look off her mum's face. Molly looked worried but hopefully at Harry as he examined the letter. Harry brought the letter to his lips and said some words Ginny didn’t recognize- nothing happened. He shrugged and handed it to Hermione. Ginny’s irritation grew. She acknowledged Hermione’s brilliance but that didn’t make her an expert like Bill or Fleur!. She suddenly felt like she was 11 again.

After making a circuit around everyone who apparently qualified as more wise, experienced, or perhaps simply more worthy, the envelope was dropped in front of Ginny.

Properly looking she was able to fully see the neat but old-fashioned hand-writing that spelled her name. With a jarring alertness she realized she knew exactly who had written this. In the two seconds after realization Ginny’s mind whirled through hundreds of thoughts, reactions, and possibilities and with incredible speed, decided on a course action.

Ginny was a surprisingly good liar and perceptively cunning when the occasion arose. The Sorting Hat had been shocked and doubtful of her vehement insistence to be in Gryffindor. (She had insisted that Harry Potter was in Gryffindor- therefore she had to be)

She made all the right noises and reactions. She feigned perfect inquisitive concern and curious denial about the letter before her. After a show of serious contemplation and with the perfect amount of pain in her voice, she posited the note was likely from her deceased roommate Amanda.

Yes, I …oh I feel so guilty how could I forget her handwriting!? She was my friend!

Ginny felt guilty about using her late roommate as an alibi but it worked perfectly. Ginny had no intention of opening the letter among an audience. While she knew not the contents of the letter,
she knew it would certainly require elements of an explanation she did not want to share. Her relationship with the author was …complicated at best and private because open-honesty would require her to share experiences she was not quite ready to share and certain would only cause despair.

Most everyone was distracted by her show of distress and guilt. Hermione, ever clever, asked how a 16-year-old girl arranged to enchant a letter with a blood seal and leave it in the custody of Gringotts before her death. Damn.

Thinking quickly, Ginny feigned ignorance with all the appropriate shows of pain and confusion. As her mum cooed consolingly and Bill asked her father some question, Ginny answered Hermione in a low voice that it would have been incredibly easy to find a cloth covered in her blood last year and that the DA practiced setting such security measures. Harry and Ron looked guilty and horrified. She ignored this for now.

After a few more faked answers she ventured that she wasn’t quite ready to open the letter immediately and would do so in private, once she was emotionally ready. Ginny even sat through the subsequent smother-parenting by her Mum and took up her fathers offer that perhaps a jaunt in the snow might ease her mind. Harry, Hermione, and Ron joined her, making small talk. It was so very obvious that the trio was desperately curious about her suspicious letter though they were too polite to openly dig. Though the letter was burning a hole in her pocket screaming to be read, Ginny insisted on a long circuitous walk. She needed to clear any suspicion and wanted complete privacy when she did open the letter.

Late that night in the privacy of her locked bedroom, Ginny pulled out the letter and fortified herself for what lay within it. How many times had she seen this script over the last year? On notice boards, on the graded notes passed back on her essays, in the small hints and insults written on her detention slips. Ginny let out a shakey breath and closed her eyes trying to sort our her thoughts and memories.

Professor Snape had been, at the very least, a master politician and actor.

Even before Harry had exonerated Snape and explained his true allegiance, Ginny had a fairly good idea that Snape was not Voldemort’s man. Not that she shared this with anyone. Once again, that would have required more…complicated explanations and confessing to things that almost happened last year.

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After the failed endeavor to steal the sword of Gryffindor, Snape had detained her in the
Headmasters office while he walked Neville and Luna to McGonagall and set their detention with Hagrid. During her wait she had a peculiar but brief conversation with the portrait of Dumbledore when she attempted to rifle through Snape’s desk papers.

Snape returned and she was still angry and obstinate but a healthy bit curious at Dumbledore’s insistence that she “Keep an open mind.” Snape was of course, not pleasant. He did not threaten or curse or really even mention her attempted theft. Instead he angrily informed her that attempting Harry-like heroics was of the highest stupidity. He went on to blithely inform her of the realities of her safety at Hogwarts. Structured a threat, with startling brutality he informed her of Amycus’ sexual desire for redheads and specifically how the junior Death Eaters viewed as a trophy to be dirtied because she was Harry’s girlfriend. (The ‘ex’ part was irrelevant to everyone but the man in question it seemed.)

Snape had called her and Neville’s DA endeavors theatrical heroics-nothing of actual substance as he escorted her to her detention with Hagrid. She had bristled at the time but everything he said had struck with her.

Then, she started paying attention.

She watched Snape.

She observed the Slytherins and realized that Gryffindor bias aside, half the house looked wan, tired, and terrified.

She overheard Daphne Greengrass pleading with a burly 7th year about her sister, only to get roughly back-handed.

She watched Snape.

He generally spent his time away from the school – putting McGonagall in charge. She noticed the influx of medical supplies to the infirmary, and the constant brewing of potions in the corner of Slughorns classroom.

She watched Snape.

When Snape was around, he involved the Carrows in long meetings in his office and demanded school-wide meetings in the Great Hall where students were plied heavily with chocolate and food. The meetings were dead boring and full of racist propaganda. But this meant nothing could happen to any student under the watchful eye of Snape and the other Professors. It was also apparently a way to feed some of the Slytherins who lived in abject terror. Ginny had not really realized any of this until after the War-when perceptively rational Luna had pointed it out to Harry when he was explaining Snape’s true loyalty.
Ginny’s confusion and changing attitude about Snape took a marked turn for the positive a few weeks after her attempted sword theft. She received notification that she would be serving an unexpected and relatively unprompted detention in the dungeons. (A uniform infraction!) The note was delivered to her Dumbledore style via a random messenger.

The note, she later realized, was written in Snape’s hand.

In the dungeons, instead of detention she found a shockingly battered 4th year Slytherin girl emerging out of a cabinet. The heavily bruised girl had clearly been stuffed and locked in this cabinet. Heavy reducto’d chains lay on the floor. The girl looked around the room spotted a small rucksack and pulled out a bottle of dittany, bruise paste, murtlap, a slap of chocolate, a sandwich and a flask.

The girl was suspicious of Ginny at first but eventually engaged in conversation, wand pointed though.

With shocking political awareness and frank directness, the girl informed Ginny her beating was meant as a threatening message to her parents. Her parents had recently been invited to join the Dark Lord-they were yet to respond. Rhys Warrington had apparently snuck in just a few moments before, unlocked the cabinet and had provided the girl with the healing provisions.


The girl immediately closed off and became coolly defiant.

“Of course, you probably think all Slytherins are the same! I doubt you even really notice us!” the girl scoffed, “They’re right when they say Gryffindors are full of sanctimonious bullshit-I doubt you even realize the hypocrisy.”

Ginny flushed and mentally cringed. She had started to notice that not all Slytherins were Death Eaters. Not all Purebloods were completely racist. When had Ginny Weasley become so prejudiced herself?

“Warrington’s parents were murdered by the Dark Lord six weeks ago. Not that you lot notice or care,” the girl snapped. Ginny gasped.

“They…they refused?” Ginny asked.
“They were asked over the summer and declined,” the girl responded grimly.

“What are you going to do!? I can help,” Ginny asked fiercely. The girl looked at her suspiciously and then appraisingly.

“I’m going to write to my parents and tell them go into hiding-as subtly as I can. The owls are being watched. Then…I guess I’ll toe the line until I know my parents are safe. That’s all I can do,” the girl said all of this grimly but she looked nervous and unsure. Ginny shook her head.

Long ago, Tom Riddle had feasted off the soul she had poured into him. He had known her everything. But she also knew Tom Riddle. The cruel 16-year old boy had only half the evil and malice of the now Voldemort. But, Ginny knew the mind games, the manipulations, and the tactics of control. She understood them deeply and intimately as they were enacted upon her but she also knew the ways in which Riddle used them on his followers. That dairy wasn’t entirely a one way street- he shared and talked and remarked just as much as she did. So Ginny knew Tom Riddle and she felt pretty confident in the ways Voldemort worked.

“Is this the first time this has happened? Did you write to your parents before?” Ginny asked her mind going into overdrive. The girl shook her head. Her parents were already preparing to go into hiding it seemed and this was the third and most blatant attack on the girl, confirming Ginny’s suspicion.

“No, He already has people watching your parents house. When you send that owl, no matter how subtle, He’s going to know his threat was delivered but- even if your parents go to him. I mean they stalled and hesitated… He’s angry and insulted. The Warringtons declined and He didn’t retaliate immediately and it makes him look weak and now someone else hasn’t responded straight away…He won’t be as terrifying if he lets this sort of thing slide. Its…bad precedent. ” Ginny explained out loud.

The girl burst into tears.

“So I can’t write to them. I’ll just…I’ll just…” the girl hiccupped.

“No. No…you have to write to them, you don’t have a choice, but wait. Wait until…can you meet me tomorrow at 9 o’clock in Arithmancy classroom on the 5th floor corridor? If anyone asks say you’re going to practice hexes. Don’t write to them until after we meet. I think…I think I have a plan.”
The girl nodded looking scared and then shook her head, “Can I bring Warrington? I’m…I don’t want to walk in the castle alone at night!”

Ginny contemplated the risks Warrington would pose to her half formed plan. So he wasn’t a Death Eater…and apparently was rescuing this girl. Sort of. His parents were murdered- oh damn. Ginny nodded and asked the girl if she wanted to be escorted anywhere. The girl shook her head vehemently.

“I don’t want to go anywhere with you!” she cried, “that’d put me in more danger! I’ll pretend I was locked in here overnight, it will give a better excuse for my delayed owl.”

Ginny blinked at her own stupid presumption. The girl took this for Ginny being clueless and said,

“Er…there’s a bounty on your head. Well, not exactly. Amycus promised whoever brought him Potter’s um…girl…got to, g-got to have a go on you a-after he finished. Crabbe said he was going to slip something in your pumpkin juice,” the girl said in a small voice looking horrified and embarrassed. Ginny nodded and made a gesture indicating she was aware of this- she was, Snape had told her in a round about way. She doubted Amycus had used the term Potter’s girl.

It was only after as she was rushing through discreet passageways back to the common room to discuss and plot with Neville and Demelza that she remembered her detention note and the complete lack of a professor or any task in the dungeons. Had Snape arranged for her to run into this girl? Was this a set up?

Did it matter? She believed the girl and a family was about to be murdered.

That night in the common room she relayed what had happened to Demelza and Neville. Demelza hesitantly confessed that Warrington had helped her out of a tight spot or three in deserted corridors earlier this month. Demelza looked nothing like Ginny. Demelza had dark deep auburn hair that made her deep blue eyes pop. But, Ginny supposed, red-haired, petite-statured, and Gryffindor was close enough; besides Demelza was definitely pretty enough to incite the fancy of a lecher such as Amycus.

Ginny, unlike Harry did not grow up in a hostile environment. Secrets, and taking up the worlds burdens on one’s own was not her immediate response strategy to a crisis. The friends plotted a way to rescue the Slytherin girls’ family but they realized they needed outside assistance.

Ginny contacted Fred and George via her DA Galleon. Through them she conveyed to the Order that a girl at Hogwarts was in need of asylum and that the girls family was in imminent danger. In the end, they realized the most effective solution was to deliver the girl to members of the Order so
she could share her predicament and have members of the Order go in to discreetly save her parents.

“But how do we get her outside of Hogwarts? And where to do we send her?” Neville had asked.

“If we send her to Fred and George with a note explaining the details and…maybe a vial of Veritaserum so that they believe her- they will take care of it,” Ginny said.

“But how do we get her out of the castle? We can’t floo and it’s too dangerous for the twins to come to Hogsmeade.”

“Make a portkey. Illegal obviously, but the Portkey office is slow in tracking and I doubt they’ll notice if we set it off in …say the Forest or somewhere unexpected. Or if there is a large presence of ghosts,” Demelza offered.

They concluded that none of them were of the level to make an illegal porkey powerful enough to overcome the Hogwarts wards and barriers, but a simple portkey outside the grounds was possible. They briefly contemplated asking Nearly Headless Nick to join them to further obscure the portkey’s magical signature but discarded that idea quickly.

Getting outside the Hogwarts grounds was a comparatively easy. Ginny was after all, the sister of Fred and George and had also spent a few months discovering utterly secret snogging spots and passageways with a boy who owned the Marauders Map. The forest behind the shrieking shack was a perfect location to set off an illegal portkey.

(Harry had told her about the tunnel from underneath the Whomping Willow to the Shrieking Shack. Granted, she had already gotten the full story and other Marauders era anecdotes from Sirius over cocoa one night in Grimmauld Place. But, considering it was the Boy-Who-Never-Shared telling her such a personal anecdote involving his father and deceased godfather she had listened avidly and been privately elated.)

Neville urged that they needed to enact this plan tonight. After a bit more deliberation, further communication with the twins, and some hasty practice with Disillusionment charms- the friends stealthily set off to the dungeons to inform the girl sleeping in the cabinet of the plan and change in plans.

There, their plan almost came to a halt as they discovered Rhys Warrington delivering haphazard bedding. Much to Ginny’s dismay, Warrington only seemed to trust Demelza, who openly
informed him of their plan. He stared at Demelza and then succinctly pointed out weak points and questioned the safety of their endeavor. He also questioned if the Order would really help pureblooded Slytherins and Ginny was once again struck by how prejudice was perpetuated on both sides.

“You’ll need some distraction. I’ll see if I can keep the Carrows and the junior Death Eaters occupied,” Warrington murmured at last. He also, offered to cast the disillusionment charms and provide a few vials of Veritaserum. (Slytherins were apparently, always prepared.)

Filled with dread and anxiety, Neville and Ginny successfully smuggled the Slytherin girl through the castle, prodded the knot of the Whomping Willow, and through the tunnel and into the shrieking shack. Warrington and Demelza kept watch. Sending the girl off to the twins’ place via her illegal Porkey, a note, and the Veritaserum went without a hitch.

Ginny was stupidly lauding herself for a life saved and the smooth execution as she and Neville trudged back into the Castle when they ran into Amycus Carrow striding around the side of the entrance. Just inside the entrance Demelza was keeping watch. They saw Warrington rush in behind and shove her into a small broom closet. Amycus, fortunately turned after Warrington too had pressed himself inside. So caught in watching the near-miss Ginny and Neville didn’t realize they could be seen in the emerging dawn.

A Disillusionment charm was no Invisibility Cloak.

Amycus peered suspiciously at the hazy figures and then ran forward and discovered them.

To Ginny’s utter horror and dread Amycus was delighted to see her. Neville grabbed her around the waist and pulled him to her and attempted to sell a story involving snogging and a morning romantic walk but Amycus ignored him. He ran a hand down Ginny’s arm, clasped his hand around hers, and began dragging her to his office where he deemed her punishment to be served. Neville started shouting that he should be punished with Ginny or on her behalf.

They were in Amycus’ office and Neville had been hexed and bound to a chair. Ginny too had been jinxed to stay rooted to the spot and her arms were bound behind her. Amycus was circling her, breathing heavily, taking deep sniffs of her hair, and had just run his hands down her arms when Snape burst into the room looking malevolent.

He coolly informed Amycus that he was altered to the misbehavior and that wandering around the castle after hours was clearly a crime to be reviewed by the Headmaster. Snape insisted the students be released to his custody. Amycus looked livid and he and Snape engaged in a brief battle of heated looks. Snape assured Amycus the punishment would be most severe and reminded him that Snape was the authority here. Amycus still looking angry released Ginny and Neville from their jinx bindings and allowed them to leave with Snape.
Snape did not speak until they were in the Headmasters office. He dismissed a reluctant Neville to a detention with Slughorn. After the door shut behind Neville, Snape turned to Ginny looking as if he were about to strike her.

“Was I not clear about your imminent danger? Do you need to be locked in your tower to save you for your own idiocy?” he hissed.

Ginny said nothing. She was mostly reeling in relief that Snape had taken her away from Amycus. Had saved her from Amycus. She felt her skin crawling after the encounter and desperately yearned for a shower. She felt dirty and indignantly angry.

She forced herself to pay attention to Snape and his anger.

“Perhaps you are as stupid as Potter- then, I shall make myself plainer. If you continue with this recklessness you will most certainly be raped. It will be brutal, it will be public, and it will become the most effective propaganda. You will be passed around Carrow’s cronies like a limp rag to be used and used again. You will be violated in every sense of the world and in every possible way- do you understand me?” Snape screamed, getting louder and louder.

Ginny shuddered visibly at the violence of Snape’s words so immediately after Amycus’s violating touch – limited though it was. Snape stared at her with an unreadable expression.

“You will be serving 3 weeks of detention. With me, in my office starting tonight at 8 o’clock. You will be escorted to and from detention by your Head of House,” Snape decried.

Ginny assumed she was dismissed but she found herself unable to move. She wanted to collapse, cry, scrub at her skin, and punch something all at once.

“You sent me that detention in the dungeons last night,” Ginny suddenly blurted.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about Miss Weasley but do not dare be late or try and avoid your detention this evening. You’re dismissed,” Snape had replied curtly.

She found a terrified and worried Neville and Demelza waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs to escort her back to the Common Room.
Much later, after a thorough shower, rehashing of all that happened with her friends, and confirmation of “delivery” from Fred&George, Ginny allowed herself to consider Snape’s actions.

She had obfuscated the details of her dressing down with Snape and had also not explained the full details of how exactly she had found the Slytherin girl. She was pretty certain it was only Snape who had sent the detention slip. She fell to an exhausted sleep attempting to piece together all she knew about Snape and if he could be trusted.

Her detentions with Snape were surprisingly relaxed.

He was almost never there and she was set to make weaker versions of Pepper-Up potion or Firmus infusions in the Headmasters office. Naturally, she was suspicious about where such large continuous quantities were going and discovered that the Hogwarts populace was being drugged via their food and drink. After her rage after immediate discovery she wondered at the reasons for drugging a student populace with….well, household common-cold potions and body restoratives.

She privately researched the effects of Pepper-Up or Firmus -a strengthening solution often used by athletes to sore aches or pinched nerves or girls on their period- and their continued usage. Luna, unaware, had looked at her research and asked if she was trying to make Firmus potion to alleviate Neville and the others after their Crucio filled detentions.

_Oh_. Luna always somehow saw the heart of the question.

Neville, much to the delight of the Carrows, kept offering to take the detentions of younger students. The grotesque irony of the situation was not lost on Neville, the Carrows, or Ginny – but she could hardly argue after he unwaveringly told her,

“My parents would be proud of this, it the right thing to do.”

Seamus, mumbling having bitten through his tongue after a session with Alecto, told her,

“Its what Harry would do- would you have tried to stop him?”

The potions were probably why no one had started to show signs of nerve damage, short-term memory loss, or mild twitching yet. (A portion of the many ill effects under continued Crucio)

After this discovery, Ginny became tenacious in her detentions. She endured Snape’s daily verbal
cruelty and puzzled at many of his actions of callous disregard but she was always watching and working. She was delivered two more relatively anonymous detention notes for made up infractions (Once even for wearing Harry’s old, green, Weasley Jumper). Both detentions led her and Neville to abused children or about to be ambushed girls.

She endeavored to maximize her time and started setting up as many cauldrons as she could manage. (Unlike Harry she was a deft hand at Potions) She squirrelled away small flasks of Firmus whenever possible and started building an emergency stash. She assessed the ingredients she was allowed critically to see if she could get other solutions out of them. On a particularly daring night she added to her stash a Common-Poison Antidote, Angel’s-Trumpet and pilfered the more common herbal materials she needed to make the various healing solutions that always stocked her mother’s pantry[1].

And then,

Snape had been called away by Riddle for a surprisingly long time. She lost her access to potion ingredients. Ginny, no longer protected by the excuse of Snape’s detentions, had spent a particularly horrific two days chained to a wall by Alecto as the Death Eater practiced stinging and cutting hexes. She took to protectively hexing her clothing and casting discreet Confundus charms on Amycus as her means of self-defense. But, with Snape now so liminally present, the Carrow’s detentions and the Junior Death Eater harassment had become worse. A resistance started permanently hiding in the Room of Requirement.

So yes, Ginny had always known there was more to Snape than met the eye. The question was—why had he willed a letter to her?

[1] Hogwarts and most ‘Academic’ institutions and books never delved into the power of household magic, what many called the small magic. But Ginny always felt this was unfair because these were the more ancient spells and practices, the lived magical experience passed down from before Merlin.

Ginny, growing up in her mother’s kitchen more than any of her brothers, had learned the subtleties of potions, the precision of charms, the theories of arithmancy, and wandless magic before ever entering Hogwarts. She was far more conscious of magic in the everyday than Ron had ever been. The power of a wish whispered earnestly in a fairy ring or other powerful location. The barrier a truly enchanted stream could provide. How to imbue magic into the rocks and trees and insects of one’s home for the smallest of protections. The bindings which could be invoked by calling one's true name. She had tried to explain it to Hermione once, this learning without pedagogy, not supported books or research to no avail.

Ginny knew that the Burrow had been protected by the small magic of Molly Weasley long before Dumbledore and Bill had warded it. A charmed string of garlic hung with woven clover stems kept the pantry free of rodents and insects, and small beings with dark intents. The lard of the first meal eaten at the Burrow, poured across the threshold, formed a small barrier against those who wished to poison or ruin all meals eaten in the home. Dried Angelica was sprinkled across the
hearth and chimney to ward away the entrance of vengeful ghosts or ghouls. Potted aloe in Muggle homes was a useful plant to remedy small burns and cut- in a magical home the aloe prevented the dangers of fire and burning altogether. A small decorative dish of salt always sat near the butter-dish untouched, a charm against indigestion, choking, or any food related unpleasantness.

Belladonna, considered dangerous by Muggles, was one of the most common household plants. All the Weasley children had spent hours plucking sprigs of Belladonna before mid-summer to make a solution of the berries to purify and strengthen the house with. A snippet of all the children’s first hair entwined in an olive branch and a candle were buried under the front door- so that any fights were always solved and children returned home.

When Harry had first come to the Burrow, Molly Weasley had soaked his oversized second-hand clothing in the juice of Belladonna to purge it of the cruelty and ignorance of his cousin and relatives. She had then misted his things in a wash of African Violets for protection and so that he would always heal. Harry never noticed but his trunk contained a sachet of sage and bittersweet to ward away theft. After Voldemort’s return, Molly doused Ron and Harry’s laundry in Coxcomb and Amaranthus for alertness, protection, and invisibility from evil. Small Magic was effective and real, but even it had its limits against greater evils. But perhaps the luck and help the boys had encountered was the result of small magics and love showered upon them by Molly.

With Parvati, who had also inherited this knowledge, Ginny made Neville start a planter of wild Elanor Flowers. Neville had wrinkled his nose at what he deemed weeds but paid attention when Parvati told him they enhanced protection and alertness when worn or chewed. In Gryffindor tower and later the Room of Requirement Parvati hoarded the herbs and spices she knew to expand the healing powers of such peppermint, witch-hazel, turmeric, etc to treat the various victims to the best of her ability. Ginny eventually employed every trick and tool she had learned from her mother. She padded her school robes with Amaranthus, whispered the not-quite-spells her mother always said when she walked the corridors, and washed her hair with Eleanor (it was said to keep unwanted suitors at a distance.) She sometimes wondered if these were the measures that prevented her from rape and assault- as she was sometimes in Amycus’ direct line of sight and not attacked.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

A Harry Interlude

Chapter Notes

Potential warning for discussions about lax rape law, and a brief discussion of the mildly described but attempted sexual assault of the previous chapter.

Harry spent the first Christmas after the War watching Ginny. He wasn’t staring, at least he thought he wasn’t. He was just unconsciously aware of her whenever she was in the room— he accepted this as a facet of his senses.

It was Ginny and Hermione’s last night before leaving for Hogwarts and Harry realized that Ginny Weasley could easily be a world-class actress if she wanted. She definitely had the looks and effusive charm. But no, Ginevra Weasley could be a world-class actress because she was a fantastic liar.

With beauty, charm, playful innocence, and fantastic acting, Ginny’s victims never realized even realized how pulled under they were until the next day.

A con-woman, Harry supposed, was actually probably more accurate.

Admittedly, he was a little shocked that in a room full of her family no one else caught that her story and distress about her dead friend’s letter was an act. But the warm pleasure that he knew, that he saw her, the he could grasp at her secrets had overridden the shock.

Later, Harry snuck up to the landing of Ginny’s room at the Burrow after everyone went to bed and knocked on the door hoping to (gently) confront her about her act. Ginny was horrified and then somewhat angry that Harry had been able to tell she was lying.

“How did you know? Did you recognize the handwriting?” Ginny demanded with a penetrating look.
Harry stood in her doorway looking down at her bemusedly. He idly wondered why he thought he could come and have a rational conversation in her bedroom. She was standing in faded sleep pants and a camisole. From his height he could see straight down her shirt to her, in his opinion, perfect breasts- and he had to angle down to meet her eyes so it was very hard to look away.


“I did! I can’t explain but I just did.”

He could say that the usual heat and fire and light that he saw in her eyes was just a tad off when she lied. He could tell her that she took too measured even and calm breaths when she lied. Of course that would mean admitting that he had a surprisingly unconscious awareness of her chest at all times. He could tell her he just felt it in her-- he just knew. But none of these were actual explanations.

She said nothing. After a few odd moments she gestured him further into her room, closed the door, and cast a silencing charm. He asked her who the letter was from, she retorted by asking what business it was of his and why he wanted to know.

“It was originally intent for me! Before whoever wrote it changed his or her mind. So I knew them too, and they died so….I want to know,” Harry responded trying to placate her.

Ginny looked at him appraisingly. Not the appraising looks he had come to recognize from the secretarial witches when he met with Kingsley or random women in Diagon Alley. Unfortunately. No, this was a hard assessing look. Finally, deciding she turned to the desk picked up the envelope and letter and handed it to him.

“Its from Snape,” Ginny said. Harry was still swallowing his surprise when she landed, “ I just finished reading it. You can read it, but you can’t share with Ron and Hermione,”

Harry hesitated, which of course she noticed. He briefly flirted with hastily agreeing to those conditions and outright lying to her. But he couldn’t. He didn’t want to lie to Ginny. He was pretty bad at evasive lies and white ones where she was concerned anyway.

But, he desperately wanted to read the letter. He was pleased that Ginny was opening up about this to him- even though they hadn’t really spoken since September, that she trusted him and no one else. He desperately wanted to know why Snape had willed her the letter. This seemed important.

On the other hand…he had never kept anything of importance from Ron and Hermione. Harry didn't think keeping some of his feelings from them something especially important.

“I’m not intentionally trying to make it difficult for you- I know you all tell each other everything,” Ginny said looking a little put out. There was the slightest of emphasis on 'each other'. Harry got the vague feeling he had just failed some test, and that perhaps Ginny was disappointed with him.

“Its just….this letter and everything about it, they’re my secrets and I’m not ready to share them
with everyone yet,”

Harry could hardly bother to be ashamed at how quickly he broke the moment she hinted at sharing her secrets with him. Exclusively. He always prided himself on having self-discipline and control in most matters. When it came to Ginny, he had very little self-control over anything. It was quite dangerous really, he had no idea where he and Ginny stood anymore but this…this willingness to share, it had to mean something and he grasped at it. Feeling guilty about so easily ditching his honest openness with Ron and Hermione he added,

“I can’t promise to keep it from them if it turns out to be wildly dangerous or something…”

Ginny rolled her eyes and shook her head indicating it wasn’t and then gestured that Harry read the letter. Harry read. Harry wasn’t sure what he had been expecting, but the letter greatly surprised him.

Severus Snape had written this letter and addressed it to Ginny a month before his death.

He willed her the entirety of his Gringotts vault which consisted of: his life savings, rare and important manuscripts of Salazar Slytherin, and the entirety of his unpublished potions research.

In an open and surprisingly even tone, Snape acknowledged that there no longer existed anyone in this world who likely respected or trusted him – much less show him a modicum of decency or politeness. Snape did not have anyone left whom he trusted either.

He had faith in Harry to do what was right and just for humanity but did not flatter himself to think that Harry would ever deign to even listen to his death wishes. He also wasn’t entirely certain Harry would still be alive after defeating Voldemort. Ginny was his last hope at a possibly willing audience. He had the faintest glimmer of hope that she could be trusted with his secrets.

Snape realized that Ginny would not want nor care for this inheritance. The letter made clear that this was not the fancy of a professor playing favorites or taking shine to a particularly promising student. (Though it did acknowledge that Ginny was surprisingly bright and cunning, for a Gryffindor.) Instead it was the last attempt to save some important information and hopefully, prevent it from being exploited by the wrong people.

War criminals and Death Eaters are buried in unmarked graves and their assets culled and dismantled by the winning government Snape explained. The contents of his Gringotts vault held a few items that Snape did not think would be safe in the hands of the Ministry or any of his incredibly distant relatives. They were not Dark Objects, in fact in materiality they were simply parchment with writing. But knowledge is power.

Snape cared not what Ginny did with the gold as it was no great sum- but hoped she would use it to her benefit. Snape did remark that if Ginny felt sullied to be in possession of Death Eater money, however ethically gained; he hoped she would give it to some organization that was effective and not simply the bureaucratic waste and excess of a government office.

He also acknowledged that Ginny might feel vengeful and inclined to destroy the manuscripts and the unpublished research or give it to the Ministry to spite him.
He explained that he preferred destruction. Snape explained that his potions work and the Slytherin manuscripts held powerful information and potentially, access to Salazar’s long lost ancestral home, The Castle Fen. He urged Ginny to use her cunning and perception to realize that such information in the public custody of the Ministry could easily fall into the wrong hands and be grotesquely exploited.

Additionally, Snape predicted (accurately) that anti-Slytherin bias and hate would be high after the War. He further explained that this hate and bias would extend to even Parselmouths, snake-motifs, and/or Slytherin iconography because of Voldemort’s abuse and association of these ideas and images. Snape hoped that Ginny would be insightful and just enough to see that not everything Slytherin stood for was dark, that not all Slytherin’s were evil, and that Voldemort should not come to stand for Slytherin House. Snape pointed out that destruction of research and history and writing in the name of cleansing evil inevitably became the first steps toward that very ignorance –and that he hoped against hope that Ginny would realize this too.

With that single and desperate appeal the letter ended.

Harry read the letter twice and then stared at it to give himself time to process. He wasn’t entirely sure what to feel, or specifically what to feel first.

“He…he didn’t betray Dumbledore,” he croaked, unsure how to start.

“I know.” Ginny replied. Of course she knew, Harry had publicly exonerated Snape and explained the situation to the remaining members of the Order and the Hogwarts staff. Harry had also explained rather loudly in the Great Hall before he defeated Riddle as well. Ginny’s arms were wrapped around her and she had clearly been waiting for a more eloquent response. Harry was uncertain how to proceed.

“I mean, I knew before too-or at least suspected,” Ginny added. Now Harry was surprised and intrigued. He raised his eyebrows at her in question.

“I served many weeks of detention brewing potions in the Headmasters office. I got some…insight,” Ginny said. If she were Hermione or Ron, Harry would have responded sarcastically at the elusive response or flicked her ear to express his displeasure at the lack of details. But she wasn’t them and he didn’t want to lose the privilege of learning her past and mysteries.

“So he knew you knew and that’s why he willed you this” Harry concluded. Ginny shrugged.

“But why me over you?” she asked. “I know he explains why but…I don’t buy that he didn’t trust you at all. He definitely hoped you would live regardless of what he says. You can’t trust and have faith someone will do the right thing when the stakes involve death and then turn around and not trust they won’t even listen to your death wishes.”
Harry had thought about that and wondered if Snape died thinking Harry hated him as much as his father had. The thought that Snape may have, Harry was surprised to find, made him oddly sad. The letter painted a desperately practical but cunning man dealing with some of the most painful realities this life had to offer; that not a soul cared for him and that he would die a traitor.

Ginny moved to sit on her bed, her legs dangling over the side. Harry quirked a small smile at how the tips of her toes brushed the floor. She was adorably petite, but it was often obscured because of her big personality. She cocked her head and gestured for him to come sit too. He moved to sit on the floor by her dangling feet. He angled himself to the side. He propped an elbow on the bed beside her and rested his head in his hand, gazing up at her as he contemplated her question.

It was difficult because it forced him to further contemplate Snape’s views of his father, and how much of James Potter’s unflattering shades Snape saw in Harry. Snape was also difficult to think about because it forced Harry to flesh out a more human picture of his father and reflect on the pensive memory he had seen. It was easier to think of James Potter as a forever gallant and brave man without any flaws. But then, it was vaguely insulting to his mum’s judgment (who everyone from Sirius to Moody to Dumbledore agreed was incredibly kind and sharp as a tack) to deem her best friend since childhood as horrid and objectively bad. Harry had no idea if his mum had known Snape loved her, but since even before Hogwarts he had clearly been her closest and best friend. Harry could also acknowledge that Remus and Dumbledore had been right, hatred and prejudice were inherited. Harry was self-aware enough to know he had inherited much of his hatred and he tried hard now to question and check himself on his prejudices.

“Snape….and my Father did not get on,” Harry began haltingly.

“I know, Sirius told me- he said they pretty much hated each other and that Snape was an utter git,” Ginny said.

Harry let out a soft chuckle. He often forgot that Ginny probably had more long chats with Sirius than he did. She perhaps knew more stories about the Marauders, hanging out all summer with Sirius in Grimmauld Place. He felt the old ache of missing Sirius and the time gone by. Ginny curled up one leg and turned to face Harry.

“Sirius would say that,” he acknowledged softly, “They did hate each other…but it wasn’t because Snap was a git- or well, maybe he was, but I don’t think so, at least not at the beginning. My dad and Sirius were, well, they were very popular. But um… they were also, they were also rich, posh, entitled prats who thought hexing people randomly-usually Snape- was great fun. They were popular enough that if they said Snape was a git, no one questioned them. And I think…I think it was easy too. Snape was really studious and odd with very shabby clothes and…I think an abusive father, maybe. When I saw his memories, it was so familiar what he felt about his childhood home- and he definitely wasn’t as confident and happy as Sirius and my Dad were…”

Ginny was listening intently. Harry continued,

"He only had the one friend, my mum, until 5th year. Apparently they were always together but she wasn’t even in his house so…I… I think he was bullied in his House too. Muggleborn best friend in those days in Slytherin? With McNair and Bellatrix and Lucius a few years above him? And yet, my Dad was his biggest bully. That….that says a lot actually, none of it good. My mum was the only one who stood up for him, ever. Sometimes I wonder…if Malfoy had been kind to me..."
Ginny slowly extended her left hand, palm out towards Harry’s free hand resting at his side. He reach out and enveloped her hand and clasped and rested their joined hands on the small bit of bed in between the two of them. She squeezed his hand comfortably and he knew she understood his trailed off thought. She squeezed again prompting him to continue. Her face was inexpressive but kind as she learned about James Potter’s not-so-honorable facets.

“Everyone says I look like my dad- and I always insisted about being like him or defending him to Snape so….I dunno. I think he thought I'd go out of my way to spite him, even in death. If he left me the letter, it would be like Ron trusting Malfoy’s kid with his private details, can’t see that happening.”

Ginny let out a small huff and said,

“But Malfoy actually *is* a git even outside the elitism, he is racist and cowardly and has no true friends. Even I can admit Snape was actually pretty courageous. It takes a lot to admit you're wrong, that you've hurt people and to amend to do better, trust me I know. Besides, he had your mum's true friendship and good opinion and she was no idiot so he can't have been all bad. --No listen, I get the parallel you're trying to make- rich entitled and popular bullying a poor relatively friendless weirdo. Ron might have been poor but definitely wasn’t friendless or weird. I mean I’m sure Ron doesn’t see it this way but he makes friends easily, he's outgoing and gets on with most blokes and even before The Sorting you two were best friends! The analogy would be more apt if it was you and Dudley.”

Harry sighed. “I guess. I just… he saved my life I’m sure more than once my first year and definitely intervened later on too. He had to kill the only person who was kind to him, and spent the War trying to take care of me or the people I loved...and I was so determined to hate him. It seems wrong, so much time spent on hate. Not even apathy but a concerted effort to *hate*”

Ginny squeezed his hand and reminded Harry that Snape hadn’t started their interaction as a neutral party either. There was no need to humiliate an eleven-year-old boy on the first day of school she contended hotly.

“I guess it was just too much for him- to see a version of my Dad everyday. The love of his life's kid looking and acting like his greatest bully. He loved her you know? I don’t know if she knew and there I was, perpetual salt in the wound of his loss with no trace of his best friend… just his bully.” Harry mused sadly. Ginny looked down at him tenderly but was wearing a frown.

“Oh Harry!” Ginny despaired, “you are far more like your Mum than your Dad and that was probably harder for him to deal with. No, not just because of what you told me about hexing Snape….but from Sirius’ stories I got the sense your Dad was a lot…um, louder and brasher than you. The center of attention because he and Sirius made themselves be. He loved Quidditch but otherwise wasn't what you would call 'into nature'. Sirius said they took the mickey out of him when he started going on long walks with your mum looking at trees and flowers because *she* enjoyed them.
They were The Marauders but they had...tons of other good friend groups and girls even in other houses and really partied and...well, he toned it all down for your Mum because that wasn’t her cup of tea was it? --Oh! I mean! not to say he ...

“You can! I mean I’ve definitely wondered...what their... relationship was like. Did he change for her entirely? That seems not...great. I wonder when and how she stopped hating him...I mean they were awfully young when they had me and...”

Ginny gave him a sad sweet smile and with her free hand tentatively brushed back his forelock. Warmth spread through Harry. His eyes fluttered shut- he snapped them back open to stare at Ginny. Harry’s hair continued to stick out and she brushed it again and then dropped her hand. Harry mourned the loss of her touch.

“I doubt he changed entirely,” she said. “I don’t think he could have stayed so close with Sirius if he had. Besides, Sirius made it seem more like maturity than denying the fun outgoing personality. They were very happy together and that doesn’t happen if one party is denying everything about themselves. The Ron comparison applies more there I think! Now he’s finally properly dating Hermione, he’s not going to randomly engage in burping or farting contests or whatever with you when she’s around is he?”

“I have never engaged in a farting contest,” replied Harry with solemn dignity.

Ginny giggled and slid off the bed onto the floor next to Harry, also leaning against her bed. She was in the shadow of his propped arm and body now, gazing up at him. He could see her thick dark eyelashes and marveled at how their shade of red, so different from her hair. Her left hand was still enveloped in his and now rested on his thigh.

“To get back to my main point,” she continued confidently, “Harry, its so obvious you’re actually more like your Mum! All the little details we do know of her, her actual personality, they’re all so you!”

“What? Like what?” Harry had only been told he was like his mother a few times. Once Dumbledore told him that his deepest nature was like his Mother and was exemplified by his kindness. Harry personally, did not think he was particularly kind, he thought many unkind thoughts all the time. More constant were the comparisons to his father. Harry despaired that he had never known his mothers best friend was always in front of him until it was too late.

Ginny let go of their clasped and instead began to lightly walk her fingers up and down his bicep. Her other hand she settled on his bent knee.

“Oh, Well, lets see. You’re pretty introverted and shy,” “—I’m not shy!”
“Harry,” Ginny gave him a look.

“It’s not a bad thing! I’m not saying you aren’t social or are sheepish or something, just… reserved, quiet. Honestly, not a bad thing. Okay? Male-ego secured?” at Harry’s eye-roll and nod she pressed on,

“Good. So you’re Reserved, not an extensive partier like your Mum, you also do not like being the center of attention, in fact you hate bringing attention to yourself.”

“You, well how much of that is actually my personality? What if its just the natural result of having lived my life? And hang on, I like parties! I never skipped any parties in the common room like Hermione!”

Ginny laughed.

“Oh baby,” she pouted in a silly condescending tone, “you can only claim you ‘like parties’ after you’ve attended a Whiskey-Roulette in the South tower on a Tuesday night and still made it to Transfiguration the next day. Or snuck into a Hufflepuff rave, Or attended a pool party in the prefect bathrooms,”

“You have!?” Harry asked, only partially surprised and more than a little disappointed about missing Ginny in a bikini. Ginny smirked and cocked her eyebrow. They both knew that Harry hadn’t ever truly been aware of the wilder side of Hogwarts. Well, Harry mentally corrected, the wilder side that wasn’t actively trying to kill you. When they were properly dating Ginny had teased that despite all his rule-breaking Harry was, distressingly, a good tame boy.

“But you… I know you all hate camping now but Harry, you love taking long walks outside and being in the outdoors. At Hogwarts, the Burrow, hell, Kingsley said you spent too much of your lunch breaks meandering around St. James Park! And well…um, apparently it was also your mums preferred… activity with a partner…” Ginny looked at his t-shirt sleeve, blushing slightly.
He never told her, but he absolutely delighted when she blushed. He vaguely lamented that she was so confident and assured that she rarely blushed properly anymore. One of his fondest memories of her was from the summer before his second year when she had stuck her elbow in the butter dish and flushed scarlet. Remembering that always brought a fond smile to his lips. Oblivious to his fondness for her blush she tossed her hair back and concluded triumphantly, “Harry, when you got to Hogwarts you could have had loads of friends, tons of clubs and groups, been like the Twins. Literally, anyone would have been your friend. That’s even true now. But instead you were utterly content with just Ron and Hermione almost all the time, like your Mum had Snape. You may look like your Dad and find the same things funny but Harry, you are so your Mum. I know you said Snape's memory showed him complaining about you. But I think that was willful, that he was trying very hard to see your Dad in you because it was so easy and painful to see his friend. Love's funny like that.”

Harry stared at her. He had never discussed his parents and Snape with anyone in such depth. He had never shared with Ron and Hermione the full details of Snape’s pensive his 5th year and before he died. They knew about Snape’s loyalty and all that but he’d never vocalized his...his angst (he supposed) about the holistic memory of his father and his feelings about Snape to anyone. Suddenly he was relieved Snape had willed things to Ginny. Here was someone through a lucky stroke of fate, who had just as complicated a relationship with Snape’s memory as he did. And this someone was Ginny, who was so easy to talk to and who just got it and shared so many other things specific to just him and her.

Suddenly, Harry was overcome and he just had to kiss her. In one swift movement he wrapped his hand around her cheek and jaw and pulled her into an incredibly slow but deep kiss. He had a moment of panic she wouldn’t respond but she did almost immediately, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and resting her hands in his hair. She took the kiss further, nipping at his lips, sliding her tongue, and pressing her chest up against his. They broke apart for air and Harry wrapped her in his arms and tugged her up to press fervent, open-mouthed kisses from the corner of her mouth down her jaw and the line of her neck. By small movements they nudged and changed into a more comfortable position, kissing all the while. Harry’s back now flat against the side of her bed and Ginny was on her knees straddling his legs.

His hands went to her breasts, his thumb rubbing at the hardened peaks of her nipples through her camisole as he devoured her neck. Ginny was moaning slightly and had a tight grip on his head. She tugged him up for a hard wet kiss and shivered and sighed when he rubbed his stubble against her skin as she made her way, wetly to the spot under his ear and licked. Harry’s already hard cock and body twitched as he felt a happy jolt through his body. His hands twitched and tightened on her chest. She sucked and grazed her teeth under his ear and ground her body against his crotch.

Twenty minutes later, she had her hands up the back of his shirt, digging her nails in, arching her body into him as he tongued around a freed nipple when a creaking upstairs jerked him to his senses. He suddenly became aware of how hard he was, that her legs were wrapped high around his waist, and that they were oddly humping. He decreased his ministrations and started detangling their torsos and legs and now chastely kissing his way back softly up his throat and chin.

Expelling a long shaky breath Harry leaned completely away from Ginny and dropped his hands from her breasts to her waist and tried to disengage.
“Ginny.” His voice was husky and breathy. “Ginny, we have to stop.”

Distantly he wondered if was the stupidest boy on the planet what exactly he was afraid of. Ginny made a soft whining noise, shifted from straddling Harry’s lap, pulled up her camisole, and slumped down to sit next to him. She briefly met his eyes, flushed, and pitched forward hiding her face into his right pectoral and let out a loud huff. Harry curled one arm loosely around her back and let his head fall back on the edge of the bed and gazed at the ceiling, taking deep breaths trying to dissipate his arousal.

He hadn’t kissed her since August. They hadn’t communicated at all during the term. It wasn’t intentional, it just happened. During the holiday while friendly, they hadn’t at all touched upon the us part of their relationship. He had not reacted well to the new of her sleeping arrangements at school. For all that he had not actually said anything, she saw it. He had no idea how to negotiate his desire for her and also what exactly he wanted out of their…lack of relationship? They had not returned to the happy easy state of his sixth year and he didn’t know what he was supposed to do.

Harry’s budding adolescent sexual awareness unfortunately coincided with Voldemort’s return. While Dean and Seamus were discovering the wonders and decidedly skewed enlightenment provided by pornography and dorm-room chatter, Harry was dreaming about possession and snakes. When other boys his age were talking graphically about sex, fantasizing about fit girls they knew, and exaggeratedly boasting about their fumbling interactions with girls; Harry was learning about Horcruxes.

In his relationship with Ginny, he had almost always let her take the reigns in all things physical. They had done nothing more that snog heavily or let their hands wander but it had worked out well. She inducted him gently, and always seemed pleased when after gaining confidence in something new, he initiated or got creative.

In his time living at the Grangers he had consumed a wealth of literature and felt more mature and worldly as a result. Hermione had said his "emotional maturity and dexterity" was astonishing. He had also discovered Hermione’s stash of female centric, pornographically smutty romance novels. They were surprisingly educating. These, in addition to his own brief forays into pornography meant he wasn’t completely unaware. But now he could feel that he and Ginny were on the cusp of a new level of relationship and sexual experience that he had no idea how to navigate. Especially in light of the fact that they no longer seemed to do all the other normal things people in relationships did. The idea of learning new sex acts with Ginny thrilled him and fueled many a fantasy but doing so while they still existed in this limbo made him uneasy and feel a bit like a rake. (A rake? Okay, he may have read too many of Hermione’s novels)

Meanwhile his guilt anytime his eyes strayed and noticed an attractive reporter, ministry employee, or the slightly older and exotic French Auror that was helping train him and Ron was mounting. Fleur had hired a plump, genteel, middle-aged witch to organize and be in charge of all his fan mail so he no longer received hordes of panties, pin-up pictures, or shockingly inappropriate letters in the mail. But young pretty girls jutted out their chests, and bent over languidly in his direct sight whenever he went to Diagon Alley or even the village near the Burrow for shopping. He didn’t have Ron’s new-found suave one-liners claiming he was taken, and he never really managed to not be rude. (Much to Ron’s amusement) Harry had somewhat controlled his blushing and learned to ignore most of the ‘come-hither’ moves but…he was still a sexually frustrated 18 year-old- he couldn’t not notice.
“What are we doing Ginny?” he finally blurted out disconsolately.

Ginny, who had had her face pressed into his chest maneuvered so that she could sit by his side and snuggle into the crook of his arm. She was silent for a long while and just as Harry was growing alarmed at her lack of response she sighed and murmured,

“I don’t know… Harry I…I…”

This response was distressing. Harry half-hoped she would give him something definitive about their status, what exactly he was to her and more clearly, what she expected of him. He was unsure how to respond.

He didn’t need to.

“I got some offers to go to University…in America. And maybe to play Quidditch for them…” Ginny said softly.

Harry’s immediate reaction was fierce pride and happiness, followed quickly by confusion. What did that have to do with anything?

“That’s amazing Ginny! To play for the Uni teams in America, that’s…wow, that’s pretty big. Do they even scout here? You could probably make it directly to a professional team here after a few years with them, skip being a reserve or playing club altogether!”

Ginny nodded. She seemed relieved he was enthusiastic.

“Is that what you’re considering then? Professional Quidditch?”

Ginny made an ambivalent motion with her head.

“I…I mean, professional Quidditch would be the dream but its not…exactly a safe career goal. Only a small fraction of people ever make it and so many things could go wrong before that. I need at least a few back ups. Thats the sensible thing to do.”

Harry was stupidly confidant Ginny would be a Quidditch player. He knew she often played it casual but she really wanted to play professionally. “You could always be an Auror, if the Quidditch doesn’t work out!”

Ginny laughed. “No that’s your dream. I…I don’t know what I really want to do outside of
Quidditch that’s not influenced by my family or… I’ve got good marks in a lot of things, so Uni is a really good option for that...and...and a million years ago before well, everything, I always wanted to go to University.” She finished softly.

“I didn’t know that,” Harry said interested. He liked learning these pieces about Ginny. Pieces sometimes Ron didn’t even know. Like how she secretly was just as into books as Hermione and loved talking about them (though not academic texts), or that she never let her nails stay unpainted for more than a day, or that she felt mildly guilty for thinking she had the best, most attractive, shade of red hair in her family. (Harry agreed with the last bit.) Ginny nodded at his side.

“Its stupid. I wanted to go when I was younger because it seems like such a great place to learn and explore and...become something. Opportunities beyond a good Ministry job or being someone's wif--" she cut herself off, glanced at him and then continued, "But its really expensive and so it was always a pipe dream. I mean who cares if I don’t know what I want, getting a job is the responsible thing to do. But...if I can go for cheap or free by qualifying to play Quidditch, getting a scholarship or something, which there’s a chance of…”

Though he had never heard her mention it before, it was clear to Harry that this was something she wanted almost as much as Quidditch. He was a bit stung she never mentioned it. He wouldn’t have laughed and of course he didn’t want her to just do some job because it was what was expected. He didn’t think it was stupid at all. He didn’t think she had to “become something,” to him she was already something. But he understood, intangibly, that she wouldn't be content until she found out everything else she could be.

He also knew why she had cut herself off after 'ministry job.’ Mrs. Weasley obviously, and in a very public manner, assumed Hermione and Ron would be getting married once Ron completed at the Academy, regardless of where Hermione was in her career plans. Harry had seen Ginny's look of horror and Hermione's unease about this. Hermione and Mrs. Granger had been shocked at how young Harry's parents were when they married, though Mrs. Weasley found it perfectly normal. Harry knew she cited Bill and Fleur getting married early due to the War. But that same objection didn't seem to apply in her enthusiastic musings about Ron. Did Ginny think Harry planned to emulate his parents in that respect? He didn't even know if they were dating, the idea of marriage anytime in the near future was a tad startling and unimaginable to him. He knew he definitely wanted a family in the future and children but that seemed like something that would just happen, later, when he was older. Did couples talk about such things already? He didn't think Ron and Hermione, for all their finality in each other were thinking of such things either.

“You should go.” Harry said decisively. “Even if you don’t qualify to play Quidditch, which I’m sure you will because you’re brilliant. But even if you don’t get a scholarship or something, you should still go. Its something you want to do and you’re very smart and inquisitive, so go for it.”

Ginny squeezed his side in a half-hug. “You’re sweet. But I can’t go unless I qualify for a Quidditch scholarship, I can’t afford it. Even then, that just covers tuition I still might not be able to go!”
Harry bit his tongue to prevent the offer of his financing her study slip out. He knew the Weasley’s would never take his money. Hermione and Mrs.Granger, and perhaps the literature he had consumed at their house, gave him a strong notion that money and snogging should rarely mix. He wasn’t stupid, he knew having her feel indebted to him would sway their power-dynamic and he definitely didn’t want that. (He was partially privy to the arguments Ron and Hermione had about splitting rents and savings and future investments.) He wanted her happy though, and this was clearly something she wanted.

“That’s what you should use the money for!” Harry snapped suddenly. “Snape, he willed you his life savings, its not much but its not nothing! It could take care of the extra’s if you get a scholarship for tuition. Using his money on yourself is more in accord to his wishes anyway!”

Ginny shifted back and looked up at Harry. The heat of their snogging had ebbed away, she was no longer flushed or breathing heavily. She looked uncertain glanced at the letter on the desk and bit her lip.

“It is a solution,” she mused. “But…damn, this is weird. I still can’t believe he willed it to me! I mean I had a general idea he wasn’t really a Death Eater because he was so intent on making sure I was safe from Amycus. But he had no real way of trusting me! I’m not entirely sure if using it on myself is proper.”

“Amycus?” Harry asked, having a general foreboding of what the answer might entail. Ginny’s eyes flicked away and then to his face again. Her eyes hardened and she steeled herself.

“He uh…he was into me. And Demelza, but more me…he liked red hair” She said attempting to give him a don’t-freak-out look.

Harry, because of who he was, and where and what he involved himself with knew that Amycus was a sexual predator. It was one of the many emergencies of the Auror Department. Amycus had vanished after the Battle, abandoning his sister. It had appalled Harry, Ron and Hermione that Amycus’ previous sexual crimes even before Voldemort were relatively untried and that the state of the law regarding such crimes was …surprisingly lax. He knew this when he had asked the question.

The specific knowledge that Amycus Carrow had a particular sexual interest in Ginny suddenly filled Harry with an ice-like rage. He felt his jaw twitch. He had no desire to shout or curse, it was like cold steel was spreading out from his heart. He was later shocked that in that moment his mind so calmly filtered through various methods of torture and punishment he felt no qualm to use upon Carrow.
“Nothing Happened!” Ginny interjected looking alarmed, perhaps Harry’s inner thoughts were showing. He attempted to clear his face and looked questioningly at Ginny. She said Snape had endeavored to protect her from Carrow, that meant at least something was attempted even if nothing actually happened.

“He managed to get me stuck in his office for detention for a few minutes. Once. I was so stupid, he found me and Nev returning from the Shrieking Shack. Oh! um…I mean we were, we had to help this…”

“The Pembroke girl and her family? The purebloods? The Order was sent a random girl whose family was about to be murdered for declining Ridde? I didn’t know that was your doing!” Harry interjected impressed.

“It wasn’t, not really. I got an anonymous note from Snape, I think. It sent me to the dungeon she was in for detention and…well anyway, Nev and I were returning and Amycus caught us and dragged me into his office but nothing happened because Snape burst in and said I needed to be punished by him for such a big crime. He just gave me a normal detentions for a month instead,” Ginny said in a rush.

Harry let out a low breath. So Snape had protected Ginny from sexual assault. For all Ginny’s insistence on "nothing happened," Harry was privy to Amycus' pre-Voldemort crime sheet. Amycus while cowardly and not a threat like Bellatrix was insidious, perverted, and his previous victims were all female. Harry couldn't help the sudden rush of gratitude he felt of Snape. Did Dumbledore know that the school would be infested with such dangerous? Suddenly, Harry felt more depressed about the sad life Snape had lived and all that Dumbledore had asked of him, and who Snape did it for.

Randomly, Harry had a perverse thought dispelling the cold feeling in his chest. Why just Ginny? Did he do the same with Demelza? Harry wasn’t…unaware what older people thought or said when they saw him and Ginny together. Lupin and Sirius had even joked that Potter-men liked redheads long before Harry had any notion of Ginny-as-a-girl. Lupin had given him an I-told-you-so look at Bill and Fleur’s wedding. Did Snape see it too? That just made everything, his will, his protection of Ginny weird. Was his own attraction to Ginny oddly Oedipal too?

“Snape was in love with my Mum. 'Till his Death actually,” Harry felt incumbent to say. Ginny rolled her eyes. She seemed to know exactly where his thoughts were headed.

“He protected me because it was the right thing to do. Me more than others because I was targeted for my connections and all and Demelza because Amycus desired her too! Don’t make it weird! I know what Sirius and Remus said. Demelza looks way more like your mum than I do! I don't, my hair is a completely different red! Besides Snape saw the greatest resemblance to your mother anytime he looked at you! ” She seemed pretty indignant that Harry would question Snape and her similarity (or lack thereof) to his Mum in such a way.
Harry felt exceedingly stupid and shook his head and shrugged sheepishly. He shook himself and said,

“I’m glad he was there. I know it was difficult and a lot of bad things happened but I’m glad he was there and tried his best to prevent it from being worse. I think you should definitely use the money.”

“Don’t tell my parents. Or Ron and Hermione! Even about University and…everything,” Ginny said suddenly, reminding him of his partial promise earlier.

Harry nodded, this was easy to promise. He understood wanting to keep the harsh reality Hogwarts had been from her parents. Personally, Harry didn't think Molly or Arthur needed to hear it so soon. He figured Ginny would eventually tell her parents about Uni and her opportunities eventually.

“So, are you going to do it? Not just use the money but keep the manuscripts and papers?” He asked around a yawn, it was ridiculously late.

“The money…maybe. It feels selfish. I guess I need to make a trip to Gringotts to look at the rest. I suppose I’ll need to set up my own account and have it all transferred before the Ministry gets zealous. I…I can see his point about things falling into the wrong hands. I think if he had willed it to Dumbledore, he would have done the same.” Ginny concluded.

“Can I…I know it’s private and I know Snape made a conscious decision not to share this with me but…when you get everything settled, can I go through the papers with you? Snape’s right, Slytherin should not become synonymous with Voldemort.” Harry asked. Ginny nodded, started to respond but stopped herself. She tilted her head and then began,

“Harry, can I ask you a favor?”

“Anything.”

“I don’t want Bill or Dad to know about this. But I don’t have an account at Gringotts and I’ll need a surety to co-sign to open a new account. I suppose I’ll have to tell McGonagall or something about it because I’ll need to go in person to set it up and do the paperwork. I was wondering if…” “Yes, I can co-sign. You don’t have ask Bill or anyone, I’ll take care of it.”
Ginny hesitated, “Do you think they’ll let me set up an account and not come in for I.D. and security stuff or signatures until later? I don’t want to pique people’s interest about this, especially if its sensitive documents. I hate to ask but could you, maybe persuade Gringotts to…I know you hate using your influence…”

“I’m not the Goblins’ most favorite person right now but I’ll see what I can do. Worse case scenario, I’ll schedule it on a Hogsmeade weekend and take you to Gringotts myself. Privately, no one has to know, don’t worry about it!” Harry said.

She hugged him tightly in lieu of a response and whispered a thank you as she kissed his cheek.

She didn’t release him and there was a pregnant pause.

Did he want to return to their snogging? It was very late and he wasn’t sure he was ready to deal with the inevitable progression of the heavy kissing and touching. He also felt staying would be a rather monstrous betrayal of the love and trust the Weasley’s placed in him. From Ron he got the sense that Ginny hadn’t exactly shared extensively about their past relationship with her parents. They knew vaguely that Ginny and Harry had briefly dated but did not know past that. Mr. or Mrs. Weasley had never mentioned or commented on it to Harry and he was immensely grateful they weren’t upset with him for breaking up with Ginny. He hoped that Molly and Arthur would approve of him and Ginny if they ever properly dated again…but he didn’t think they would approve of him being in their only daughters room late into the night. He saw enough of Mr. Grangers frowns at Ron and even himself to know that much.

Harry cleared his throat and stated he should leave. He couldn’t read Ginny’s expression. Awkwardly he tangled out of their close embrace and stood up. She got up too, led him to the door, and hesitated before opening it.

“Thank you, I guess I’m glad you could tell I was lying downstairs. I’m glad you know about Snape.”

Pleased, Harry nodded, brushed his lips on her forehead and left quietly. He snuck back into Ron’s room and hoped the other two occupants wouldn’t notice or question him.

The trio were no longer sleeping in the same large bed but no one questioned that Ron and Hermione were sharing a bed now. When Harry was around, bar Ron’s arm around her waist or some mild cuddling, the couple never made it uncomfortable. They had all shared a bed in friendship, comfort, and recovery for months. It was the most natural thing in the world to continue to share a room and stay up at nights whispering across the small gap between Harry’s bed and Ron and Hermione’s. But tonight, Harry didn’t want to answer their questions. Unfortunately they both stirred as he got into bed.

“Everything okay Harry?” Hermione whispered sleepily. Harry slowed and warily began pulling up the covers with an eye at the adjacent bed.

“ ‘Moine, let him sleep.” Ron’s voice responded.
His head popped up from Hermione’s curls and his eyes met Harry’s in the moonlight. Harry was a tad bit nervous, there was no way Ron didn’t know Harry had been in his sisters room until 3am in the morning. For all that the two boys rarely spoke about girls, Ron had a pretty good idea how attractive Harry found Ginny, how attractive most blokes found Ginny.

“Ginny okay?” he asked. Harry nodded.

“Good. Now go to sleep, we have to be up super early.” Ron rolled over and went to sleep.

Harry let out a silent breath, glad that Ron somewhat understood.

He didn’t fall asleep for a long time, reviewing all that happened in his head. For all the open conversation they had tonight, he was still woefully stranded on the status of them. There were other matters more important.

He realized now why Ginny had responded to his question about them with her potential offers to go study abroad.

There was a good chance she was leaving! And was unsure about their halting relationship as well? And where did that put him? Ron and Hermione were both disheartened at the notion of being apart for the next 6 months when Hermione returned to Hogwarts. Ginny didn’t sound reluctant or disheartened about University at all, only nervous about the cost.

He was a prat, thinking about himself when she was clearly excited to figure out her future. He wasn’t even sure if he had a right to be so disheartened. Hadn't she let him go when needed? Hadn't she understood so easily? Also, he wasn’t her boyfriend officially, he didn’t think. If he was her boyfriend, then he had been absolutely shit at it. He hadn’t sent her an owl or attempted to visit in the past five months! Tonight was the first time they had talked alone since August. It was ridiculous to expect she would consider herself in a relationship, that too across an ocean if this was the state of things.

Once again Harry felt like everything that was Harry-and-Ginny was being pushed away for some elusive hope of after.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

The last chapter brought the story to EXACTLY 30,000 words. But alas the beauty of that perfect round figure needs to be destroyed. Instead we join Ginny in college.

Chapter Notes

I have intentionally tried to avoid naming Universities (magical or muggle) however I have placed Ginny in Boston because it has the highest rate (Statistically) of someone choosing to go to college there and choosing to go there after 7 years of exclusive boarding school.

Once again for those seeking the intense Hinny, I promise it will emerge eventually but for now Ginny explores the world of higher academia and american boys.

Warnings: Sex occurs in this chapter. It is not written in a particularly smutty manner but the mechanics and snogging are described.

The first time Ginny had sex with someone other than Harry she was underwhelmed but a little triumphant.

She was in the United States, Boston specifically, for University for four months. Thus far, it was the most amazing, fulfilling, and world expanding experience of her life, and something entirely her own. Ginny Weasley loved University. She absolutely loved her classes and was so invigorated to explore the higher elements of magic and theory in this new space. True, she wasn't an academic like Hermione who delved in voracious depth into everything, but she appreciated the liberal exposure of her coursework.

Her University allowed students to take classes at the “sister” Muggle University. Away from everyone who knew Ginny Weasley before, Ginny devoured courses in Literature & Poetry, Anthropology, and Sociology. She fell back in love with writing. Inspired by her classes, she began tentatively writing analytical pieces about the culture, conventions, and customs of the Magical World for the University Newspaper. (Accio, Boston was nothing like The Daily Prophet) These pieces weren't large nor were they regular features but they were fun and she felt she had crossed some personal hurdle by letting the general public view her writing. She finally bought a small bright green notebook from a roadside muggle bookstore and after an eight year hiatus started writing her own poetry, short stories and personal reflections. She even casually referred to it once as a Diary!

Then of course, there was Quidditch. Ginny didn’t think she could love Quidditch more than she had when she graduated Hogwarts. But playing at this amazing competitive level for her University team was the biggest high she had ever experienced. She grew radically as a player and took every advantage of the various coaches, trainers, and supplemental staff the team provided. Rising at 5am for practice and conditioning and juggling her middling course load and hobbies
and clubs left her ready to crash into bed exhausted at the end of every day. But, she could not remember feeling more satisfied, more perfect, more confident and proud of herself, and this continuously happy with herself ever before.

Ginny was riding the high of her team’s recent win, where she had significantly increased her scoring record, when she spotted Tad Wellington. Happy, confident, and at ease with the state of her life Ginny decided it was time explore more new things and take some risks.

Tad Wellington was broad chested, tall, impossibly blonde, always grinning, and so very American. He didn’t play Quidditch but rowed crew for the sister Muggle University. Ginny often passed him on her way to class and always loitered to enjoy the view. Ginny and her team and Tad and his team were at the noisy local collegiate pub (bar in American). He caught Ginny’s eye and made his way over. He chatted up Ginny and bought her next two drinks and gazed all over her appreciatively. Ginny for her part, responded with saucy humor and eyed the v his shoulders and waist made.

It was obvious what Tad’s end goal was and Ginny... well, Ginny was randy and ready for this new experience. Besides, she did once say she wanted to shag a Muggle.

As Ginny and Tad did the obvious-but-trying-not-to-be dance of leaving the bar together and walking to Tad’s fraternity house and room; Ginny congratulated herself for being an adult and having ended things with Harry so maturely, therefore enabling this.

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**Seven Months Ago**

During the Easter Holiday Ginny quietly announced to her parents her future plans. She sent in her applications to a few Universities in the U.S. She and Madam Hooch wrote letters to the affiliated University Quidditch teams requesting they send scouts or asking for Summer try-outs. These letters were also delivered with copies of Madam Hooch’s pensive memories of Ginny playing. The Universities sent scouts and she qualified for a few Quidditch scholarships. At McGonagall’s advice and her Mum’s insistence, Ginny chose the school with a competitive team that also had a reputable academic program.

Harry, true to his word quietly set up a Gringotts account for her and signed as her surety. In the end, Harry didn’t have to come to Hogsmeade. A Gringotts goblin owled her informing that Griphook would meet her one weekend in Hogsmeade for her final signatures and security prints. (Turned out the Goblins didn’t hate Harry so much as to not extend this courtesy. They of course also wanted to keep the business of Mr. Potter and his rather large sum of galleons) She explained to her parents that she received a small amount of money from a deceased friend (She hadn’t wanted to talk about Snape to her parents) and would be using that to finance the rest of her study. She expected her parents to be dismayed or urge her to be responsible and get a job. She definitely expected her mum to bossily and angrily tell her to “stop being ridiculous” and shack up with Harry. (Or something to that effect.) Instead they were both very supportive, though her Mum asked her to consider schools closer to home and didn’t seem to quite understand the whole Quidditch-as-serious-career thing. Her quiet father surprised her the most when he expressed his pride at her maturity and hard work. Later he asked her with a knowing smile, who exactly signed as her surety and set up her Gringotts account.

She didn’t announce her decision to the rest of the family until after her graduation dinner. Her protective brothers were exceedingly surprised and a little upset they were kept in the dark. Percy was immediately excited and approving of her decision, citing it would “do wonders for her career
longterm”. Charlie, always one to champion travel and adventure, grinned happily. Bill looked at her Mum concerned, looking a little surprised that his protective mother would let Ginny go so far. He made some careful comments insinuating as such until his wife tartly admonished him for his hypocrisy. George and Ron, however looked lost, confused, and asked why Ginny needed to go to University at all. What about post War reconstruction all there was still to do? (Ron) Did she really want to study for another three years? (George) Didn't she want to be settled? (Ron) Did she even know what she really wanted to study? (George) and What about people who were...depending on you? (Ron) Ron's last question was said with a furtive glance at Harry. Ginny suspected Ron’s sense of confusion had more to do with his assumption she would move into Harry and Ron's flat or house like Hermione as planning to. Her father came to her defense and espoused that Ginny taking time for herself, to truly figure out her interests and work towards her Quidditch goals, away from the post-war politics, influences and attention was a wise decision. The lack of commentary from her mother and the subtle declaration from her father shut down any other objections her brothers may have had. Hermione later confided she was excited and happy for Ginny. She of course, approved of this academic decision but wasn't Ginny hurting Harry by going so far away? The bright witch didn't seem to understand the importance of the Quidditch scholarship and team benefits. Ginny was also surprised that Hermione (of all people) was advocating Ginny cater her career and education decisions to one boy. After a lengthy conversation, an annoyed Ginny finally asked if Hermione was planning on taking her own advice and dropping her own ambitious secondary education plans because it would certainly impede her time and proximity to Ron. Forcing to accept her own hypocrisy Hermione flustered half-heartedly backtracked and stopped her questions. Hermione even told off Ron for his pestering on the subject. Harry took the news surprisingly well and later privately confessed that he had known this was coming. He agreed wholeheartedly with her father's sentiments regarding Ginny's University decision. Harry also thought that playing Quidditch for the University team was a grand opportunity that she would be a fool to pass it up. He was confident this playing experience would smoothly take Ginny to playing for a professional team. He assured her that he was incredibly happy for her. Harry disagreed with Ron's characterization of her decision as "running away," and laughed with her that Hermione's righteousness sometimes got her in trouble with her own words. Ginny tentatively queried if Harry would like for himself an option like the one she was now embarking on. With surprising self assurance he told her he truly enjoyed Auror work and that he could not imagine another career track.

That summer, Ginny's impending departure seemed to have a catalyzing affect on her desire for Harry. He and Ron were still living more at the Burrow than not. Harry had recently discovered his grandparents country house lay uninhabited and he and Ron were slowly contemplating to move into with Hermione at the end of the Summer. She grabbed Harry for heavy snogs whenever possible, whispered he stop by her room before bed, and was desperate to learn and touch every inch of his body. They grew closer physically and eventually had sex but their relationship still wasn’t quite the casual intimacy of her 5th year. He was still too busy to properly date, they were rarely alone during proper daylight hours to really chat, and she was distracted with her future plans.

Two weeks before her departure, after weeks of avoiding, she addressed their state of affairs. She realized that she couldn’t sustain this …limbo of a relationship with Harry for the next three years. She also realized, with no little heartbreak, that she wanted to go to University with a clean state. The thought of a declarative commitment for the next three years terrified her. Specifically, she couldn’t imagine committing to something so big across an ocean that didn’t come with or imply a ring. It seemed ridiculous to try and commit to three years of long distance when she and Harry had not written a single letter to each other in the past year. It burned and rankled that her relationship with Harry would come to this, but she did not want to end up bitter and angry
because of promises unfulfilled.

So, one afternoon after deftly managing to clear out the Burrow for several hours she brought Harry into her room, snogged him thoroughly on her bed, and before they progressed to the newfound pleasures of sex, informed him that they needed to entirely break-up before she left to school.

At first, he had not taken the news well. The resulting argument, their first proper discussion and disagreement ever had deviated wildly, delving into other concerns, insecurities, and the problems they never discussed or had intentionally shied away from.

“How do you know that the only reason you liked me isn’t because I was the only girl around who understood some part of what you were involved in and what you were going through? Because I was the only girl who knew you instead of the Boy-Who-Lived, That I wasn’t just some mixture of Girl-Ron and attraction?”

Harry looked like he’d been slapped and his eyes went blank for a moment, to be replaced by a controlled but hurt and angry look.

“Is that…why you think I like you?” Harry enunciated slowly. Though he was speaking quietly his home-county accent was like cut-glass and she could see the barely restrained rage in his eyes. She had just confessed some of her deepest fears about him and it cost her greatly. But she was undeterred and spoke through the pain. Not explaining herself would be worse.

“No. Well, not really. But how do you know you don’t? You can’t tell me that you-and-me together isn’t a bit of a safe option.” His eyes got colder. She cut him off as he was about to say something.

“Have you even considered, really considered there being someone out there for you who is more compatible than me? The idea is not even that far-fetched! A fellow Auror, a criminal-Investigative researcher, maybe someone Hermione meets in her course, a teacher! You haven’t really dated to know or even explored real deep friendship outside of Ron and Hermione!”

She had more bullets in her arsenal and had to keep going to make her point. She had to unleash them all otherwise the growing look of hurt in his eyes was going to derail her.

“I know you’ll say no one knows the real Harry but I’m not the only girl in the world to see past the fame! She could also get your life, want to hangout with your friends, play with Teddy, and love the people you do and not just because they happen to be related to her!”

“I don’t fancy you because its convenient…and I didn’t realize my lack of previous experience or friends apparently was such a detriment.” He said with cool burning anger. She gave him an
exasperated look because this was not exactly how she meant it. She knew he had never considered the possibility that perhaps he liked Ginny because she already fit with the set factors of his life— the family he loved, his best mate, the experience of being 'in' the Order, etc. The phrase "tried and true" came to her mind. How did they know their attraction to each other was not the result of these other factors?

“Don’t we owe it to ourselves and this new world we now live in to… actually go live? You barely had a real teenage life! You deserve to date random girls and do stupid things! You came back from the dead Harry! Don’t you think you should go and try everything and do everything? We’re hardly old- How can we possibly know that we’re it for each other and won’t change? Do you want look back in ten or twenty years and realize that while your sixteen-year-old sweetheart is great, she’s not exactly the best fit for you at forty; especially now that you don't have as many things in common? And you’re left living this desperately almost happy life? You deserve more than almost Harry.”

“So what, I should go shag every girl from here to Albania before you’ll believe I want you for reasons that have nothing to do with Ron or Voldemort?” Harry said bitterly.

“No! If you want to shag every girl from here to Albania it shouldn’t be to prove some point to me. I imagine you’ll learn and discover a whole lot about yourself if you do shag from here to Albania. But Harry, don’t you… worry that if we continue like this we’ll be miserable? Trying to recapture how happy we were when we actually dated? And then eventually resenting each other?”

“Have you really been that unhappy?” Harry asked quietly sounding pained. Ginny sighed.

“I have not been unhappy. We wouldn’t have shagged if I was wallowing and looking for an escape or disappointed with you. I loved dating you when we were in school, but we just… never got back on track after did we? It’s been over a year and we’re not anything concrete, don’t you think that’s a sign?

There was a long pause. She knew her hits had landed. Maybe not all of them, but he was at least considering what she had said.

Ginny tried yet another track and more gently she asked,

“Harry, did you consider us a real couple when I went off to school this past September?”

Harry shook his head bitterly.

“Suppose you did think we were officially back together. Do you think… we would have acted or done anything differently?”

Harry looked away not meeting her eye. His jaw clenched and he jerkily shook his head not looking at her. She could always count on his honor, the fierce sense of duty and fairness. He would never deny his own harsh truths or lie about something like this. Hell, he barely ever lied outright. He knew that he would have been a shit boyfriend. In truth, they had been shit friends to each other too.

“Do you think its fair— to either of us- to go on treating each other with such polite… neglect? If I wasn’t a Weasley and didn’t have to return to where you were too, do you think we would have… engaged in anything physical?”
Harry’s expression got progressively more guilty and hurt. For all that he was lying on her bed and she was sitting straddling his lap, he wouldn’t meet her eye.

“Don’t go just blaming yourself and thinking you took advantage!” Ginny said fiercely lest he drown entirely in self-criticism and disappointment. She had most certainly jumped him in most of their physical encounters. “I’m to blame too! I didn’t write, I didn’t ever try to talk to you! I used you for physical relief when it suited me only. I never gave you answers about what we were doing when you asked. I barely paid attention to what you were going through or what you were doing. I know the months after the War were hard and I didn’t even try to help you or talk to you. We’re **both** to blame here, don’t go around thinking it’s all you!” Harry blinked hard and clenched his jaw but nodded. Ginny needed to continue to make her point.

“When I move to the other side of the world, we’re both going to be just **as** busy if not more so. I would feel like I **had** to wait up by the floo at nights to chat and you would hate the imposition on your training, time with Teddy, and meetings with Kingsley if we tried to date. Couples should be **happy** to flow their long distance partner, not resent it! We’re entering relatively new undiscovered phases of our lives. It seems wrong to hold each other back for any reason. You’ve already changed some and that’s natural and **good**.”

There was a very long silence where Harry stared hard at the ceiling and worked the muscles in his jaw and throat. Finally, he slowly pushed himself up to sit, dislodging her from straddling his thighs, and pulled one leg in. She sat in front of him cross-legged. Harry let out a loud slow sigh.

“I don’t agree with you entirely,” he said quietly qualified.

She nodded. But it meant he agreed with her **some** and he would think on it more. They could part and she wouldn’t feel guilty or oddly estranged or like some sort of horrid cheater because they had both agreed this was best and both agreed they **weren’t** dating.

“Why did you sleep with me?” Harry blurted. He looked genuinely confused. Ginny giggled breaking the seriousness of the previous conversation.

“Because I was randy and you’re attractive.”

He rolled his eyes and raised an eyebrow waiting for her real answer. She was randy and he was attractive, these too were bits of the real answer. It sometimes broke her heart that Harry seemed to have a deeply engrained notion that he wasn't particularly good looking, that he was weird-looking.

“Because we were headed that way and I wanted to. I couldn’t leave and officially settle the matter of **us** if we didn’t. I would have spent the rest of my life wondering and unconsciously sabotaged any future relationship.” She cocked a knowing eyebrow back. As much as he affected her, she knew she had at least some of that affect on him. Regardless of what they were to each other, Harry would always be in her life. This she knew as fact. Even if she fell in love with some American, got married, and lived abroad- Harry was always going to be a part of the Weasley’s. She would have always wondered if they never settled things openly. She would have always secretly lusted at the mystery of him too.

Harry contemplated and nodded as if to say it would have been the same for him. “As always, you’re two steps ahead of me,” he said with a wry smile.

“And besides, I couldn’t leave and let you die a virgin,” she said in a teasing and dramatic manner.
Harry huffed a laugh. “I don’t see that happening if I’m supposed to shag every girl from here to Albania!”

“Right, because that’s actually going to happen. When was the last time you pulled?”

“Please, I’m Harry Potter I can pull!” Harry said faking cocksure indignation.

“For Harry Potter it’s depressing how little you actually can,” sighed Ginny. Harry flicked her thigh in mock affront.

“So…this is it then? The end?” Harry asked after a pause.

She had expected him to look devastated and grace her with his heartbreaking ‘lost-orphan’ look. He looked remorseful but understanding and also a little..relieved? No the relief was because of the understanding not because he had felt shackled. She too was sad, in fact she had cried the night before after thinking through what she was going to say. She thought she wouldn’t be able to get through this conversation without tears, but it hadn't been…as bad as she thought it would be.

“Harry…no matter what happens and who we date, you know I’ll always be there for you right? That nothing will change the love my family and I have for you?” She said suddenly. She needed him to know this, his orphan background tended to make him lose sight of how much he was loved. She stared at him hard willing him to understand this. He gave a small nod and with a hint of a blush assured her the same was true for him.

Harry made to leave the bed and started to look for his shirt. She watched the slowly emerging muscles of his back and shoulder play under his tanned skin. Even without the tan, he was darker than her, a dark olivine beige contrasting with her stark and pale porcelain. Her eyes traced the dip of his spin and lusted at the arrangement of bones and muscle at his shoulder.

“You know Harry…I still have two weeks at home. We could…postpone our official, declarative end to when I actually leave…” Ginny hedged tentatively. She wasn’t entirely sure he’ld be up for it.

Harry froze. He stared at her and then his gaze turned assessing.

“You want to keep shagging.” It wasn’t a question.

“A last week of enjoyment before the end?” she said hopefully shrugging. Harry looked conflicted. After what seemed like a difficult internal struggle he said,

“Only this week. We can’t continue next week, it will….it will be too hard.” Harry Potter, always bearing the brunt of responsibility, even when it was the last thing he wanted to do. Ginny quickly agreed and then pointed out that no one was at the Burrow or expected back for the next few hours…

Sex with Harry had been slow and sweet. Ginny of course initiated the first time, luring him out to the orchard one night and seducing him to remove half his and her clothing. He faltered then,
claiming things were getting too heated and asking once again, what exactly they were doing. Ginny had given him a hard blazing look and frankly announced that she wanted to have sex. With him.

Ginny would never forget his shocked surprise. She also had not anticipated a nineteen-year-old refusal of sex. He uncomfortably argued it might not be the best time, that it seemed like he was taking advantage, and if this was how Ginny really imagined her first time. Ginny wore him down. When she declared she had no fanciful notions of her first time just that she wanted it to be with Harry, he acquiesced and surprisingly (and sexily), took charge. He cast some decidedly powerful privacy charms, conjured some ridiculously fluffy blankets and pillows and bashfully but purposefully asked her about contraception options.

The physical act was slightly awkward and fumbling and relatively short-lived, but Ginny expected as much. While she hadn’t verbalized it, she was rather impressed and surprised by Harry who insisted on extensive foreplay and providing her with two orgasms before any penetration.

She knew, from conversations with Dean and Seamus, knowing Harry himself and the details of his difficult life, and the general perception that came with having so many brothers, that Harry did not particularly engage with pornography (muggle or magical) or lascivious locker-room chatter. She didn’t doubt he dabbled a little bit, but far less than what she had come to understand as the norm. Therefore, she had no idea how shy, reserved, Harry Potter gained such detailed knowledge on performing oral sex. He found her clitoris completely un-assisted, and after proving that his hands did indeed posses the skill they promised, reduced her to a gasping mass with his tongue. Harry had thrust a pillow under the small of her back and massaged the inside of her thighs before entering her, informing her this would ease the pain. He had been rather convinced she would experience a great amount of pain and discomfort.

When underwear shopping with Fleur and Ginny, Hermione confessed to having been considerably uncomfortable the first time she had sex with Ron. Fleur assured them it was different for everyone and that lubrication, natural or external was everyone’s best friend. Ginny, who had spent her entire life on a broomstick and was incredibly physically active felt almost nothing her first time. There had been no pain, only a stretched out ache that lasted a few hours, much like sore muscles after a grueling practice.

Ginny had not believed Fleur and Hermione when they informed her they enjoyed performing oral sex on their partners and that they had no quals swallowing. Ginny’s horror was only partially at the fact that the witches were discussing her brothers. Ginny’s first and only blow-job had been on an ill fated afternoon a week before her break-up with Dean. She had always felt mildly guilty she had never blown Harry before. But Harry had never even so much as hinted or pressured and she had disliked her first experience so much she had never offered...until they had sex. Fleur and Hermione were right, it could be an enjoyable act. Context, it turned out, was everything.

They managed to have sex sixteen more times that summer before their official and definitive end. Sixteen times not including the handful of times they hadn’t had time to take their clothes off or progress past shoving their hands down each others pants ...not that Ginny was keeping count. While they both improved from their first time, they had not gotten to the level Ginny read about in trashy novels or saw in her small dabblings in pornography. They were still shy about their abilities, awkward on pacing, and not entirely confident in their nakedness. Bashful questions of if something was okay and awkward silences during sex were a constant.

But, it had always been slow, sweet, and satisfying, Ginny reflected as she walked back from Tad Wellington’s frat house clutching her heels in her hand. She had anticipated her first college sexual
experience to be a bit more glamorous. A man as beautifully sculpted and as ruggedly manly as Tad, she thought, would have been a master of sexual arts. Suave in his lovemaking and words. His bedroom a tasteful den of iniquity.

She was vaguely disappointed. It wasn’t that the sex was completely unsatisfactory. The fast-paced frenzy of raw lust and intensity she hadn't experienced with Harry had heightened her arousal. She had also been startlingly surprised that when Tad kissed her roughly she enjoyed it. Harry always kissed her with almost heartbreaking tenderness. Ginny was even surprised to find she enjoyed how quickly Tad had thrust into her and the sheer energy and pressure of the thrusting.

But Tad had not even deigned to touch her clitoris. Their coupling ended when he had achieved orgasm. For a full minute after she lay assuming he would reach over or bend down to pleasure her with his hand or mouth. She was full of energy and not quite finished. She gazed around mildly upset that his room was no tasteful den of iniquity but almost identical to Ron’s mess at the Burrow. She was jarringly surprised when he sleepily said,

“You can sleep over if you want, but I have practice in the morning so…”

Ginny refused to be embarrassed. She coolly responded that she did too, imperiously ordered him to find her clothing, and left the frat house, only a little confused as to what had just happened. By the time Ginny reached her dormitory her confusion and comparisons were finished. She was oddly triumphant. She had had her first casual sexual encounter! Sure, she hadn't received a proper full orgasm but she had enjoyed everything else! She had discovered she liked it fast! She had even managed to be fast and coordinated herself! She had pulled an absolute beauty of a man at a pub. She had regally ordered about him post-coitus! All the mild disappointments aside, she felt powerful and felt she had scratched an irritating itch that had been building.

The next morning over breakfast, Ginny’s roommates teased her about her conquest. She also learned that orgasms during sex, especially anonymous sex, were not a promise. She found this a little unfair and ridiculously inconsiderate. One of her roommates laughed and gave her a book on sex, politics, and gender to peruse. In the privacy of a letter to Demelza, Ginny admitted she had always assumed the Muggle World was far more progressive in such matters than the Wizarding Pureblood society. It had come as a shock to realize that despite the greater equality in sports, careers, and sexual and personal independence, some of the latent attitudes towards women and sex were hauntingly familiar.

Ginny’s mother grew up in a society where pre-marital sex among wizards was unthinkable, especially among pureblood women. While everyone said in insulting tones that it was very ‘muggle’ to have pre-marital sex, witches seemed to be the only ones who bore the brunt of this pressure or shame. Ginny’s Mum, while being very against most pureblooded ideals, had difficulty abandoning her notions towards marriage and sex. Her Mum wasn’t ignorant enough to believe that pre-marital sex didn’t occur, but the nature of her sexual education talks with Ginny and her distaste at the notion of living with a lover before marriage heavily implied that she expected her daughter to prescribe to some of her notions.

Some of Molly’s early disapproval of Fleur was because of the French girl’s unabashed acknowledgement that she had, for a time, lived with a previous boyfriend and had essentially moved in with Bill when they dated. Molly had not taken kindly to Ginny pointing out that her darling Bill deserved just as much disapproval for living with Fleur. (Though she amended her list of reasons to dislike Fleur then.) Fleur herself told Ginny that Bill had had many sexual partners before her. When Ginny asked if that bothered Fleur, her sister-in-law beamed and said,

“Not in the slightest, even after all that pleasure and all those women, he wants me! We have both ah, lived, I know what is out there and so does he. The prospect of being with only each other
from now on doesn't incite regret or wondering. If anything it makes our love stronger!"

Even with complete financial independence, Ginny knew she would face her Mum’s considerable disapproval if she lived with a boyfriend. Ginny’s generation of witches in England were the first to have open live-in arrangements, casually confirm that dating couples were in fact sharing a bed before marriage. People had done it before of course, but with more discretion.

The fact that the most prominent Witch in England was living with two boys, one of whom was her boyfriend, had drawn many pernicious comments in the newspapers and socially. (The trio had moved into Harry's ancestral home just outside the village of Godric’s Hollow in September) It was Harry who abated some of the heat from the newspapers with a few carefully chosen remarks. "Hermione has raised a rather ardent feminist" Neville had written as a comment underneath the news clippings he sent citing the story. Maybe, Ginny had mused, but Harry probably had no idea how people categorized his beliefs. He simply believed in equality, fairness, and was vehemently against any kind of prejudice. That these beliefs extended into matters of gender once he learned of the problems was no surprise to Ginny. She hoped he felt the same about witches who had casual sex and different sexualities...

Ginny was rather proud of her Mum for defending Hermione’s living arrangements whenever they came up socially and also allowing them to share a room at the Burrow. Maybe Molly had grown further from her pureblood conservative background. Ginny assumed it more likely that those three got a pass because it was so easy to see how desperately they clung to each other after the War. But Ginny was another matter. That Ginny had sex with a random Muggle casually could never be shared with her Mum. Ginny was pretty certain that if her Mum knew she had sex with Harry, she would either demand a hasty wedding or blame Ginny for being some sort of vile seductress. Harry could do no wrong in her mothers’ eyes.

In her letter to Demelza, Ginny confessed to her feeling of triumph in having successfully shagged a non-boyfriend, and her ability to casually negotiate such an encounter. Her feelings of triumph were not just confidence but also a physical confirmation that she was completely done with her last relationship. For whatever reason, after Harry she thought she would feel suddenly pained or disingenuous the next time she had sex. She loved Harry in some way or form for almost the past decade and she probably would forever. She was secretly worried that she wouldn’t have the courage or ability to be so intimate with another man, especially a man she didn't have any feelings for. Even her other boyfriends at Hogwarts had been crushes and boys she actually liked. But sex with Tad had not been intimate and she had not felt that she was committing some great betrayal.

Demelza in her reply a week later had succinctly summarized her feelings and provided additional advise commentary. Demelza was studying at Oxford (The magical side) and had received one of the five prestigious Transfiguration Professor’s assistant seats. Equitable to a muggle Ph.d program, the position required extensive study and also a few years conducting and writing original research in the discipline.

You feel confident now that you can still have love for Harry without being in love with him- Confident that your care for him will not hinder your own relationships as they did at Hogwarts. I imagine the distance helps but I’m proud of you too. You can now potentially seek out a relationship! (Or continue shagging muggles to check off your list! No, seriously, don't do that.) Either way I urge you to be safe. Always have your wand! And definitely stay on the potion and use disease prevention charms! But, I wonder, shouldn't your sexual adventures be more about learning what you like and about yourself than simply how each man compares to Harry?

The letter had also gone on to lament Demelza’s current romantic tangles. Demelza ended up agreeing to date a junior professor in the Experimental Charms and Theory department. At the
recent Halloween party she and this professor had been caught in a relatively compromising position by one of the research apprentices. While embarrassing, the situation was only exacerbated by the fact that the Experimental Charms and Theory apprentice was Rhys Warrington. Building on the incredibly tentative friendship started at Hogwarts, over the past year Demelza and Warrington exchanged a series of letters, forging an odd if at times surprisingly emotionally open friendship. All of this had abruptly stopped when they both came face-to-face at Oxford as research apprentices in different departments. Neville and Ginny, much to Demelza's annoyance, deemed the silence unresolved sexual tension.

The last pieces of Demelza's advice stuck with Ginny over the next few months.

*shouldn't your sexual adventures be more about learning what you like and about yourself than simply how each man compares to Harry?*

Yes, Ginny decided, if she continued to have sex, she wanted to be in control and she wanted to learn, and not fixate on how this compared to Harry. The Tad experience was alright, but Ginny didn't feel it was good enough to repeat. Ginny started noticing boys after this. It wasn't like she was ignorant of them before, but she hadn't made any strides or assessments from a romantic standpoint.

In her Muggle Poetry class Ginny became enraptured by a tall skinny boy with a ponytail who always had a book of poems in his hand. He invited her to slam-poetry reading in a small club that reminded her of the Divination classroom. From there they walked around the high streets avidly discussing all they heard. It was the most natural thing to walk back to his flat for coffee, explore the books in his bedroom, and have sex amid them on his floor mattress. Unlike Tad he saw to her pleasure and did not kick her out immediately after. They brought books down to the mattress and alternated reading out loud and having sex until Ginny had to leave for her morning practice.

Two months later, after a euphoric win at an away-match, Ginny explored the body of the chaser she had just defeated with her tongue. This was a slight return to Tad as the sex was just as frenetic and high energy. Unlike Tad, the chaser attempted to engage with her clitoris but wasn't able to bring her to orgasm. Ginny didn't mind, she'd had fun and wanted to get back to her partying teammates anyway. The Chaser asked if he could write to her. Ginny agreed but didn't think much would come of it (she was right) and they parted amicably.

By spring, Ginny was too busy with her studies and the increased practice schedule demanded by the end of season playoffs to explore men anymore. She also felt that her three distinct experiences were plenty! Her team did well enough to place in the quarter-finals but did not progress further. At the post match party, Ginny's dancing attracted various men who didn't all immediately understand she did not desire male company that evening but wanted to revel with her teammates. A tipsy beater from some other team grabbed her chest from behind and attempted to drag her towards the wall for a snog. Flying on instinct, Ginny punched him hard in the face. Later in the evening when another player insisted she come back to his flat and refused to take no for an answer, Ginny sent a small stinging hex at his genitals.

Ginny always carried her wand and played an aggressive defense when it came to men in sexual situations. She had spent a long and hard year being openly visible prey to a sexual pervert who had terrorized her and her classmates. She refused to ever be in a position for any man to have such power over her again. Over the course of the year, the less respectable wizards at her University learned to not to mess with Ginny Weasley who could punch harder than most men and send an exquisitely aimed curse loose within a second. Subtle more persuasive pressure for sex or control in any situation she was also surprisingly immune to. She refused to be manipulated by pleas of "come on, smile," "just being friendly!" or "i'm not asking anything more than a drink!" She was often reminded of the subtle seductions of a sixteen-year-old Riddle when men
approached her like this. Even in group projects or in her classes she found she was easily able to spot manipulations. It was a perverse sort of awareness that after the master manipulations of Riddle, almost nothing phased her.

Ginny did not go home for Christmas that first year. Inheritance or not, she couldn't really afford it. So by the time she finished her final exams at the end of May, Ginny was giddy with excitement at the prospect of going home. She was sad that a year at University had gone by so quickly and had absolutely loved every moment of it. But she had never gone this long without seeing any of her family or home friends before and missed them terribly.

It was of course, the week before her International Portkey departure when she met HIM.

Ginny and her roommates were cleaning out their house. Ginny was baffled at the sheer number of plastic take-out tins they had accumulated. She was bent over outside the house trying to sort the various tins in their appropriate recycling bins in the humid May heat. She was wearing ratty shorts, a sweaty stained tank with her hair was in a messy bun when she heard a voice say,

"You've got it all backwards,"

Startled Ginny looked up and came face to face with a ridiculously good looking man. He had perfectly coiffed waves of black hair, sharp blue eyes, and a strong square jaw that emphasized his full lips. Stepping back she noticed, he had a ridiculously fit body, very similar to Tad's and was casually but very well dressed.

"What?" Ginny said stupidly

"The recycling, you're doing it wrong!" the man said kindly. Ginny despaired of her outfit and the fact that she hadn't taken a shower but smiled politely and allowed the man to explain, and then show her how to sort the tins. (She wasn't doing it wrong- just not how he did it, but Ginny swallowed her rebuttal to his mansplaining to promote conversation)

The man's name was Ryan. He was two years older and studying Runes and Magical Foreign Policy. He had an easy comfortable grace and deep rumbling laugh and after their joined recycling venture, offered to buy Ginny a water or coffee for her efforts. Ginny rolled her eyes and instead invited him into the house for a cup of tea as she was disgustingly dressed. After tea Ryan too was dragooned in to the cleaning efforts followed by dinner with her roommates. He was incredibly social and became friendly with all her roommates easily, who gave her approving looks when he was away.

Ginny and Ryan met for either Lunch or Dinner or even Lunch and Dinner everyday that week. He didn't play or follow Quidditch or any other sport. Ginny considered this a crime but was willing to forgive him because he was funny, charming, and interesting and they often found themselves chatting until restaurant owners urged them to leave. Ryan was very posh (American posh that is) and infallibly polite. He pulled out chairs, always called to confirm their meetings, insisted on paying, and spoke with the most pleases and thank you's. Ginny wasn't sure if it was years of learned manners or simple shyness but for all their daily interaction and obvious attraction, he didn't lean in to kiss her goodnight whenever he deposited her at her doorstep. Ginny thought it was pretty obvious they both liked each other by now. He was disheartened to know she was leaving at the end of the week for the entire summer. She was disheartened too, why couldn't she have met him earlier?

The morning of her Portkey, he asked if he could owl her regularly over the summer. When she agreed, he bent down and finally kissed her long and tenderly.
It was with a giddy smile that Ginny passed through international portkeys and floo-ed into the Burrow's living room - to be met with a half-naked Harry Potter.
Chapter 10

Some of Ginevra Weasley's Concentration Requirements

Enlightenment Era Revolutions in Transfiguration: Thought & Theory

Transfiguration: Object Imbuement and Inflection Points

Transfiguration: Thermodynamics and Material Stress

Transfiguration: Geospatial Conjuring and Geologic Theory

Transfiguration: Newtonian & Euclidean Graphing and Application

Landscape Arithmancy I: Spatial Magic & Nexus Theory

Landscape Arithmancy II: Regions of Magical Concentration

First semester will focus on natural creations Forbidden Forest, Albanian Forest, Forest of Mists, Cliffs of Moehr, Amazonian Forest, etc

Second semester will focus on historic locales: Salem, Godric’s Hollow, Slytherin Fen, Avalon, Stonehenge, New Orleans, St. Mont-Alytwich, Samarkand

Euclidean Arithmancy and Applications

Theory of Magic I: Theories and Systems of Magic

Theory of Magic II: Ancient enchantments and contemporary Harnesses
Theory of Magic III: Contemporary Research and Issues

Please note that regardless of concentration, course dissertations must demonstrate a thorough understanding and application of all greater magical theory while also incorporating recent research and findings.

**Non-Major Requirement Course Options**

Introduction to World Magic & Cultures

Introduction to Wandlore

Potions, Charms, & Sexuality


Origins and Development: The First Wizard-Who and When?

Public Magic and Integration in Muggle Problems: Ethical Issues, Concerns, and Practicum

Introduction: Rune Interpretation across Language Barriers

Dance: Ritual Dance & Power Harnessing

Students should note that if they are considering specialized Healing programs they must take the general pre-medical requirements.

Magical Maladies 201-Plant Based Injuries and Organic Compounds (commonly referred to as Orgo I)
Magical Maladies 202-Creature Based Injuries and Organic Compounds (commonly referred to as Orgo II)

Magical Maladies 203-Hexes, Curses, and Spells Gone Awry
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Harry Potter: Adulting, cooking, and consuming a ridiculous amount of the BBC via friendship adventures

Chapter Notes

A few warnings:
1. brief description of crime/murder scene that is a bit gruesome (dead female bodies) but not especially descriptive.
2. Details of particularly athletic potentially forceful sex - NOT dub con or non con though
3. Mild discussion of pornography and objectifying language

All the names of Harry's neighbors, and the name of his house come from the wonderful brain of JKRowling. The name Stinchcombe comes from her post on Pottermore about the Potter family. The names of the neighbors have been mined from small details on book writers from the Potter books and Pottermore. 10 points to Gryffindor if anyone can figure out whose relatives/descendants some of Harry's neighbors are!
Yes, this chapter too contains some footnotes. I work in academia, its a hard habit to break.

“Stop fretting ‘Mione!” Ron admonished gently from the sofa.

They were at the Burrow and Harry was standing shirtless in the middle of the living room while Hermione and Mrs. Weasley fussed and investigated the bite on his shoulder. Unlike almost all of his other injuries, Harry sustained the bite as a part of a cleaning accident not, fighting some dark wizard.

A year ago Harry received and finally detangled the greater details of his assets. He discovered that his grandparents’ country estate still remained and was now his. In September Harry and his friends took a trip to see and explore the house. Harry unexpectedly had fallen in love with the house. When Harry first saw the term Country Estate on the estate papers, he had envisioned a sprawling palatial house with manicured lawns, high gates, and house elves like Malfoy Manor. Then, after watching TV with Hermione he thought perhaps it would be like Mr. Darcy’s estate,
The house was situated down the road, around a small hill from the village of Godrics Hollow. Instead of tall wrought iron gates, overgrown hedges outlined the front of the property and a squat brick hedge-gate sat at the bottom of the drive leading up to the house. The house was situated on a beautiful piece of land, nothing like the woods or grounds Harry had imagined. To its left was a mid-sized clearing that ran into the small wood that stood to the far left of the estate. The grass, which clearly had never been manicured, wrapped around the back of the house until it hit a stream. On the very far right, with enough space in between for a Quidditch pitch, lay the dilapidated remains of what must have been the neighboring house. Harry found the inside of the house exceeding his expectations as well. Instead of heavy crown molding and high ceilings, he and his friends encountered warm, relaxed, English country interiors with many large windows.

Ron and Harry had rented a small flat in London when they first started Auror training. It had never quite felt like home, or any extension of the Gryffindor dormitory. They ended up spending more time at the Burrow than not. When Hermione finished at Hogwarts she spent the summer with her parents attempting to figure out which of her many future plans to pursue. She finally decided she would study law. Always the overachiever, she decided that she would study Muggle and Magical law and was now simultaneously enrolled in two programs of study. After a few months living and commuting from her parents, she determined she wanted to move in with the boys. The flat the boys shared was far too cramped for the three and Harry sensed Ron’s growing concerns about rent at a larger flat. Ron unlike Harry lived on his Auror stipend alone and did not have the failsafe of a large inheritance. He also (according to Hermione) was too proud to ask his parents who could now afford it, for a bit of help financially.

The House was the perfect solution. Before visiting for the first time, Harry thought he hated the idea of a house walking distance from Godric’s Hollow. Instead when the three friends fell in love with the house and explored its ample space, Harry demanded Ron and Hermione move in with him there.

“What am I going to do with five bedrooms Ron? And Hermione I’ll need you to sort out the library!”

The house was of course, in disrepair (though nothing like Grimmauld Place) and the three friends set to dusting, cleaning, and sorting salvageable furniture. As they cleaned, refurbished, and sorted through old papers, Harry learned more about his history. The House was officially titled Stinchcombe. The property had transferred to James Potter upon the death of his parents. At that point Lily and James were already living in the village cottage. Harry learned that his parents had chosen not to take up the house for it would have been an obvious target and instead remained at the small discreet rental cottage, laden with protective enchantments, in the village of Godric’s Hollow itself.

Being a mixed muggle and wizarding village, the three friends were surprised to find that two magical ley lines intersected at the village Chapel, known to wizards as Goodrich’s Alter, imbuing a great deal of landscape magic into the area. Most of this magic had been bound, centuries ago by Godric himself, into low-grade protective enchantments across the land. Apparently the muggles of Godrics Hollow were quite used to and happy with the peculiar happenings of the town and accepted the small bits of magic they encountered with superstition and old beliefs. The three
friends were delighted to learn that the magical laws of the village and surrounding township also included a complete ban on press activity. Reporters and photographers were held at bay by the wards and had to seek formal permission with the judicious town council for entry!

Over the course of the year Harry and his friends slowly cleaned and refurbished their home. So far, they had cleaned and refurbished three bedrooms, the warm living room that reminded Harry of a restrained Gryffindor Common Room, and the large open farmhouse-style kitchen. Hermione in her spare time delved into accounting and cataloguing the books in the formal library. Harry had started work restoring a small windowed den off the back of the living room that he discovered was once his grandfather’s study.

Harry and his friends love their house, though they had not quite cleaned out much beyond the spaces they used. The large kitchen provided more than enough space for meals that they had never ventured to the formal dining room or small parlor. The three friends were often too busy to truly delve into home decor. Harry took the master bedroom, (or as Hermione informed was technically a master bedroom suite) and was so content he did not feel compelled to explore the other bedrooms. Ron and Hermione took the sizable bedroom down the hall. The library though comparatively small for the size of the house was in serious need of overhaul- Hermione was still in the accounting and inventory phase.

By the end of May it was approaching 10 months at their new residence, and after much nagging from Molly, the three friends decided to start clearing out a few additional rooms and actually attempt some 'home decor'. Ron and Harry were cleaning (fooling around really) the sun parlor at the back of the house that overlooked the yard and stream. Dilapidated wicker furniture and overgrown potted plants were scattered across the room. Harry had not been paying attention, gazing out the dusty windows at the stream in the distance. He had been about to float the idea of a planting a Willow Tree by the stream to Ron when something bit his shoulder.

That was how Harry found himself standing in the middle of the living room at the Burrow holding his shirt in his hands. Mrs. Weasley and Hermione were fussing over him. The small creature had bitten Harry’s hand too when he had removed it from his shoulder. He felt exceedingly stupid when Mrs. Weasley asked why they weren’t wearing gloves and why they didn’t keep any dittany or first-aid supplies in their house. Ron sat in the corner laughing. Mrs. Weasley went to the kitchen to find some undoubtedly vile tasting tonic and Harry was making a rude gesture at Ron when Ginny Weasley floo-ed in through the fireplace.

In the few seconds of frozen surprise and stillness Harry starred at her. She looked…different. Startled, she was staring at him with wide eyes too. Was she blushing? He whispered her name and the silence shattered with the exclamations of surprise and hugs and excitement.

Harry was surprised and pleased to see Ginny. While he had not entirely agreed with all her reasons for their formal cessation of affection, he had understood her tempestuous turmoil and desires and could admit they were on a route to make each other miserable. He agreed with Mr. Weasley that Ginny was practically bursting at the seams to strike out on her own and that she would not be content until she achieved her various goals. At first he had wondered why these goals couldn't also include him but he reasoned this had more to do with her anxieties and turmoils than him. Meanwhile, the past year had been good to Harry. He discovered his house, settled better in his Auror training and learned to shed some of the many responsibilities he had taken on immediately after the War. He had grown comfortable as a Godfather to Teddy and how to deal with the grief of all those he had lost two years ago. Harry was most proud of the fact that he had learned to say no. The first year after the war he agreed to help, assist or be a part of every initiative that came his way, pushed himself to be aware of every detail. He had felt a burning sense to make it all right and make sure nothing bad or unfair occurred.
The English Wizarding World was technically still in Reconstruction. But now, two years after the war, Harry was less paranoid, felt less compelled to be informed of every department of the ministry or every subject he was randomly consulted on. He declined giving opinions urging that he needed to be better informed or directed whoever was asking to those who did know. Harry had also gotten better at press relations. He would never be particularly great with the press, or as jovial and easy going as Ron was, but he was better. Harry was very glad Hermione forced him and Ron to commit to the full three years of Auror training instead of opting for the abridged program and promotion the Ministry had first offered. Granted, the Auror Corps had been radically depleted and the trainees were getting far more hands-on experience than anticipated, but Harry was glad they were still taking the full three years of schooling. It gave him an opportunity to really delve into his coursework, more than he ever had before. He discovered new interests, a new diligence to studying and his work, and how to better manage learning with immediate life stresses and emergencies.

Dinner that evening was a celebratory affair. Everyone had missed Ginny and clambered for her attention and news. Mrs. Weasley very obviously missed her daughter and spent half the evening not eating but clutching Ginny’s hand in happiness. Mr. Weasley too remarked at least every 20 minutes how glad he was that Ginny was home. Harry hadn’t realized how much Ginny was Mr. Weasley’s darling until she left.

“Maybe one day boys, you will have daughters of your own and will understand how easily they can steal your heart” Mr. Weasley had said when Ron teased his father.

For Harry, all of Ginny’s stories and adventures were new. As predicted, they had not written save a small note, the details of her bank papers, with her present at Christmas. In Harry’s defense he was not a particularly great letter writer and Ron too had only written to Ginny once in the past year. Ginny however, knew about the move to Stinchcombe and that Ron had broken his leg last month because of her healthy correspondence with Hermione.

Harry noted oddly that he hadn’t really missed Ginny. Well, that wasn’t true, he had missed her quite a bit at first, whenever he wanted to share a joke or remark on a ridiculous situation. He had also missed her greatly when he was studying for his first round of Auror exams. But the ache of missing Ginny was a familiar burden now. It was nowhere near as haunting as when he had been on the Horcrux hunt. The world at peace made a ridiculous amount of difference. He had spent the year after the War missing Ginny but he was so busy that it was a contented missing her. He was happy she was safe. She was still safe and clearly happy and thriving at Uni, therefore he missed her but it was once again a contented missing her.

As Harry sat reveling at Ginny’s return and the happy environment of the Burrow, he focused on how different Ginny seemed. She hadn’t actually changed physically. She was still very pretty with her electric hair, her cupid’s bow lips, her sparkling eyes and delicate face, but something about her was…different. Harry didn’t know how to explain it. At first he thought it was confidence, but Ginny had always been rather confident. Could someone look noticeably smarter? Ginny had always been clever with a sharp keen perception, but could someone look noticeably more clever? She looked comfortable, but that was stupid, of course she looked comfortable sitting in her family home. In the end Harry concluded that he was being a creep, he was simply noticing that Ginny had gone from pretty and beautiful to very fit. It wasn’t until Harry, Ron and Hermione returned to their house and Hermione remarked upon it that Harry finally understood the differences he was seeing.

“Goodness can you believe how posh and graceful Ginny’s become? University has been so good to her!” Hermione said.

Her boyfriend threw her a half incredulous half confused look. Harry cocked his head wondering.
With an exasperated sigh Hermione cried,

“Don’t tell me you two didn’t notice! I don’t think I’ve ever seen her dressed so smart! She looks so confident, assured- no, comfortable! And she clearly enjoys her coursework and training, she talked about it so much!”

“She was always confident,” Harry blurted. Ron made an agreeing noise. They were seated around the island in the kitchen waiting on the kettle.

“Of course she was, but don’t tell me you two didn’t feel it! Oh I’m so happy that she’s gotten so involved and expanded so much in her interests! She’s becoming such a woman of the world!” Hermione trilled handing the boys mugs of tea.

“She’s just got herself a posh haircut ‘Mione, and maybe gotten a bit older,” Ron said. Hermione rolled her eyes and muttered something that sounded vaguely like boys.

Harry definitely noticed the haircut. Ginny’s hair was always on his radar when she was around so it wasn’t surprising that he noticed it now too. Ginny had always had a long solid mane of beautiful red hair. Still technically long, her hair was now cut a bit shorter and very differently shaped. It seemed to have some motion and body of its own. Differing layers competed for attention as they caught the light and highlighted the arrays of red and gold when she moved her head. Shorter pieces of hair now artfully framed her face and highlighted her delicate bone structure, particularly her cheekbones. She even had bits in the front that stylistically swoop-ed, glancing off the sides of her now exquisitely shaped brows. Harry always had a hard time not staring at Ginny and her hair, but it had taken all his determination to not reach out and run his hands through her new cut at dinner. It was particularly distracting whenever she turned suddenly and all the differing layers and strands vibrated for attention.

As he thought about Hermione’s words he realized Ginny was rather smartly dressed. Harry had rarely seen Ginny in anything but her school uniform, jeans and jumpers, or in the summer, cut-off shorts and an old t-shirts. He vaguely remembered the silhouette of a dress from the Yule Ball and distinctly remembered the strappy, low-cut, almost backless bridesmaids dress from Fleur’s wedding.

Ginny had arrived today in skinny sleek and fitted blue jeans and a summery oh-so-elegant blouse, not a t-shirt or jumper. Instead of trainers or her school shoes, she wore stylish low heeled ankle boots, and her neck and shoulders had been carelessly but decoratively wrapped in an oversized printed scarf. She even had stylish accessories! Harry couldn’t remember if Ginny accessorized before. When she arrived she’d had what Hermione later exclaimed was a very posh leather handbag dangling from her elbow and a fashionable pair of sunglasses tucked in her hair. She’d showered and changed for dinner but even that outfit had been surprisingly stylish, though casual. Ginny had always been pretty and fit, but now she was bordering on sexy and sophisticated. Now that Harry was thinking about it, Harry realized Ginny now had the easy confidence, grace, and confident sex appeal often seen in Fleur or…Ariadne.

Harry grimaced. He never liked thinking of Ginny and Ariadne together and avoided any mental comparisons. Ariadne was very sexy but in a completely different way than Ginny had ever been. Ariadne certainly did not have the grace Fleur exuded. Ariadne was tall with sharp striking features. This with her dark coloring and bright green eyes gave her a very exotic and alluring face. The woman was also very conscious about her sex appeal and maneuvered it like a weapon. Ariadne was a French Auror on deputation in England for three years. A few years older, she was sent because she was one of the best France had to offer.
At first Ariadne hated Harry and Ron. Her early duties essentially seemed like glorified babysitting or teaching. Harry and Ron had been very involved in much of the post-war policing and clean-up despite having just started at the Academy. The regular policing units, the Magical Law Enforcement Officers, had not really existed in those early days and the Aurors had had to fill in the gaps. In the first ten months after the War, the height of the Reconstruction, most of the populated centers of Magical England were under martial control.

Aurors conducted nightly patrols. Apparition, floo, and other travel was incredibly regulated. The many abandoned or destroyed buildings of Diagon Alley and other centers had to be carefully searched, raided, and often times de-cursed before any reconstruction or reoccupation could begin. Ron and Harry, considered the de-facto and potentially the few remaining experts on Voldemort and the Death Eaters, were involved in most of the search parties and patrols. But Harry and Ron were also war heroes, incredibly famous, and high profile targets. Kingsley and a reinstituted Gawain Robbards, the Head of the Aurors, asked Ariadne to team up with Ron and Harry whenever they left the training grounds. She was even required to escort them home most days, much to the displeasure of all parties involved.

Fortunately, it was only took a few months before Ariadne begrudgingly admitted to the young men’s’ skills. It was a few months after that when they earned her respect, and almost a six months later when they earned her admiration. Harry and Ron, also grew to respect Ariadne’s skill and determination, and admire her commitment to serve a nation not her own. Harry’s only criticism at first had been that Ariadne seemed to think Ron rode on Harry’s coattails.

Fortunately, Ron (who had grown out of the shadow of his brothers and Harry) quickly proved his own merit. He also showcased to everyone that he was far better at Harry in long term security strategy, negotiating particularly difficult (or stupid) civilians, and the press. (He also surpassed Harry in straight Hand-to-Hand combat due to sheer mass and arm span, though Harry was quicker and no slouch either). The three Aurors formed at first, a tentative friendship, and then later the trust and camaraderie that came among partners. Harry even enjoyed Ariadne’s biting sarcastic humor and rough prickly personality.

Then, four months ago, Harry and Ariadne started sleeping together.

The first time was after a horrific investigative mission in the Outer Hebrides. The Aurors had tapped into muggle police chatter and found that 20 teenage girls had been found dead in a shipping container. There had been no evidence of how the container arrived in a random field in the middle of a random island, no evidence of vehicle movement. The crime seemed suspicious enough to have magical perpetrators. So, Harry and Ariadne had gone posing as DI’s. The whole case turned out to be muggle driven but with a few wizard middlemen in the end.

Ariadne and Harry eventually had back-up but they were the only two Aurors when the shipping container was opened. Muggle CSI would have arrived before the Auror CSI, potentially destroying magical evidence. Harry and Ariadne were forced to wade through the bodies sweeping for spell and potion residues and wand signatures. Ariadne, though a few years older and slightly more experienced, was visibly rattled at the grotesque horror of the crime scene, her first of this type. Harry, who thought he had already seen the worst of humanity, was also seriously disturbed. The two Aurors were told to stay on the Island and monitor until the proper paperwork and mingling orders were filed. This would enable the Auror Department to send in an Auror who could claim lead/overriding authority for the Muggle investigation. Harry was not really a drinker, so it was inevitable that the two unsettled partners drowned their fears and discomfort in each others’ bodies. From there things steam-rolled quickly. Harry and Ariadne were assigned to the shipping container case and Ron was sent undercover as a Portkey-shipping crewman. It was Harry’s first official case and it had nothing to do with Voldemort related fallout.

The case lasted over a month and grew steadily more depressing. By the end, Harry and Ariadne
were having sex regularly.

Harry hadn’t thought about sex past his summer with Ginny. Of course he thought about sex, he got aroused, had desires, and masturbated as much as the next healthy young man. But he hadn’t really contemplated the idea of his next sexual partner. If he thought about it, he assumed he had some vague notion he was waiting for Ginny. Sex with Ariadne was very different from sex with Ginny. Their first time was angry and forceful. Harry was later ashamed that he had not particularly cared or even considered if he hurt Ariadne or if she was left wanting. He remembered slamming into her with considerable force and abusing her chest. He vaguely remembered that he had thrust a hand down between them to stimulate her clitoris but wasn’t entirely sure if she achieved orgasm. Unlike with Ginny, he didn’t think he could bring himself to ask if he had.

The next time Harry made sure she shuddered around him before driving in wildly. The next morning he was mortified when he discovered bruises the size of his finger-pads on her waist and breasts. Ariadne laughed sharply, smacked him surprisingly hard on the stomach and sashayed out of bed making some vaguely condescending comment about how boring his previous lovers must have been.

Ariadne was a tall, tough, hard woman of mostly muscle. But for all her strength, height, and rough persona, Harry was still taller, bigger, and by mass stronger, he didn’t think it was okay to so casually ignore the damage he could do to her body. Harry began to be more conscious of his strength and force. She responded by biting the meaty flesh of his shoulderhard when he came inside her and told him she wasn’t some damsel in distress and to “Fuck her harder.” Sex, or fucking as Ariadne often said in French, became all about challenges laid and testing boundaries after that.

They were both strong and athletic and often their coupling was forceful, usually involving some bet or merrily taunting challenge. They tried to see how long they could hold off orgasms (naturally,) or how many consecutive orgasms could be had, or how well they could resist arousal.

How hard, how slow, how fast.

How long standing, how long sitting, how quickly after a workout, how slow was their running speed post coitus? How accurately could they hit a target mid-orgasm? How effective was their wandless magic mid-coitus?

(Harry and Ron swore that the potency of their windless magic and their magical strength was directly related to how much sex they were getting despite Hermione’s adamant stance that "it doesn't work like that" )

One evening after a heady sparring session, Ariadne dared Harry to maintain a plank while she slid her head under and blew him. Afterwards, he countered the challenge and roughly fingering her while tonging clitoris. Harry won.

He learned that she liked the impact and depth they gained when he took her from behind and she learned that his chest was surprisingly sensitive despite the many scars.

Relations between Aurors were frowned upon but technically there was no rule or precedent preventing them. Regardless Ariadne and Harry were incredibly discreet about their relationship. The two Aurors kept it quiet not just because Harry was a private man but because it would look more unprofessional for Ariadne than Harry. He was The Chosen One and a man. She was one of the scattering of female Aurors and had built her reputation as a tough as nails, effective, and efficient French Auror who had the esteem of Harry Potter and Ron Weasley and the Minister. It was definitely worse for Ariadne’s reputation if people thought she had earned their esteem with her body.
They never referred to each other as anything more than Auror partners, even privately. Hermione asked once and Ariadne cocked an eyebrow and smiled condescendingly. Later Harry shrugged and told Hermione that they were partners who liked each other. Hermione huffed and turned to Ron exasperated. But Ron too shrugged and insisted it wasn't anyones business but Harry and Ariadne's. Ron had of course, in the privacy of their bedroom, dutifully listened uncomplaining to his girlfriends complaints and concerns about Harry's relationship which she found perverse and odd. He only partially agreed but still maintained it wasn't his or Hermione's business to intervene.

Life went on. Harry and Ariadne shagged regularly, were exclusive (Harry assumed, they never really discussed it), and they understood each others jobs and didn’t have to lie to each other. They enjoyed each others company. On Ron and Hermione's date nights, Harry and Ariadne inevitably had dinner together so Harry supposed it amounted to the same thing. Harry even had a toothbrush and gym bag at Ariadne’s flat.

And yet, Harry didn’t like thinking about Ginny and Ariadne in the same mental sentence. Ariadne wasn’t a secret per say, but she never really fit with the rest of Harry's life outside of his career.

He disliked and felt guilty that he couldn’t seem to prevent himself from comparing his sexual experiences between the two women. He was glad had some sort of mental block at comparing their bodies in detail. He wasn’t sure why but it made him feel…unfaithful, though he couldn’t quite figure out to whom.

On the third day of Ginny’s summer holiday, Hermione (and the boys, but Hermione mostly) hosted a garden party at Stinchcombe[1]. They had not had an official housewarming and this combined with Ginny’s return seemed like a good excuse to throw a party and use the newly built patio. Harry felt particularly content gazing out at his guests who were scattered across the lawn. Neville, Dean, and Ginny were lying on the grass, heads propped on conjured pillows. Hermione was reveling in hosting duties fluttering from cluster to cluster of friends. George was entertaining a few of the other Auror trainees who had been invited and Hermione’s law-school friends were chatting animatedly with Demelza and Luna on lawn chairs. Harry had Teddy on his shoulders, letting him play with the wisteria that crept up the side of the kitchen wall when Neville and Ginny approached him. Dean meandered with a drink toward Sharon, an Auror a year above Harry and Ron.

“You should build a trellis,” Neville exclaimed watching Teddy bat at the hanging flowers. Ginny acknowledged that they had done a lovely job with the clean up and restoration and creating a “disgustingly perfect Pemberley.” She and Neville exchanged a look and then burst out giggling gasping random phrases of what was clearly a private joke. The friends chatted some more and Teddy demanded a ride on Neville’s shoulders. Ginny attempted to regain the trust and friendship of the two year-old who seemed to have forgotten her and asked the two men about Auror training.

After graduation, Neville applied to the Auror Academy. His astonishingly good NEWTS and work at Hogwarts during the war and after cancelled out his mediocre OWLs. It also helped that Neville was interested in Tactical Logistics, and Criminal Analysis. Only a year behind Ron and Harry, Neville’s coursework and training thus far was almost identical. However, in the third year Neville would focus more on tactical support systems, data analysis, and a bits of the CSI scientists’ coursework as his position would eventually put him to liaison with such departments. While Harry and Neville certainly became closer than they’d ever been before through Auror training, Harry always got the distinct impression that Neville was Ginny’s friend first and Harry wondered what Neville relayed to her in his letters.

“Where’s Ariadne Harry?” Neville asked looking around. Harry stiffened.
“She couldn’t make it,” Harry lied and then at Ginny’s inquisitive look added, “She’s our partner.”

If Neville found the use of our instead of my odd, he didn’t remark on it. Neville was one of the few people who knew about Harry’s relationship. Suddenly Harry regretted Neville being privy to this information. Harry trusted Neville with his life but Neville’s best friend was Ginny...

So What?

Harry didn’t care if Ginny knew he had a …girlfriend. Their relationship was over, she had been very clear.

But then, Ginny would question why his girlfriend wasn’t at his housewarming or why her mum or Hermione hadn’t mentioned her yet. The distasteful feeling Harry experienced whenever he inadvertently thought about Ariadne and Ginny in the same mental space returned.

Setting Teddy down to run towards George, Harry excused himself to go refill the drinks and contemplated his mental discomfort. He wasn’t ashamed of Ariadne. He had invited her to the party a week prior. Ginny’s unexpected addition had not changed his invitation either when discussed the party with Ariadne the night before.

No, Ariadne had declined the invitation.

She hadn’t said she didn’t want to come or why but Harry wasn’t so oblivious as to not hear it. Harry got on with Ariadne, socially and sexually. Unfortunately, with the exception of Ron, the same could not be said for most of Harry's friends.

Ariadne’s first and only visit to the Burrow had been disastrous.

Mrs. Weasley distrusted Ariadne on sight. If Harry had thought the snipes and barbs between Fleur and Mrs. Weasley before Bill’s wedding were bad, they were nothing compared to the uncomfortable exchanges between Ariadne and Mrs. Weasley. Worse was the open animosity between Ariadne and Fleur.

Ariadne had gone to Beauxbaton with Fleur and apparently neither girl had given up active dislike of the other. Andromeda, now another unofficial Weasley, had taken almost ridiculous offense at Ariadne’s aversion and hesitance to touch Teddy. The situation had not improved when Ariadne defiantly declared she did not like babies and had no intention of ever having children, casting a wary eye at Teddy. Ron had attempted to be a good mate and assist Harry and defend Ariadne. At the time he was the only person who knew of Harry’s relationship with the older Auror. But even Ron’s attempts had petered out when it became obvious Hermione was getting steadily angrier at his defense of Ariadne.

Hermione and Ariadne had always been wary of each other, even after Ron and Harry became good friends with Ariadne professionally.

After the shipping case, they got on like water and oil.

Hermione tried to hide her horror that Harry was engaged in a romantic relationship with the woman and Ariadne was livid that Harry had even shared such a detail with Hermione. She still didn’t understand the closeness the three friends shared, or why Harry “ran to her” with everything. When Harry let slip that He, Ron and Hermione had shared a bed platonically for six months and that they still sometimes all lounged together on his bed at Stinchcombe chatting or reading, Ariadne looked horrified. Harry had angrily cut her of and deemed the subject closed when she later suggested a problematic co-dependence. Hermione, never one to let something go,
made annoyed comments of sighs whenever the subject of Ariadne came up.

Ron burst out laughed when Harry once miserably asked if it was some sort of jealousy or female dominance thing. Ron had the surprisingly ability of managing to be in both Ariadne’s and Hermione’s good graces all the time regardless of his comments of admiration for either woman. It probably helped that Ron made his position startlingly clear. For all that Ron was friends with Ariadne, respected her as a partner, and enjoyed her company, at the end of the day, he was Hermione’s man entirely. Ron, like Harry, understood that Ariadne was of a persnickety personality, she trusted rarely and was in general rather difficult to like. But with the insight of a lover, Ron could tell that Ariadne aggravated all of Hermione’s worst insecurities, insecurities even Harry wasn't aware of. Ariadne found Hermione insufferable and completely unrelatable at the core their value systems were too different. The two women would never get along. Harry sadly, despite Ron’s acceptance of this fact, still held hope.

On Ron’s advise Hermione eventually realized that regardless of how much she disliked Ariadne, Harry was going to keep her around. Ariadne too begrudgingly came to realize that Hermione was part and parcel of any type of relationship with Harry or Ron. Eventually, with startlingly dignity Hermione acknowledged that Ariadne was still a trusted Auror and partner to both Harry and Ron. She valued and respected Ariadne's ability to keep Ron and Harry safe in the field. Harry wasn’t sure if it was love for him, love for Ron, or Ron’s persuasion, but for the past two months Hermione had maintained a polite silence about his relationship and managed incredibly stilted but polite conversation with Ariadne.

Fortunately for Hermione, Ariadne was rarely around at Stinchcombe. This habit didn’t bother Harry. Hermione’s friends from Law School never spent time at the house either. Ariadne, Ron, and Harry relaxed at a Muggle Pub in London near their office with the other Aurors, so it wasn’t like they were never social. Yet, standing in his lawn watching the lazy merriment around him, Harry felt distinctly sad that his supposed girlfriend didn't want to be around some of his closest friends and family.

This was quickly followed by an odd guilt-laden relief that Ariadne and Ginny did not have a chance to meet. He had no reason for not wanting them to meet, and no reason for not wanting Ginny (And Mrs. Weasley, he could admit) to know he was sleeping with his partner. He just had the distinct impression that he would be harshly judged for it and their good opinion was still very important to him.

Was he…ashamed of Ariadne? Not exactly- but the notion of Ginny meeting her…assessing her…made him uneasy. Harry was pretty certain that unlike Hermione who often got angry and indignant, Ginny would be able to match Ariadne in biting comments and condescension, barb for barb with cool sangfroid and perhaps haughty disdain. The possibility of such a face-off was not especially pleasant, though he was sure Ron would find it amusing.

Harry suddenly realized that he never told Ariadne he once dated Ginny. They didn’t really talk about their pasts outside of Auror-related experience. Ariadne made errant comments about Harry’s previous lovers at times. From her comments Harry surmised she thought he had multiple former lovers and…that they were demure, sweet, soft girls from his school days who were in love with ethos of Harry Potter.

Pulling ice out of the magical fridge, Harry chuckled. He never really thought about it but Ariadne’s impression was ridiculous. Harry should tell Ariadne that despite his fame, he had not been some Casanova or even particularly popular in school. Harry then wondered what Ariadne would think of Ginny. She had been quick to dismiss Fleur as an airy tart more interested in the superficial, an erroneous impression. She blindly clung to this opinion despite Harry's protests.
Harry’s odd anxious curiosity on what would happen if Ginny and Ariadne met didn’t last long. He was witness to their first meeting a few weeks later.

Ron and Harry recently pointed out to Robbards that broom related skills were not actually a part of any official Auror training program. In return they were given more work as they were told to take the week to put together a comprehensive tutorial/training course in aerial combat tactics focusing on rescue.

Two weeks later Ron and Harry had convinced Ariadne that the grounds of Stinchcombe were the perfect place to try out and practice broom-related combat and rescue maneuvers. The three Aurors spent the morning in a rush of adrenaline and silliness as they tried out various Quidditch tricks, maneuvers, and acrobatics on their brooms. The three came into the kitchen for a refreshment break when Hermione and Ginny came in through the kitchen floo, giggling loudly. Hermione noticing the three Aurors seated on the high chairs at the island cut off mid giggle.

“Oh! Hello” Hermione said politely and made to set the alarming number of shopping bags the two girls carried on the kitchen table. Ginny smiled at the Aurors and turned to detangle herself from her load as well. Ron smiled indulgently as giggly Hermione loaded with shopping bags was a very rare sight.

Meanwhile Harry was once again struck by Ginny’s casual style. Or maybe it was just that he was still getting used to the newness of a Ginny not wearing cutoffs and old t-shirts. She had come in wearing her chic sunglasses, they were in her hair now like a light headband, graceful wisps of hair fell around them framing her cheekbones. She was in a casual but stylish summer dress that floated to her mid thigh. She was wearing strappy wedged sandals, and was carrying a denim jacket folded over one arm. Harry stared in fascination at the gold chain around her delicate ankle and what looked like a haphazard mixture of long thin lockets that accented her ensemble. Regardless, she looked good, her skin was tanned (for her) and the dress showed off her sensual lean legs. For a short petite girl, she had the legs of a tall supermodel.

“Where have you two been?” Ron asked around chewing a bun looking alarmed at the bags being set on the table. Mrs. Weasley sent a weekly basket of tarts, buns, sweet breads and scones that usually sat on the island for picking.

"We did a bit of shopping, and then met Lavender and Parvati for Lunch.” Hermione replied.

Ron made a disbelieving noise at her proclamation of a bit. Hermione affectionately stuck her tongue out at him and walked over to get a glass of water, ruffling Harry and Ron’s hair as she went by. Lavender and Hermione had both gone back for their 7th year at Hogwarts and had both returned after Christmas. Lavender had spent the summer and fall recovering from her werewolf bites and fall. Despite the long recovery she had still spent most of her 7th year redo in a magical wheelchair, in and out of the infirmary. Her best friend Parvati who also returned, intent on becoming of a Healer had spent much of that year working as Madam Pomfrey’s assistant. Harry wasn’t entirely sure what had happened but Hermione, Lavender, and Parvati emerged from the year as quite good friends, something Harry had not thought possible after their 6th year. Hermione told Harry that she was actually delighted to have more than one good female friend and to have finally bonded with her roommates. She even insisted that Lavender was no longer a silly bint but quite clever in her own way.

“Hello! You must be Ron and Harry’s partner, I’m Ginny -its nice to meet you,” said a smiling Ginny thrusting out her hand.

Harry suddenly found it very difficult to keep casual and wondered if Ron and Hermione were as keenly interested in Ginny and Ariadne’s handshake as he was. For a fleeting half-second Harry
had the triumphant thought that he lived long enough to have had sex with both of the stunning women before him. He had been pretty sure he was going to die a virgin at 16 and 17...

“Ariadne,” the Auror said briskly shaking Ginny’s hand.

Ginny drew closer to the island and peered at Mrs. Weasley’s baked goods basket, grabbed a tart and bit into it. With her other hand she started tentatively poking around the basket to see what else was in it. Harry knew she was looking for the lemon curd tarts, her favorite. He drew the two he had on his plate closer to him.

“Are there any lemon cu-- “Harry has ‘em.”

Harry shot Ron a betrayed and overly outraged look. He turned to see Ginny looking at his snack pointedly. She looked up at him and pouted. Harry hastily reached down and took a small bite out of the side of both tarts.

“And to think, some call you a benevolent savior” Ginny sighed airily. Ron snorted into his second bun.

“How can you still be hungry after the lunch we had Ginny?” Hermione exclaimed.

“She’s related to Ron!” replied Harry gleefully earning Ginny’s exaggerated frown at this fact.

Despite Ginny’s accusations when they broke up, Harry had never compared her to Ron. But once, both he and Hermione had laughingly pointed out that Ginny clearly shared her brothers’ gusto for food. Ginny had not been amused. She often joked that being related to Ron was a tragic burden she had to bear. She also insisted she only ate small "ladylike" portions of food...

“The portions were too small! And I agreed to split dessert with Lavender because she was dieting, I should have gotten my own. I’m starving is there any food?” Ginny said, already walking around the island and opening the fridge. Hermione rolled her eyes and shared a look with Harry.

If Ariadne was surprised this relative stranger walked around Harry’s house with such imperious comfort she didn’t say anything. Harry viewed the house as “theirs” collectively, but Ariadne and many of the trainee Aurors always referred to Stinchcombe as his house and Ron and Hermione as rent free roommates.

“Lavender Brown? The girl who wrote those fluff style pieces about the reconstruction for the Prophet?” Ariadne asked. She shot a surprised glance at Hermione. Perhaps at the unlikely friendship of someone like Hermione with someone like Lavender.

“Yes, she went to school with us.” Ginny said distractedly. She had pulled out two verge large blocks of cheese, some table crackers, an apple, and two large slices of apple tart from the fridge. Hermione rolled her eyes and shared a look with Harry.

“She and Dennis Creevy are thinking of starting a new magazine! Its really exciting, a rather ambitious venture!” Hermione said to the boys, drawing out a cutting board and some knives for Ginny. Ginny was poking through the bread box now. Harry half-heartedly lamented she was likely to find, and finish, all the cheddar rolls he had ‘hidden’ under the boule loaf.

“Does the world really need another Witch Weekly?” Ariadne mused wrinkling her nose.

Ginny emerged from the bread box with a roll and gave Ariadne a wry almost condescending smile. Cutting off Hermione she said,
“Hmmm, no, I don’t think that’s what they’re aiming for. They want to focus on culture pieces that go overlooked and also shed light on stories or issues that aren’t ever covered in The Prophet or other rags.”

“Like what?” asked Ariadne skeptically.

“She has a few ideas. A series of articles on Squib Culture and Neighborhoods, pro and con articles about if OWLS restrict students choices too early, a few short cultural history articles, social impacts of potions innovations, maybe a lifestyle piece on Deans’ Hogwarts Portrait Restoration Project or Dating Changes among our generation. You know more people are working in the muggle world and dating muggles now. She was interested in writing a style history assessing wizarding fashion…”

Ariadne cocked a disbelieving eyebrow at the last few ideas and made a disdainful noise. Hermione bristled. Ginny however, had been very invested in her cheese. Harry thought she missed the scoff but she raised her head and caught Ariadne with an almost luminous look of challenge and assessment.

“You don’t think such topics are of value?” she asked with a politely with not-quite concealed laugh. Ariadne scoffed and shook her head.

“You don’t think we should question why wizarding fashion hasn’t changed in 40 years? Or that it still clings to surprisingly old-fashioned gender norms and pureblood ideologies? Doesn’t that affect your life?”

“Does it?”

“Well…at the most basic level, your uniform. Especially your smart dress uniforms. The ones for witches are so outdated but the wizard ones are not. All of that trickles down and affects perception and society and ideology. N’est pas? ” Ginny said brightly.

Ariadne said nothing, looked reluctantly impressed, and also annoyed that Ginny matched her cool somewhat condescending demeanor. Ginny pressed on, still smiling coolly while amassing more food in front of her.

“I think the smart dress uniform is so unfair, the men’s is built to hold all their awards and honors and be flattering. The lady version is still the same from over a hundred years ago when witches couldn’t be Aurors! A girl could have five different Order’s of Merlin’ for shit’s sake and no one would know! She could be taken for the welcome witch at a party because your dress isn’t meant to show any rank or merits. You can’t tell me it not a little bit insulting and not the result of ingrained sexism. ” Hermione beamed at Ginny.

“Fine, a piece like that makes sense, but Runway fashion articles? Then its just a rag like Witch Weekly” Ariadne said. Her tone was casual and seemingly uninterested but Harry could tell she was rattled to have been so coolly bested. Ariadne was far more used to Hermione getting worked up and righteously frustrated or indignant.

Ginny shrugged and as if explaining to someone particularly slow she said, “Its all part of the conversation. Why are the runway houses only designing ridiculously long dress robes from 20 years ago when short skirts and trousers can also be fashionable and made couture. Why are they not ever looking at muggle fashions? Seems a tad racist. All of that trickles down and affects other clothing choices and social perceptions. I think Lavender is quite clever to get such conversations going. ”

Finished with her piece Ginny breezily popped a hunk of cheese with a slice of apple into her
“When’s she starting? What’s it called?” Harry interjected.

“She’s not sure yet, money and having enough articles are an issue. She doesn’t have staff really. Just her, Dennis and some freelance writers and maybe some friends to help out. It might be a monthly until she can get it popular enough to make it a weekly. She’s got a good name though!” Hermione replied.

“Yes, The Patronus” quipped Ginny now starting on the slice of apple tart.

The conversation soon moved from Lavender to what the three Aurors had been up to. Ron explained what they were practicing and attempting. Hermione begged off to study but Ginny asked if she could join the flying trials. Ariadne looked hesitant.

“Oh well…it may be a bit intense. We’re trying to put together a tactics and skills for Aurors who’ve already passed conditioning”

Harry realized that Ariadne had no idea Ginny played Quidditch at an almost professional level for an American University team. She barely knew Ginny existed. What opinion had she formed of Ginny in this meeting? Ginny gave no indication she heard Ariadne. Harry wondered if she truly hadn’t. He couldn’t remember a time when Ginny had taken a brush-off of her skills or ability casually…or well. Instead Ginny simply followed them out into the lawn.

She watched them fly for about a half hour before she shouted for them to come down. She informed them that none of their various maneuvers and tactics would work unless the Aurors learned how to execute barrel rolls and maintain perfect broom balance. She also informed them that there was no point in fancy flying if the Aurors couldn’t master variations of forward and backward rolls with broomsticks first and a few key balance skills.

“Most people don’t know how to maintain balance with updrafts and sudden velocity changes much less weight changes! How are they going to manage aerial rescues? Watch this-”

Ron was swooped low on the ground his toes brushing the grass. Ginny took a running start and jumped onto his back to ride pillion. Ron had not expected this. The entire broomstick tipped dangerously to the side with Ron and Ginny hanging precariously off the broom sideways. Ron was slipping off but Ginny had tightly flexed her right thigh and was using it to maintain her seat. Ron eventually tumbled off and Ginny rotated back into a normal sitting position.

“See?” she said having clearly demonstrated her point. Harry wondered how she managed to keep her dress from riding up and also marveled at the ridiculous definition he saw in her legs. She always had nice legs but this was a new level of strength and muscle. He quickly tamped down his thoughts about her legs before they ventured into dangerous territory.

Mounted on Ron’s broom Ginny ordered Ron to take a running start and jump on with her. Everyone hesitated. Ron was easily 3 stone more and 2 feet taller than Ginny, his sudden addition would radically alter balance and potentially knock them both off dangerously. Ginny insisted and even acquiesced to have Harry and Ariadne on standby with a cushioning charm.

She gathered a small bit of speed flying a lazy circle. Ron took a running start, jumped and landed straddling the broomstick behind his sister. His sudden addition caused the broom and riders to careen dangerously to the side with momentum. It looked like they were going to fall off their brooms but Ginny deftly handled the energy and pushed forward the gathered momentum and
used it to complete the rotation of a barrel roll and shoot upward. Ginny had struck out her hand and wrapped it behind her around Ron’s torso the moment he landed ensuring he didn’t fall off the few seconds they were upside down.

She and Ron made a smooth landing and Ginny jumped off the broom with a flourish. Ron and Ariadne were in an impressed shock. Harry let out a low impressed whistle. This was a great technique and a perfect solution for how to gracefully take on an unexpected passenger (a rescued person perhaps), even one considerably larger and taller without throwing off balance.

Ginny was an excellent flyer, the smooth adjustment and roll looked easy when she executed it. Trials with the three Aurors under Ginny’s direction did not go as smoothly. Even Harry, who was a natural on a broom, had trouble taking sudden additional weights. Everyone seemed to be able to catch and pick up Ginny without turbulence. She was light and slender and their arms carried most of her load anyway. Ron suddenly dropping on Harry’s broom, and one of the men falling into Ariadne’s broom however, caused some erratic flying and a few falls.

“Harry, you’re flying like a seeker! It’s not just speed and catching! Flow with the additional weight and wind resistance,” Ginny cried as he flew. He caught her around the waist and was pressing her to his side with the one arm as he flew. She kicked her legs up to wrap around his waist. He thought he was flying rather well, all things (her position) considering.

“You’re just carrying me that’s not your flying- that’s just your body holding me- suppose I was dangling off the edge of your broom, what would you do then?”

They practiced until the sun started to dip and trooped into the kitchen tired and hungry. Hermione was sitting at the kitchen table with a book and a mug of tea and looked at Ginny in askance, Ginny’s dress was in need of some serious washing.

“You’re a top-notch player now Ginny! Better than Charlie!” Ron praised. Ginny rolled her eyes but gave her brother a small hug to show her pleasure. Ron began asking her about her team and training and Harry ravenous with hunger started poking around the kitchen. Hermione, always an elder sister to Harry, came over and smacked his hand as he was reaching for the piece of tart Ginny had pulled out earlier.

“That’s just sugar have a fruit instead. Besides its half seven, we might as well start dinner! You lot look like you could use a big meal. ”

The unexpected challenge of adulthood Harry, Ron and Hermione found was learning to cook and properly feed themselves. While Ron and Harry were far better cooks than Hermione, the task of preparing a daily meal had taken a very long time to become routine. It wasn’t just the ability to cook. Remembering to get groceries in a timely manner and carving out the space in the day to put together a normal meal was oddly difficult, especially with the busy lives they led. Eventually the three friends turned to an Owl service for weekly basic groceries and opted to walk into the village when needed for anything extra. Harry, who actually liked the idea of a family meal around a table, eventually mandated they cook and eat together at least twice a week. Slowly, with much trial and error and laughter the three friends became surprisingly competent in the kitchen. The men were still better than Hermione though.

The twice a week system worked well. Mrs. Weasley insisted they spend Sunday evenings at the Burrow and sent them home loaded with leftovers. They rarely made lunch for the next two days and definitely never had to cook the following Monday. Tuesday nights, Hermione had a weekly dinner with her parents. If the boys were available they were required to attend as well. The
Grangers did not send leftovers, but Mr. Granger had developed a beer-making hobby that kept them well stocked on that front. Harry therefore, felt no qualms in eating take-away the remaining other two days of the week. When Harry spent evenings at Ariadne’s they inevitably had take-away or explored the various dining options of Muggle London. Ariadne refused to cook. She did however, have an incredibly refined and sophisticated palate and knew delightful restaurants and a host of very tasteful take-away spots.

Ron went to the sink to wash his hands and opened the fridge to survey.

“Harry, we have got to get rid of this damn chicken, its turning into a serious problem,” he called. Harry sighed and agreed. Curiosity piqued, Ginny came over to look in the fridge and asked why on earth they seemed to have 15 kilos of frozen chicken.

Five weeks ago Hermione convinced Harry that they needed to ‘engage with their community more’ and dragged a sleepy Harry to the village farmers market. Ron promised to have breakfast waiting and was allowed to sleep in. (He was still asleep and did not have breakfast waiting on their return) The market was in full swing by the time the two friends arrived.

The muggle locals were pleasant and happy to finally meet the new owners of Stinchcombe. These village neighbors were pleased that the small country home was finally occupied after ‘being on the market’ so long and marveled at how young Harry (the owner) was. Harry didn’t have to make up an excuse about family money. People thought it was quaint if a tad odd that Harry bought such a large fixer-upper and now lived there with his two friends. They also seemed relieved that despite their youth, the occupants were not constantly throwing wild parties on the estate.

The magical locals however, were ecstatic that Harry and Hermione were at the Market.

Harry discovered three things about Godric’s Hollow that day. First, the village’s magical population could only be described as…eccentric pensioners. Harry and his friends were the youngest magical people in the neighborhood by a good 50 years.

Second, the magical residents of Godric’s Hollow were somewhat of a cache intellectual crowd. Harry easily recognized half the names of those he met as prominent writers and academics he’d been exposed to in school. Hermione struck friendships with people old enough to be her grandparents and was quickly booked up for the next month of Sundays with invitations to book readings or Salons. Finally, and most importantly, the aging magical residents of Godric’s Hollow tenaciously considered Harry their community baby. For all that he had grown up in Surrey, Harry was thought to be Godric’s Hollow’s very own native son. The residents, though a tad eccentric, were fiercely proud, protective, and loyal.

Quintin Trimble told Harry he went around strengthening the anti-photography and anti-reporter wards on the village and neighborhood every month. Octavius Spellman (Grandson of the Spellman of Spellman’s Syllabary) was head of the village council. He heartily informed Harry that he denied all the reporter and photographer requests that came through to the council and approved of anti-apparition wards in front of the estate should Harry desire it. (Harry didn’t think it prudent to tell him Stinchcombe had an insane amount of security measures including anti-apparition already on it) Miranda Goshawk, kindly patted Harry on the arm and told him to call her if they had any trouble cleaning out the house. She also requested he come for tea because she had been good friends with his grandmother and had stories to share with him. Mr. and Mrs. Woodcroft, who were so old all their words came out half mumbled, shuffled over to Harry with tears in their eyes and patted his arm smiling for about 10 minutes. (Harry insisted on walking them home and felt compelled to check up on them every other week or so) Harry was
embarrassed and touched. He made a point to visit all his magical neighbors at some point and went bearing his own homemade tarts. They were delicious but aesthetically, a tad lop sided.

Old Man Dodderidge was the reason for all the chicken in the Stinchcombe fridge.

He kept chickens, game hens, a few sheep and pheasants. He absolutely insisted on delivering to Stinchcombe every few days, a headless, and bled but decidedly un-plucked chicken. Learning to pluck and process the chicken had been a hilarious and mildly traumatizing learning experience for Harry and Hermione, children of the suburbs. Ron grew up with chickens around the Burrow and had a vague notion. There was much trial and error. Ginny was giggling and clutching the island countertop by the time Harry and Ron finished the story, with a full reenactment of how they had processed their first chicken. Ariadne too was smiling.

“Thai Basil Chicken alright for you two?” Hermione asked Ariadne and Ginny politely. Ron pulled out large handfuls of basil and tossed Harry a hunk of frozen chicken to start cutting.

Ginny nodded but Ariadne stiffened, quickly glanced at Harry and then gave a tiny nod. Ariadne had never eaten a ‘family’ meal at Stinchcombe. She rarely came to the house and the few times she had stayed for dinner were with just her and Harry. Ariadne hung out with Ron and Harry but almost always begged off for any activities where Hermione was around. Everyone present save perhaps Ginny knew that Hermione and Ariadne didn’t get on. Harry couldn’t ever imagine Ariadne wanting to join him Ron and Hermione for a cozy meal so he had never invited her. Ron raised his eyebrows at Harry above the two girls’ heads at Hermione’s implied invitation and Ariadne’s acceptance. Harry was pretty proud and impressed by Hermione’s effort- or was it simply because Ginny was around?

They were halfway through the meal when Ginny received an Owl. Her name was written in a scrawling hand on the envelope. She glanced at it and after the conversation started up again around her, opened it. Harry saw her quickly glance over the letter and her lips curled into a small, half-mischievous smile and the faintest of blushes graced her cheeks.

She quickly folded up the letter, stuck it in her jacket pocket, and deftly rejoined the conversation. But Harry had seen. Ginny was a master craftsmen in schooling her face so her rare slips were treasure troves of information. Harry knew the look he’d seen on Ginny’s face. Hell, Harry had been the cause of that look. He’d noticed that look unconsciously since he was 12, much before he’d come to realize what it meant. Apparently, Ginny Weasley had a crush.

Harry felt a stab of…something. Then Harry felt a flare of annoyance at feeling anything it all. So Ginny had a crush, and by the look of the express international owl, the crush returned her feelings so perhaps even a new boyfriend.

What was it to him? Its not like he hadn’t anticipated this. In fact he knew Ginny would garner male attention wherever she went. She really was too popular for her own good. He had no right to feel anything towards her anymore and besides, he was with Ariadne.

The afternoon flying with Ginny, Harry realized that he was still attracted to her. But Ginny was a very attractive woman and he’d seen her naked, he rationalized that was normal. Dean and Ginny were very good friends now but Harry would bet all the gold in his vault and eat his own foot if Dean too didn’t admit attraction for Ginny.

(Harry didn’t know it, but he was wrong and lucky no one would call him on that bet. Dean was no longer attracted to Ginny. In fact Dean come to realize that Ginny wasn’t exactly his type and found it hard to view her in any romantic way by the end of their 7th year. Sure, he could
clinically acknowledged her beauty and sex appeal but *attraction* was an entirely different animal.)

Harry disliked feeling unfaithful, even in thought, to Ariadne. Some of the lads in the locker rooms ribbed each other discussing women (often celebrities or maybe women they knew) they’d like to shag, but Harry and Ron never joined in. Perhaps it was a male-bonding ritual you had to have gotten into when you were young to really get it. Or maybe it was because as celebrity himself, Harry intimately knew what it was like to have people talk about you in that way.

Regardless of the reason, Harry felt fantasizing about some other girl when one was in a relationship pretty disingenuous. He and Ariadne were not expressive people and despite her caustic exterior; Harry was certain she would be incredibly hurt if she knew he had spent the day half-aroused, denying the attraction he felt for his ex girlfriend. The usual comfortable pang of "missing Ginny" suddenly sharpened.

What Harry disliked even more was that he internally reacted to the awareness of another man in Ginny’s life. He was pretty sure Ginny cottoned-on that Ariadne was more than his Auror partner. She spent the entire evening perfectly relaxed and seemed utterly unbothered by this fact. It bugged Harry too, that she was so un-bugged.

Irritated, Harry suddenly wished there was some book or established convention for how to deal with bloody attractive ex-girlfriends who you were bound to keep running into. And perhaps the love he couldn't quite shake.

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[1] The House was titled *Stinchcombe* after the 12th century Potter family patriarch. The three friends cleared and tackled Stinchcombe’s surrounding garden and lawns to some degree but Harry refused to create any proper lawns outside the bit of English garden in the front of the house. He wanted his home to be as unlike Privet Drive as possible. Instead the clearing to the left of the house and the rolling weedy land leading up to the stream behind the house were left relatively unkempt.

By the beginning of summer, Hermione forced the boys to mow and clear a bit of the left-side clearing. The kitchen windows overlooked this side of the house. Hermione (successfully) argued the merits of a flagstone patio leading out the kitchen’s side entrance. Hermione’s argument for it consisted mostly of describing how lovely it would be to have meals out on said patio. Mrs. Granger on a visit after the project was completed exclaimed that the view from the kitchen and patio now resembled a happy Constable painting of a a semi-domesticated English countryside. Harry thanked Hermione for her idea and nagging at their unofficial housewarming when he took in the scene of tables groaning with food on the flagstones and their friends and family sprawled out across the lawn.

[2] Hermione was recently been touted by *Witch Weekly* as a “socially conscious” style icon. Harry didn’t really know what that meant. Evidently it involved a lot of people asking Hermione what she was wearing at events and Hermione brashly insisting on lecturing them about *why* she was wearing something and who created it. Hermione also recently employed a designer, who worked with a surprisingly well paid House-Elf, to fashion a few dresses and outfits for her.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Relationships are easy, until they're not.
or a chapter mostly about Ginny's relationship with a new man- there is a surprising
amount of Harry, and a little plot.

Chapter Notes

A few warnings:

- one or two casual mentions of attempted rape (the same hypothetical discussed in
previous chapters)
- discussions of The Diary Tom Riddle being very similar to an abusive persuasive
boyfriend
- There is a scene of violence and terror in this chapter. The scene is not described in
detail and none of the main characters are affected- but a random act of terrorism
occurs in a public space.

And yes, more footnotes.

Ginny was surprised with how easily she fell in love with Ryan Caulfield. Or at least whatever
this new feeling was. Love snuck up on her. It was so different from any other love she had
experienced that she scarcely recognized it.

Loving Harry was like a religious experience. She sometimes couldn’t distinguish between the
group ritual of love, worry, and support she engaged in with her entire family and others and her
own private communions. There had only been a few short weeks in the spring of her 5th year
when private prayer had surpassed the group ritual.

After the War, her feelings for Harry overwhelmed her. The pent up worry, fear, and longing had
burst and she was engulfed by emotion. She could admit in her heart of hearts that the depth of
what she felt for him terrified her. Terrified her more than she cared to admit. She had felt like a
candle suddenly snuffed, surreal and out of herself, when she thought him dead for a brief few
minutes. She didn't like that dependency and worried about what that said about her and her own
will. Her worry that this dependency, this feeling would guide her life decisions had scared her the
most. She had not lied to Neville, Luna, and Demelza when she said "Of course I love him, but
then what?" But there were also many other anxieties at play.

Her feelings for Ryan, in contrast, were practically undetectable by comparison. Over the summer
holiday Ryan had sent Ginny two owls a week, every week. He was funny, charming, and so
simple in his open letters.

*I like you. The look of you, the sound of you, the thought of you.* He had written in his first letter.

Sure, they had spent the two weeks before her summer seeing each other for hours everyday and had gotten to know each other well, but she was still surprised by his frankness and commitment on paper. She certainly hadn’t made determinations on the depth of her attraction beyond just that, attraction! In fact, back in her home, among her friends and family, enveloped by the love and comfort of those who knew her darker shades, she had almost forgotten the giddy dates of May. She was pleasantly surprised and happy to receive every one of Ryan’s letters though. But she was nowhere near as faithful in her replies. She was busy catching up with her beloved friends and family. To excuse herself from all that was happening to write a letter was hard. At University she had thrown herself headlong into every experience, every party, every opportunity academic or social. She missed her family but had not, as a result of her busy schedule and constant influx of new experiences, felt that she was missing anything at home. Back at home, she felt her absence strongly and felt the ache strongly anytime stories of all she missed came up. On the other hand, Ryan’s letters had the benefit of distracting her from this ache and... the seemingly always half-naked Harry.

Auror training, the lack of a homicidal maniac intent on killing him, and Old Man Dodderidge providing high amounts of lean protein in his diet, had been very good for Harry. His tall frame had taken lean muscle beautifully. Hours frolicking outside Stinchcombe had bronzed and burnished his skin, giving it an enviable glow. Harry was now full into his manhood and it showed with surprising grace. Ginny was rather annoyed at the errant stabs of lust she felt whenever she visited the house. It was unfair, she made the decision last year that Harry Potter would not have such power over her anymore. They had discussed it like adults and broken up! The estate, the local beauty, and a very fit and happy Harry inspired a few too many irritatingly steamy dreams that summer.

Ginny returned to Boston incredibly frustrated and once again emotionally tattered. Leaving home was much harder this time around. She looked forward to Quidditch but wondered at the profound peace she had found flying at Stinchcombe and dining with its inhabitants. Ryan was a cool balm to all her frustrations. Mellow, comfortable, and calm. The tickling happiness and pleasure of kisses and dates soon turned into a boyfriend always at her side.

Ginny was also surprised how unconsciously Ryan merged into her life. When term started they met at least twice a week for dinner. Their dates were the epitome of normalcy, a novelty for Ginny. Dates with Ryan did not come with the anticipatory, excited, anxiousness beforehand or the trilling, giddy, almost squeal-inducing energy during (as they had with Harry). Instead Ginny was placid and a more simple happy. Three weeks in, she invited Ryan to stay the night and from then on, that too became their routine. Early morning Quidditch practice followed by classes, then a few meetings with her various activities or studying, dinner dates with Ryan exactly twice a week followed by sex, became as a part of her schedule as brushing her teeth. They didn’t quarrel, or have emotionally fraught conversations (a fact she didn’t notice until much later). They didn’t share eyebrow quirks and private looks, nor was she overwhelmed by longing when she didn’t see him for two weeks. But, they got on happily, attended parties together, and dated without fuss or conflict.

Ginny was content, busy, and emotionally placid in her happiness and therefore didn’t notice the passage of time. She didn’t notice that this was the longest mature relationship she had ever been in until Ryan asked if she wanted to spend spring break in California with his family. Ginny was confused and wondered if it wasn’t too soon. After all, she had no barometer for what was a
normal period of time before meeting the parents. Harry had met hers when he was twelve. Ryan had chuckled when she expressed her concern, gave her a worried half-glance, and exclaimed they had been dating for over half a year. He assumed her hesitance and uncommittal response was “a reserved English” thing.

Through some amazing stroke of fate Ginny did not have Quidditch commitments over the spring holiday and after much persuasion agreed to holiday in California. By this point Ginny thought she was perhaps in love. Her Uni friends laughed at her for not realizing it sooner.

You’re happy and content and fit so smoothly with him!

What exactly were you expecting actual fireworks and frogs in your stomach? It’s not like in the books dearie!

You both get on well and see eye-to eye on things.

Everything they said was true but Ginny had never experienced love in this way. With Harry, her love for him had been such a strong heady constant. When he finally kissed her she did feel like something had exploded. Relaxed dates by the lake where all they did was hold hands and kiss left her body zinging and certainly the feeling of frogs in her stomach. A shared smile or joke, a wry look at something ridiculous, even after they started dating caused her to blush into her pillow at nights, hours after the event. Being with Ryan made her very happy too, but nothing like what she felt in her school days. Ginny wrote to Hermione shortly after Halloween that year. She was very happy and it all felt so new and as surreptitiously as possible Ginny asked her friend what love felt like and… what it felt like when life was normal .

Hermione’s answer had not been very helpful.

“Love bears a truth more potent than the strongest veritaserum and is headier than the best-brewed amoritenta,” Hermione had written. (Incidentally, Ginny had yet to recognize all the smells in her Amortentia; Quaffle Leather, ink, and two other smells.) Hermione went on to discuss the grandiose in the everyday, overwhelming desires, inflicting cruelty in love, visceral awareness of each others’ ugly, being laid bare, maximized emotion, and having heart stopping certainty that this person was the other half of your soul.

Ron and Hermione experienced love in this way because of all they had been through Ginny surmised. She and Ryan were not like that. By Valentines Day, Ginny was pretty certain she and Ryan were in love. They simply experienced a more normal, less crazy, variety. They adored each other and breezily exchanged I love you’s. Fleur admitted in a letter that confessing love had been difficult for her and Bill, hard and revealing, riddled with hesitance and insecurity. ”I love you,” had slipped out easily for Ginny, an automatic response to Ryan's utterance when she was leaving for an away-match. Ryan didn’t “know her implicitly” like Hermione claimed Ron did, but instead they always asked each other about their thoughts and shared. Ginny didn’t share her deepest fears or insecurities with him. But she rationalized that that wasn’t a relationship thing, but simply a Ginny thing. They rarely disagreed because they were both like-minded people. They didn’t lie to each other, she didn't think, and certainly didn’t “inflict cruelties,” whatever that meant. Sure, there were some small habits of Ryan’s that bugged Ginny at times and she was sure he had similar feelings but nothing so stark as to deem “visceral awareness of the other's ugly.”

Ginny found herself humming Ryan’s favorite songs, knowing his favorite foods, and feeling small blips of pleasure when he gazed at her appreciatively. He went out of his way to pick her favorite flowers, listened to her talk about Quidditch for years, and always made sure she went to bed happy. Ginny rolled her eyes at Hermione's usage of “overwhelming desire.” Yes, sex with a
loved one was great but honestly. Ginny and Ryan had a happy sex life. How could they not? Sure, he had not inspired any ridiculously steamy fantasies like Harry had, but those, Ginny thought, had been the girlish fantasies of her youth! Ryan was tall, well built, and classically good-looking with a charm and happiness that came from self-assured confidence and a life showered in love and comfort. What more could Ginny ask for?

So Ginny spent her spring break outside of Los Angeles with Ryan’s family. It was only after landing and then entering the house that she realized that Ryan’s family was wealthy. For the first day Ginny was suddenly self-consciously and hyper aware of everything she did. Would his family realize she grew up poor? Would they care? She and Ryan never discussed money before but she knew families sometimes cared about these things. Mr. and Mrs. Caulfield were incredibly refined and had raised their children in a manner that exposed to them to extensive travel, food, and (wealthy) culture. They planned, as was their habit, a week of rather posh events over the spring holiday. Many of these, Ginny never experienced before. The first evening they were all to go to the Opera. Ginny was mortified that she had not known to pack accordingly and ended up borrowing Ryan’s sisters’ dress. Ginny had good taste and with her small amount of economic freedom had curated a stylish wardrobe, but she never had the means to dabble in such high-end fashion. Fortunately Mrs. Caulfield (appropriately) blamed her son for not informing Ginny of the plans.

After an evening spent subtly simmering with anger in Katie Caulfield’s borrowed dress, Ginny decided to set aside her insecurity and power through. So what if his sister owned to-die-for branded clothing and his mother had planned three evenings of events at the country club? Ginny would not be intimidated. She may have never ridden horses, gone golfing, eaten Persian caviar, or attended a couture trunk show, but she was well-read, social, and a quick study at most things. Shame on anyone who judged her here! She may not have grown up with material wealth and experience but she could be just as refined and erudite! Fortunately for her, American Wealthy was slightly less distinguishing than English Wealthy and most American’s couldn’t tell that her distinct west country accent was decidedly not standard RP[1]. (As a 10 year old she had thought Harry and Hermione terribly posh until she heard the dripping heightened RP of the Malfoys) The fact that she had gone to Hogwarts[2] and now attended Uni in Boston had gone rather far in establishing her “elitism credentials.”

Ginny enjoyed her time with the Caulfield family. They were welcoming and friendly. Ginny was gratified to learn that the Caulfield’s had raised their children on the wealth of experience and exposure rather than material possession. Though they didn’t lack in material wealth, Ginny soon found that Ryan was more culturally circumspect, kinder, less snobbish and less of an overall posh tosspot than his prep school peers.

In addition to her new privileged experiences, Ginny learned via Mr. Caulfield about the various wizarding technological innovations that were emerging. Most of these were magical adaptations of Muggle technology. Television, House telephones, and cars were relatively common-place among the American middle class. (The Americans had almost no public transport, Floo or otherwise) Even if the Weasley’s had been able to afford these household items, the War and a decidedly stronger pureblood ethos delayed the arrival of these products into English markets. Only now were these products making forays into England. Harry had immediately purchased a magically compatible television and telephone for Stinchcombe but he was in the minority. (America had almost no pureblood politics as even their founding fathers had been half-bloods. Instead they had other political burdens, foreign to England)

It was the last night of her stay when it happened. Ginny and most of the family were sitting on the deck enjoying a meal when Mr. Caulfield rushed in and demanded they turn on the television.
The AMBC news report was on showing breaking headlines. There had been an unexpected Death Eater attack in Falmouth at the Falcon’s stadium during a Quidditch match!

We’re relaying information from our British WWN correspondent as soon as we get it. Reports are that the stadium has been evacuated and that Aurors and Healers are on the scene. Our correspondent has not had a moment to talk to an Auror but the English Minister is reported to be making his way and assisting the Aurors as well......

To clarify, there has been no sign or casting of a Dark Mark, I repeat no Dark Mark folks. But the attack started when two rows of supposed audience members in the stadium suddenly donned the very recognizable Death Eater masks and began shooting curses out into the audience. As these Death Eaters dissapparated, they hurled small explosive bombs at the pitch and seats. Archie, are these bombs muggle or magical nature?

It seems we have no official word on the nature of the bombs. Do we have an injury or fatality count Archie?

There was silence as Ginny and the family stared at the TV. Ginny’s heart beat wildly and she was gripping Ryan’s hand very hard.

The confirmed fatality count is in the high 80’s but injuries are in the hundreds according to a source from St. Mungos. St. Mungos, to remind many of our viewers is the largest Magical hospital in England and the primary triage center. Do we have any comment from the Aurors yet? (There was no comment from the Aurors)

Wizarding England as we all know, just started to come back economically and politically after many years of horrific War and political instability. I’m sure the British people and many around the world are now wondering after this tragedy if this is the end of their two years of peace. The Secretary of Magic has issued a statement of support to the English people and their Ministry earlier today that we will be playing shortly....and we will update you on the fatality and injury count at the bottom of the screen.

Ginny was blinking back panicked tears. She needed more information! The news was not going to tell her anything. Harry and Ron, If Aurors were on the scene, they were certainly there. Was her family okay? Were the Death Eaters back? She was gasping, her mind going into overdrive with the possibilities, when Mr. Caulfield put a firm hand on her shoulders.

“My dear, would you like to floo-call your parents?”

International floo-calls were expensive but Mr. Caulfield waved off her concerns insisting that this was important. Ginny went into Mr. Caulfield’s study and used his fireplace.

“Mum! MUM! ANYBODY?!!?” she screamed after she got her connection.

“Ginny?!?!” her mother ran into the living room. “Is that you dear?”

“Mum! I just heard, is everyone okay? What happened?”

“Everyone was home, they’re okay but Ron and Harry left to the stadium and Percy and Dad have gone to the Ministry. George has gone to see if he can help wrangle all the people at the stadium. But yes dear, as far as I know the family is fine.”

There was a pop somewhere in the house and Hermione came in escorting a heavily pregnant Fleur.

“The boys want me to re-ward and fidelius the house Mrs. Weasley!” Hermione said briskly
looking anxious. “Harry’s ordered Andromeda and Teddy here, he said to ask if that was okay... Oh! Ginny, hello.”

Molly Weasley had a brief moment of stricken shock. She lived through two wars and knew implicitly what such a defensive orders meant and was oddly proud but also heart broken that her boys were thinking ahead. Molly gathered her wits, nodded to Hermione and then ordered that Hermione bring her parents over as well. Ginny sensed her mother going into Manager-mode and Hermione was about to leave again so she quickly asked,

“So is it true? Do they think its Death Eaters? Are they back? Who is leading them?”

Hermione quickly rushed out,

“It was twenty attackers. The Aurors haven’t caught Amycus, Dolohov and Rudolphus but everyone else has been captured or is dead. They wore Death Eater masks but no Dark Mark and definitely not Riddle’s style with the bombs. No, probably a new terror group… maybe led by Amycus or Dolohov or Rudolphus.”

The girl turned and with a pop rushed to her parents’ house. Ginny looked concerned at Fleur who was sitting on the sofa.

“It is too soon to tell ma soeur, but the idea of a new terror group is... The ministry only recently opened full Apparition and de-regulated the floos. People will panic as they were getting back to normal, this will be very hard for the Aurors,” said Fleur.


“Bill has gone to set up anti-apparitions around the Bank and the shop in Diagon Alley. Hermione came with a note from Ron and Harry saying they’re worried of a second attack. There aren’t enough Aurors to spare. They’ve sent MLE to patrol St. Mungos and other areas but of course, the boys don’t trust them. As far as I know your friend is safe, he’s helping coordinate with CSI at the stadium. I do not know about the others but I shall ask Hermione to Floo the Lovegood residence once she returns.” her sister-in-law replied.

There wasn’t much else for Ginny to ask. Her family and the Auror boys were accounted for. Molly excused herself saying she needed to start making beds, food, and possibly potions.

“Where are you floo’ing from Ginny? I will send you a call if there is any news. The Owls will be too slow and jumbled tonight,” Fleur said. Ginny thought she ought to ask permission from the Caulfield’s first but gave the floo address anyway. She had owled her mum over a month ago informing her of the Caulfield’s invitation and “asking permission,” so her parents knew she was in California and of her boyfriend. Ginny had no idea if her brothers or Harry knew she was staying with her boyfriends’ family. Not that it was important now.

Ginny emerged from Mr. Caulfield’s study and relayed the news that her family was safe and the little she knew of the situation. That night lying in bed Ryan turned to her and asked if she could take two weeks off from classes and training. (The Caulfields were far more liberal than Molly Weasley and had assigned Ginny to Ryan’s bedroom) Ginny was perplexed.

“I think we should go to England and visit your family for a week or two. You said your brothers are Aurors and your father was just appointed the Muggle Affairs Minister, we should be with them through all this,”

“I’d love to but I can’t afford a ticket even if Coach gives me time off,”
“I’ll pay for it, you worry about getting time off”

“I couldn-- “We’re together, these things shouldn’t be an issue. It’s settled! Get time off and we’re going to see your family!”

Ginny felt she couldn’t love him more in that moment.

Ten days later she and Ryan took the International Portkey to London where they met her father who took them to The Burrow. When Ryan insisted on Ginny visiting her family, she hadn’t completely registered his use of “we.” Ginny loved Ryan but hadn’t really thought far enough to consider how and when she wanted him to meet her family. Her world and experiences with Ryan and the light airy feeling of their relationship was so...divorced from the more grounded and mature Ginny she was at home. Either way, this was certainly not how she envisioned Ryan meeting her family and the more serious aspects of her life.

Magical England was reeling. The final fatality count was 112. The Aurors caught four of the perpetrators who had denied any association to the known un-captured Death Eaters. The prospect of a new terror threat so soon, just as the world was done rebuilding, incited much panic.

Her father and Ryan shook hands and made pleasant conversation. Her Mum exchanged a polite hello and piled his plate with food and directed him to Charlie’s old bedroom to settle his things. Ginny caught Ryan’s look of surprise to not be sharing her room but shook her head at him. She was so relieved to be at home, being able to touch and assure herself of her family’s safety that she forgot to notice or care about Ryan’s reactions to her home. When packing she had wondered how he would react to her decidedly more humble house and its radical difference from his. Ryan was gracious and polite. On his first day he seemed more startled by the overwhelming number of people who flowed constantly in and out of the Burrow as semi-permanent residents. His family of four were the only occupants his family mansion.

It was during dinner the second day that Ginny realized how much of an outsider Ryan was to this part of her life. She had spoken of her brothers, acknowledged she had been at the Battle of Hogwarts, and informed him that Harry Potter and Dumbledore were close family friends, but Ryan obviously only registered what that meant now. Somewhere in the back of her mind Ginny wondered if Ryan had not believed her when she first told him of all this and bristled.

Dinner as always was a loud affair. The Grangers and Andromeda flanked Ryan at the table and made polite conversation. Fleur waddled around the kitchen assisting Molly. It was a mark to how much the french woman had changed that she took George calling her a ‘cow’ so easily. Arthur and Percy were speaking rapidly to each other, unaware of the chatter around them. George and Bill had a map of Diagon Alley balanced amid their plates. Ginny was wondering where exactly Teddy was and the conspicuous absence of The Trio when Harry walked in carrying Teddy, Hermione a few steps behind him.

Ginny had not seen Harry at all yesterday. He looked haunted, tired, and irritable. He had three days stubble on his face and faint shadows under his eyes but was still somehow smiling at Teddy. Ginny was annoyed she could still tell the last time Harry slept or shaved by just one glance. She also knew implicitly that the death toll at the stadium was probably haunting him, impeding proper sleep, and that he was very frustrated at being a few months short of a full-fledged Auror right now.
“No Ron?” her Mum sighed. Harry shook his head, “He’s overseeing the night patrol. We’ll switch in the AM.” He took the open seat across from Ginny, sat Teddy on his lap, and started piling food onto his plate, making a little section for Teddy on his plate as well.

“At least six large bites of green today,” Harry told Teddy. The boy huffed but nodded and tucked into his corner of the plate. Harry looked up and spotted Ginny.

“Hi! When did you get home?” he looked completely astonished to see her.

“Yesterday morning, we figured it was best to be home,” she replied.

“We -?” Harry’s confused gaze darted to her side and spotted Ryan, “Oh hello.”

“Ryan Caulfield,” Ryan said extending a hand across the table. Harry relinquished his fork and shook it dazedly.

“Harry,” Harry offered.

Ryan let out a small chuckle, “I know. Its an honor to meet you Sir!” Harry nodded still looked dazed.

Ginny was surprised and a little amused Ryan felt the need to call Harry ‘sir.’ She felt as if everyone at the table was staring but a quick glance to the side showed that her Dad and Percy were still jabbering away and the Grangers were chatting with Hermione. Did Harry realize this was her boyfriend? A serious boyfriend? Why did Ryan call him ‘sir’?

“Who’re you?” Teddy suddenly piped.

“He just told us Ted, his name is Ryan. Be polite Teddy, say Hello!” Harry gently chastised.

“Hello... Are you Inny’s?” Teddy asked. He still couldn’t say ‘G.’

Ryan chuckled and replied, “Pretty much, yes. Nice to meet you Ted.”

Well Harry certainly knew now. Teddy seemed to have sorted how Ryan fit in at the table and went back to his meal.

Percy cleared his throat and got Harry’s attention, he called for Bill’s as well. “I’ve spent all morning lobbying with the Ministers and the Wizengamot, but it looks like Kingsley is going to be outvoted on this one Bill. Harry what does Robbards say?” He asked

“He’s spitting fire and about ready to murder whoever leaked it. Investigation by the public and press is the last thing we want, it’s going to have a detrimental affect on our work and turn into a witch hunt, no pun intended.” Harry said. Bill made an angry noise. Ryan tensed slightly. Ginny glanced at him and then at Bill. She never realized it before but her brother could look rather ferocious with his scars. As an outsider, Ryan was probably more than a little intimidated.

“The Goblins were cooperating! This will set us back! they’ll only make it harder now and be more likely to help...less savory organizations!” Bill bit out. His wife placed a placating hand on his arm and said, “We can manage this, I can spin it well. I can polish the press from the Aurors and the Ministry. I can – “

“Absolutely not my dear! That baby is coming in two months and you have already started maternity leave, you do not need to be on your feet all day taking fire from the reporters!” Molly Weasley interjected firmly. Fleur looked to her husband for support but he and everyone around the table seemed to be firmly on Molly’s side. Fleur huffed.
“She’s right though, this is going to be a mess, and possibly unethical,” Hermione said, “I could wrangle press if needed, Fleur could help me! From Home! From Home!” she added hastily as Bill and Molly started to scowl.

“What’s going on?” Ginny demanded.

“The various ministers of the Ministry, the members of the Wizengamot, and the Secretaries are going to override Kingsley’s orders and demand there be a public opening and declaration of assets in various Gringotts vaults. The Aurors had sent a request to investigate various money trails and vaults quietly last week but The Prophet found out and now everyone is demanding the vaults be open and accounted for publicly,” Arthur Weasley explained.

“Why? What’s that got to do with anything?” asked Ryan

“The average age of the attackers was about 20. We got this information from the four we did catch. They knew almost nothing about the actual Death Eaters other than some ideology and …style tactics. The real question, well one of the many anyway, is how they got the money for such an attack and who is funding them. Neville and his team got a few leads and submitted a subpoena for four supposedly inactive vaults they wanted opened and investigated,” Harry said bitterly.

“But after that dropped in The Prophet, people and ministers started demanding that all inactive vaults and the account histories of anyone who was ever accused as a Death Eater be opened and reviewed in a public hearing. It’s because people are panicking and any minister who champions this looks ‘proactive’ to the public,” Hermione finished.

Ginny immediately saw the problems. If the Falmouth Attackers didn’t know the direction of the Auror investigation, they certainly did now. This would derail the investigation for weeks. Additionally, the Ministry and the Goblins had negotiated many treaties after the war to carve out spheres of influence and control. The Goblins contracted a team of Ministry approved accountants to go over all the accounts kept at Gringotts for illegal discrepancies (embezzling, tax evasion, racketeering, etc) every other month. There were carefully worked out limits and holds on how far this team could go. People naturally, wanted their financial matters kept private and the government had created laws to ensure that.

Disregarding that this move was likely directly against many of the post-war Goblin agreements and reforms, a public opening was not an effective means to find the attackers but simply a massive invasion of privacy by the state. It would discredit people’s faith that Gringotts and the Law could keep their information private. If citizens, and even companies began pulling their assets out of the bank due to fear and privacy concerns, it could create a run on the bank! England was one year out of the post-war depression. A run on the English Wizarding bank would be catastrophic for the whole economy that was just stabilizing.

Ryan, Ginny could tell had not figured out all of this and was asking the table various questions. As an American he was not as familiar with the English government and was surprisingly unaware of the War itself. She saw Harry and Hermione look at him questioningly (in judgment?) as her father and Percy very patiently explained. Ginny too was a bit surprised at his lack of awareness, he was after all hoping for to work in government and politics in the States.

“This is sure to set all the work you lot have done back,” said Mr. Granger echoing Ginny’s thoughts. Harry nodded and said irritably,

“People continue to surprise me at how stupid they can be. I get people are angry but The Prophet is just racking up panic. Only half the people I talked to today even read Lavender’s piece in The
Lavender had started her new magazine around Christmas. Ginny had not yet read the article Harry was speaking about but surmised it reflected the more rational viewpoints.

“The Goblins at least seem pleased that Kingsley told them directly what was going on. He’s been over all day today practically on bended knee begging them to peacefully resist the full subpoena if, no when it comes,” Bill added.

“Is it really so bad if all the former Death Eater vaults get opened? Most of them are dead anyway! It’ll make the public happy,” said Ryan. Ginny cringed internally; he hadn’t seemed to completely understand what was at stake. Ginny lamented that he asked such a question to the full table of family. It was selfish and not at all the appropriate time, but she didn't want her boyfriend to look stupid. The Grangers who were muggles and less familiar with Wizarding government were following along without difficulty.

“That’s surprisingly un-American opinion,” Harry said with a wry smile and cocked eyebrow. Ryan asked how so.

“Your government rarely allows searches and seizures of private property, they fought a war over it. That’s what they told me when I asked on the Maslow case, “ said Harry still with the wry voice. Ginny had the feeling Harry knew Ginny was internally cringing at Ryan's inelegant questions and how patiently her father had to explain to him. Ginny also had the feeling that Harry too was cringing but amused by Ryan's reactionary questions.

“You worked the Maslow case?” Ryan asked impressed. Harry shrugged laconically. He was being a smarmy git Ginny decided.

Johnny Maslow was a mid-level American Dark Wizard who had murdered 23 people over the course of 5 years. He had primarily used a low-grade form of possession and invented the potion form of the Imperius curse to enact out his murders via third parties. Harry and Ron had technically only consulted at the late stages but Ginny knew that Ryan had taken Harry's shrug to mean a much greater deal of importance. Wanker.

“Who is deciding the list of vaults to be opened? Is it just captured or deceased Death Eaters?” Ginny interjected, saving her boyfriend from further judgement.

“That’s just it!” said Hermione distressed, “A random magically selected committee of Wizengamot members and Ministry employees. Its supposed to make it more democratic.”

More than half the Wizengamot had been replaced the year after the War. While this method was probably more democratic, the average person had very little awareness of who actually was a Death Eater. The public had felt the post-war trials were rather lenient. Harry and Kingsley, who actually knew conclusively who was a Death Eater and who wasn’t, had prevented the trials of every person who was ever rumored to be a Death Eater. The angry and hurting public was of course not happy.

Almost all of Voldemort’s Death Eaters, that is Death Eaters who bore the mark given by Tom Riddle, were dead. There were a few exceptions. They were serving Azkaban sentences (Like Greyback) or house arrests, or living as squibs under heavy monitoring. Amicus, Rudolphus, and Dolohov were the last un-captured Death Eaters. The random committee would most likely open the vaults of all the imprisoned Death Eaters and all those rumored. The rumored list was rather ridiculous; Horace Slughorn, Andromeda, Stan Shunpike, Mr. Ollivander, and even Victor Krum were on it!
“Damn,” muttered Ginny. “Harry, you or Neville need to tell Warrington. I can write, but it should come from the Auror office that this is coming.”

Harry nodded at Ginny’s statement. He had only interacted with Warrington briefly but the knowledge that he had protected Ginny and Demelza from rape was something Harry would be forever grateful for. Harry was also ashamed that due to the strong anti-Slytherin sentiment after the war, Warrington had been too afraid to ask the Aurors or the Ministry for assistance in finding his sister. The man had been genuinely afraid the Aurors would simply arrest him!

Rhys Warrington, officially the man Demelza vehemently denied having any feelings for, was a 7th year Slythering during the War. In the Battle he saved a group of first year girls from Greyback. Warrington’s sister, who his parents had sent to France to study, had gone missing during the War. She was recently discovered at a Healing Nunnery in Inverness. She would not speak of what happened to her and spent most of her days usually silent, tending the sick. The late Mr. and Mrs. Warrington were relatively wealthy purebloods and had been social with the Malfoys and Fudge. They had lost their lives for declining Riddle’s invitation to join, but factions of the magical community still condemned them. Warrington suffered much disbelief and derision as a result of the post-war prejudice. He would most certainly be on the vault-opening list.

The next morning The Prophet officially announced that 24 Ministers, 6 Secretaries, and the members of the Wizengamot voted to have a broader scope towards the vault openings and that the seized assets of the vaults would be accounted and declared in a Public Hearing. Ginny’s father, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Gawain Robbards, and Madam Goshawk were among the few officials to have opposed the decision. The paper went on to say that a committee of fourteen had been selected to compile the list of Gringotts vaults to be opened. Subpoenas for the vaults on the list were to be sent within the next three days.

Ginny sighed and tossed the morning paper away from her. It was 5 am in the morning and due to jet-lag Ginny was awake and alone in the kitchen. She figured she would help her mother and started breakfast for the large brood and attempted to organize her thoughts and guilt.

Ryan had snuck into her room last night and she had patiently explained, again, all the details and ramifications he had not completely understood at the dinner table. Ginny was tired and frustrated that Ryan simply did feel the gravitas of the situation as she did. Instead Ryan had been relatively excited that he met Harry Potter and had been rather impressed by his encounter. He was also in somewhat awe of how important her brothers were. Ginny couldn't place why but Ryan's enthusiasm and proclamation of ‘importance’ annoyed her. Ginny also felt guilty that Ryan did not know the full details of her relationship with Harry. She had first described Harry as a ridiculously close family friend, and had left out their previous relationship.

In the beginning this was just a result of habit. She kept the news quiet because she didn’t want the attention and didn’t like being known due to Harry. Once she had established herself on campus her casual admittance of her relationship had always gone wrong. Telling her friend Stewart from her Transfiguration Theory class that she lost her virginity to Harry had been a mistake of epic proportions. Her teammates had treated the news normally (Well with giggles and questions naturally like gaggles of girls are wont to do) but … blokes tended to get weird when they found out she dated Harry Potter—even in America.

Ginny and Ryan had been dating a little over 6 months and Harry had never once popped up in conversation. It felt weird to randomly bring it up now. Ryan never volunteered information about his previous girlfriends either. Ginny felt that they were secure in their love that they didn’t need to
know. She didn’t want to keep it a secret from him, but she also didn’t want him to think she kept it from him intentionally. She hadn’t, she didn’t think Harry had any bearing on her relationship with Ryan. She just needed to come clean.

She was startled out of her thoughts when Ron apparated into the garden. He walked in, muttered a hello, and slumped onto the table. Ginny placed eggs, bacon, and tea near him. A few moments later Harry, half dressed in his Auror fatigues and a vest (really? when did this boy lose his body modesty?), climbed down the stairs yawning.

“Any news?” he asked.

“They passed the motion to override,” Ron muttered. “No activity in Diagon Alley, but people were queuing outside of Gringotts as I left. Hope to Merlin this doesn’t start a run on the bank.”

Harry grimaced and Ginny tossed him the newspaper and set a plate of bacon and eggs in front of him. He nodded thanks.

“What’d you lot get up to yesterday,” Ron mumbled. He too was in need of a shave and sleep.

“Oh not much, dinner, talking. Mum set Ryan and me to potion making and arranging food baskets all day to take to some of the victims’ houses. She and Mrs. Granger have the Muggle Parents Alliance[3] over for tea today so I suppose we’ll have to be elsewhere. I was thinking of visiting Dean’s studio and Luna’s.” Ginny mused.

“Ry -? Oh right your bloke,” Ron said his head still pillowed in his arms. “What’s he gonna do all day?”

Ginny bit back an annoyed response. Her family kept forgetting Ryan’s name, or forgetting he was around. No one attempted to get to know him. She knew it was petty since they were clearly all so busy helping with the crisis- but Ryan had been with her when she found out and had insisted she come home and even paid for her portkey! The least they could do was remember his name!

“He’ll do whatever Mum wants us to do. He came to help and support,” Ginny said a tad forcefully. Ron was clearly too tired to respond and Harry was still reading the paper.

“Is Hermione up?” Harry asked. Ginny shrugged. “We’ll need to compile our own potential list, to prepare for the fallout and hopefully let a few people know. They won’t be able to do anything but at least they’ll be prepared. I’ll tell Warrington today Ginny.”

Just as he finished speaking, Hermione came down the stairs looking drowned but alert, wearing one of Ron’s oversized jumpers. Harry turned to her and repeated his request. Hermione dropped a kiss on Ron’s head and said,

“Yes, yes, I’ll work on it today and Owl you. Oh good, Ginny you’ve started breakfast. I sent a patronus up to your parent’s room telling Mrs. Weasley to sleep in, we can take care of breakfast. She’s stressed and she and Fleur are going to hospital today. We’ve got a house to clean before the MPA meeting. Ginny can you tidy up the carpets and make some scones and tea cakes? Could Ryan de-gnome the garden? Ron, when you’ve finished eating go straight upstairs, you haven’t sleep a proper 8 hours in weeks! I better not see reading the case reports either!”

Ginny caught Harry’s eye and they shared a knowing smirk at Hermione’s eerie ability to sound like her mum, especially when giving domestic orders. It was inevitable really, that Ron’s future wife would be someone who could channel his mother.

Harry got up and stretched and Ginny noticed he was extensively bandaged around his left ribs.
When he had come down wearing a white singlet and his Auror fatigues and she was turned partially away, towards the stove, but now that he was stretching it was obvious. A tendril of that old panic and worry stabbed her. /p>

“What happened?” she asked, this injury was obviously old but he had been carrying around Teddy all day yesterday! Oh her Mum was going to murder him, did she know?

“Nothing. Its fine,” Harry said, the usual evasion. Ginny looked at Ron who shook his head refusing to disclose. Hermione said,

“He just took an unexpected hit when they were cleaning up the Stadium. It’s healed mostly, your Mum saw to that.”

The bushy haired girl was definitely lying, or at least glossing over some key details. No doubt Harry was doing something stupidly noble when he sustained this injury. The tendril of panic and worry stabbed harder and Ginny found herself bristling internally that she didn’t know, wasn’t there, couldn't do anything. But her Mum knew. Ginny was surprised at how hurt she suddenly felt that she was the only one who didn’t know. Her parents assured her everyone was fine when she floo’d, so were they lying or did this happen after? Ryan came down the stairs jovially just at that moment, disrupting her distress.

“Morning Babe,” he said easily, pulling her in for a quick kiss.

“Oi! None of that,” Ron grunted. He finished his breakfast and was lounging by the sink with his arms crossed and a frown, looking generally intimidating. Annoyed with the hot-cold swing of her emotions this morning and the overall situation, Ginny shot him and angry dirty look.

"How fucking hypocritical,” she thought, Ron being an easy receptacle for her confused frustrations and worry. Harry used to spend half the night in her room and join Ron and Hermione later and not get so much as a by-you-leave and Ryan, an actual boyfriend of many months, got glares. Ryan, unaware of all the hypocrisy and Ginny's inner stew of emotion, smiled sheepishly at an unamused Ron and turned towards the table for breakfast.

“Woah, what happened to you?” Ryan asked sounding impressed and surprised starring at Harry. Harry stiffened and looked self-conscious. Ron interjected by repeating the same story they’d given Ginny. But Ryan was undeterred, “Damn. All of those are Auror scars? They can’t be from just the Stadium?”

Ginny thought Harry’s scars weren’t particularly obvious. They were very faded and had blended rather well into his musculature. Ginny doubted one could easily recognize the ragged pendant shaped scar that lay just below the cleft of his chest. The thin lightening bolt scar smack in the middle of his pecs was now nested in muscle and its discolored nature only heightened his musculature, instead of drawing the eye to the scar itself. Ginny wondered if Harry might have had more hair on his chest if it hadn’t been for the scarring. Regardless, she thought they weren’t particularly obvious or unattractive but Ryan was staring.

“No.” Harry said shortly. He generally disliked talking about himself and Ginny wondered if Harry still disliked his “freak” body. The scars of childhood were the deepest. Ginny desperately wished Ryan would shut up on this line of observation.

“Wow. Aurors. You and Ron man, so cut up, still looks pretty badass though!” Ryan said digging into his bacon.

Ginny didn’t know what to say. Her heart ached in shame and also a desire to comfort. She couldn’t look at Harry, what was she supposed to say? She wanted to scream and tell him no, his
adolescent fears did not come true. He didn’t look like Moody or some freak! She could feel Ron’s frown deepening and Hermione’s shocked look. Harry wasn’t really that scarred at all. In terms of stark contrast and density, Ron’s arms were significantly more scarred. But Ryan’s body and that of his friends was so perfectly blemish free he probably felt even Ginny’s body was pretty scarred by comparison.

“I should go,” said a stunned Harry and jerkily walked out the kitchen and disapparated. Once Harry was gone Ron turned to Ryan threw him a disgusted glare, looked at Ginny angrily, clearly blaming her for her boyfriends inelegant and obtrusive remarks, and stalked upstairs to sleep.

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Ginny, Hermione, and Ryan cleaned extensively all morning and then made teacakes, sandwiches, and scones for the MPA. Fleur returned from hospital happy but tired and decided to review the papers and put together some statements for Harry, Ron, and others. Hermione was deeply engrossed in some books and research so Ginny and Ryan went to visit (and check up on) Luna and Dean.

Luna and her father were happy to see Ginny and very welcoming of Ryan. Ginny missed her friends deeply and spent the rest of the morning catching up while Ryan was entertained by Mr. Lovegood. Luna remarked that Ryan seemed like a nice boy and very much in love with Ginny. Luna smiled oddly when Ginny said she loved Ryan too and then asked, “Enough? Consumingly?” Ginny nodded that she did, but the question bugged her and she filed it away for another time.

Afterward, Ginny and Ryan took the floo to The Leaky Cauldron and went out into Muggle London. (The Apparition restrictions had been reinstituted.) From there they took the tube to Dean’s flat overlooking the river just outside Borough Market. Dean welcomed Ginny and Ryan with great bear-hugs and ushered them to the balcony for drinks. The friends spent a good hour sipping drinks on Dean’s river view balcony before they got a tour of the very modern and very chic flat. The second bedroom, with the help of an Extension Charm, was converted into a massive studio space for Dean’s art. Dean had gained a name for himself in the Magical Art world due his Hogwarts Portrait Restoration Project and now gained steady employment from restorers, galleries, advertisements, and other collaborative projects, muggle and magical. Ginny walked around the sun-lit studio looking at the various half-finished paintings and sculptures.

“You paint anyone famous? Alive I mean?” she asked over her shoulder.

“The Society of Circee have commissioned a portrait of Hermione and McGonagall to go in the Magical Portrait Gallery. Apparently women of imminence are very under-represented there. I haven’t started Hermiones yet.” said Dean. Ginny raised her eyebrows impressed.

“That’s it? Ron’s girlfriend?” asked Ryan skeptically.

Ginny had the vague feeling that Ryan had dismissed Hermione upon meeting, not realizing that this was in fact, the brightest Witch of her Age and 1/3 the force that destroyed Voldemort. He often looked to Percy or Harry for confirmation of anything Hermione said and seemed curiously surprised by the reverence Harry gave her. In Ryan’s defense, Hermione had been stressed and exhausted, wrapped in Ron and Harry’s clothes and not very talkative. Swamped in work and worry, she had not been an impressive first sight.

Dean crinkled a confused eyebrow at Ginny. ‘Ron’s girlfriend’ seemed a bit of a passive diminutive. This was one of Ginny’s pet peeves about Ryan. He and his friends tended to call
people by who they were attached to than their names, even if they knew them personally. Her roommate Elise was Matt’s Girlfriend, and Fleur was Bill’s Veela-Wife instead of Ginny’s Sister-in-law. Ginny hated that Ryan’s friends referred to her as Ryan’s Girlfriend instead of Ginny or even The Chaser (what they had called her before they knew her).

“Does Hermione know this?” Ginny redirected to Dean instead.

“Yes, they offered her membership too. She was embarrassed by the portrait but Ron convinced her. Ginny smiled fondly. “He asked if I was any good at painting women, young ones! Said he didn’t want Hermione coming out looking like some old professor!” Dean continued affronted.

It would be hard to make Hermione look bad. While she was not conventionally attractive at first glance, she had a soft, enduring, beauty and easily over looked dewy femininity that sparkled when she was excited. Much to Ron’s half-lament and half-amusement, most of Hermione’s stuffy studious Law school study partners were in love with her. One muggle classmate had even gone so far as to tell her that her “thuggish copper boyfriend couldn’t ever be her intellectual equal.” Most magical law school classmates were too afraid and in awe of Ron Weasley to ever dare such a comment but it was pretty obvious they thought it.

“You should have shown him the sketches you did of me! They came out well and you’re way better now!” Ginny said laughing.

“Yea right, tell your battering-ram of an Auror brother I had you pose for me when we dated!” Dean said rolling his eyes, “He wouldn’t even let me finish, break all my fingers straight off!”

“Oh please, they were perfectly innocent!” Ginny said giggling.

“You two dated?” Oh. Right.

Dean blinked and looked at Ryan who was looking very surprised. “Erm…yea ages ago, in school,” Dean replied looking confused that any boyfriend of Ginny’s would care.

“Yea I told you remember? Starting summer before I turned 15. Oh goodness its been so long!” Ginny said breezily. She was deliberately acting. She knew for a fact she had not told Ryan she dated Dean. She’d forgotten.

Neville was her best friend but Ginny, Dean, and Seamus by the end of her 7th year were very good friends and she often forgot that she and Dean had actually dated. Michael was her first boyfriend, her first real kiss (she and Neville had kissed tentatively at the end of the Yule Ball) her first relationship -she always remembered him. Dean was not her first boyfriend or a particularly serious one. Her relationship with Dean had been so light, so innocent, so purely the joy of age-appropriate snogging. When she thought of her relationship 5TH year, Dean was never who she thought of.

“Ginny often forgets she even dated me! It happens all the time!” Dean said. “I can’t believe you felt the need to tell me that! I didn’t have to know that part!” Dean added indignant but laughing.

Ryan seemed a little abated at this news. He even cracked a small smug smile and said “What happened Dean? Couldn’t hold her interest?”

“Didn’t have those emerald green eyes,” Dean said smiling.

“What?” Shit

“Nothing, Dean’s just teasing,” Ginny interjected hastily flashing Dean a look, “I had a huge
crush on another boy that year and everyone knew and teased me about it mercilessly.”

Dean looked at her concerned and shocked as Ryan obliviously chuckled. Ginny did not want Ryan to know she dated Harry like this. She amended to tell him that night. Ryan made some comment Ginny didn’t register, and continued walking around the half finished paintings.

Behind him Dean mouthed, “Are you serious?!” Ginny shrugged helpless.

“He doesn’t know about HARRY?” Dean silently enunciated.

Ginny couldn’t answer. She and Dean didn’t have the types of conversations she and Neville did but Dean wasn’t stupid. Even Dean knew that Ginny had been in love with Harry, that Harry was important, and that not telling the person she currently loved about their past was…bad.

“What the fuck Ginny,” Dean mouthed.

Ginny held up her hands in surrender and mouthed back, “I’ll tell him! I’ll tell him!”

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Ginny felt Ryan was surprisingly sullen on the walk to the tube and ride to the Leaky. As they waited in line for the Floo connection, Ginny got him to admit that he was bothered about her past history with Dean. She assured him it genuinely was because she forgot and that she and Dean were completely platonic friends. Ryan seemed more upset by the later.

“How would you feel if I was still friends with my ex girlfriends,” Ryan asked. Ginny assured him she would be fine with it. She trusted him and assuming that the friendship was healthy and platonic on both sides she would have no issue. Ryan seemed suspicious but accepted her answer.

By the time they returned to the Burrow Ginny thought he had gotten over his sulky mood and was preparing for how to tell him about Harry. His reaction to Dean had been…not great.

The Burrow was as usual, a hubbub of activity. Ryan claimed a headache and went to nap before dinner. Ginny suspected he was still sulking and perhaps that the insane activity of the Burrow was overwhelming him. Teddy Lupin was loudly playing in the living room and talking over him were Andromeda, Fleur, and Mrs. Weasley and the Grangers. Ginny’s mother insisted on relaying all the details of her day to Ginny and was cooing over the picture she had of Fleur’s ultrasound. (Another recent muggle adaptation) Meanwhile Hermione was going over notes with a classmate via Floo. To Ginny who grew up in such a busy environment it was easy to filter the noises but Ryan was very likely inundated.

Ryan reappeared for dinner and seemed far calmer and even squeezed Ginny’s thigh under the table as if to say “we’re fine.” Dinner brought more news of the day. Harry and Ron were both home this time and grimly informed them who had received the first round of subpoenas. Between the various departments and positions at the table, their network of friends and Hermione’s research of rumors and past press clippings, they worked out a very good ‘likely list’ of vaults and accounts and had been able to warn their peers.

Harry had visited Slughorn, Warrington, and the Malfoys to discuss what was likely to happen at the public hearings. Ron had apparently spent the day after his 'nap' and lunch assisting the MLE with crowd control outside of Gringotts. Hundreds of people were apparently either clearing out their accounts or attempting to empty their vaults of potentially embarrassing materials. Accusations had been hurled as people went into Gringotts and fights had broken out more than once. Gringotts and the Ministry were very determined not to use the phrase "run on the bank,”
but a run had started. Percy and Bill had spent the day talking to foreign banks trying to cajole them into backing Gringotts or providing temporary loose galleons to stem the run.

Harry gained attention as he walked out of the Ministry talking to one of the Wizengamot members. The press mobbed him and demanded to know why he was so against the vault openings. The evening Prophet had been rather brutal in its criticism of him.

“I don’t mind if they critique my views and my actions, but at least do it with some logic and reason!” Harry grumbled.

“How did they get around to declaring you were hiding something?” George asked.

“Eat the peas Teddy don’t just roll them around mate. What? Oh because of Skeeter, she fired the first shots.” Harry was once again sharing a plate with Teddy, the boy seated on his lap. Harry was surprisingly good at getting Teddy to eat everything on ‘his plate.’ Ginny observed the small boy at breakfast and he was a surprisingly fussy eater. Andromeda confessed that only Harry could get Teddy to eat all his vegetables, drink milk, and willingly go to bed. Harry for his part, made it look effortless. He let Teddy sit on his lap anytime he wanted but didn’t make the boy his primary focus, instead Harry continued on with conversation and activity but always aware of his addition. Harry also casually dropped kisses, ruffled his hair, picked him up, and hugged him with surprising regularity. Ginny was astonished because the Harry she remembered had never been so carelessly physically affectionate.

“What did she say?” Molly asked Harry.

“She’s horrid but smart, she made a not-so-innocent suggestion that I perhaps profited from deceased Death Eater vaults and from there the rest of the vultures picked it up.”

“How did she know?” Hermione mused.

“What?” Ryan asked surprised.

“Harry’s godfather was Sirius Black and was wrongly accused of being a Death Eater. Sirius willed him everything before he died but he died before his name was cleared and the Ministry then was…..corrupt,” Ginny filled in smoothly.

“Padfoot!” squeaked Teddy at Sirius’ name.

“That’s right Teddy, Padfoot,” Harry rumbled, dropping a kiss on his godson’s head. It was a disgustingly cute. Ginny could literally feel her mother’s heart clench. Ginny too felt an tendril of warmth in her stomach. “The fact that the rest of the Blacks were known Death Eaters is probably what she was angling at. To cast aspersions on Sirius’s name or maybe Grimmauld Place. If they add his vault, then its de facto adding mine.” Harry added.

“Should I be concerned? What about Teddy?” Andromeda asked. Harry shook his head but then paused and contemplated. “Get a lawyer. It’d be the safe thing to do. Chang & Associates sent me an owl today basically advising the same.”

Ginny looked at Hermione and raised an eyebrow. **Chang & Associates good enough?** Harry Potter as a client was a big catch. Hermione hid a small smile but nodded, she would of course look into it just to make sure.

“Skeeter didn’t write the full article though, its far too flattering and flowery in your description,” piped Ron attempting not to laugh. “This is Vane for sure, Potter, tall, tanned and muscular answered questions outside the Ministry of Magic today. Blah
Auror Potter looked confident as he gazed out but his strong jaw twitched when faced with accusations of his own vault having potentially unsavory associations. Potter, whose inherited fortune is estimated at – where do these people get these facts? This amount is bigger than our national debt! While only the subpoenas will tell whose vaults will be opened, this writer does not think Potter’s will be. His deep emerald green eyes looked guilelessly at the assembled press and manfully answered questions – can you answer questions manfully?"

Ron finished his exaggeratedly breathy reading and commentary to laughter. Even Harry, though blushing, was chuckling. But Ryan had stiffened and gasped softly at the end of the reading.

Ginny turned to look at him smiling and froze. Ryan was staring at Harry with an intense look and then swiftly looked at Ginny, and then back to Harry. He finally turned to look at Ginny looking utterly betrayed. Ryan had discovered that Ginny used to date Harry- in the worst possible way.

[1] RP = Received Pronunciation aka the general BBC English stripped of regional accent and assuming a level of posh-ness. Conservative or Heightened RP is distinctly more posh and more like the type of English one would hear the Queen speak.

[2] I conjecture that Hogwarts is an exclusive boarding school education in the Magical World. My support of this idea comes from the fact that even wealthy families like the Malfoys, Blacks, etc all send their children to this school to mix with people they would never otherwise. Also there are many other people in the Potter world who seem to have never gone to Hogwarts- and perhaps attend a trade school or apprenticeship, an example of this is Stan Shunpike.

[3] The Muggle Parents Alliance had started as a small meeting of mothers grieving children lost in the War. The original members were Andromeda Tonks, Molly Weasley, and Mrs. Creevey. After Mrs. Granger’s return from Australia she too had joined and the group had transformed slightly. Months after the War it soon became apparent that the Muggle-Parents (Regardless of the war or not) had suffered from a large information gap about their children and the Wizarding world. Even the most diligent letter writing children could not explain the intricacies of the world they were just discovering. The four women started meeting once a week to talk and exchange questions about each others’ worlds. When Hogwarts reopened Mrs. Granger pointed out that there were likely other Muggle parents who felt as lost and confused as she had and the Muggle Parents Alliance was born.

Muggle parents (mothers mostly) of magical children met in the Burrow once a week for tea to talk, exchange, and ask questions to Mrs. Grangers, Mrs. Weasley, Mrs. Creevey, and Andromeda. Mrs. Granger even started a newsletter to send to muggle parents who didn’t come to the group, to keep them informed. In light of the Falmouth Attacks, the groups founders thought it prudent to call a few ‘emergency’ meetings.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

All historic details regarding The Fens liberally pilfered from Wikipedia. All family tree information comes from Pottermore.

Ryan’s face after the realization that Ginny used to date Harry quickly morphed from shock and betrayal to anger. He wasn’t obviously angry enough that people around him could tell but Ginny could feel the wrath radiating off him. Distantly she was shocked and disturbed at the level of rage in his eyes. Ginny was in turmoil. She had never seen Ryan behave like this or this upset. She and Ryan didn’t fight. In fact she and Ryan made fun of couples who did! Ginny wasn’t even sure if they were fighting now or how exactly this would go. She could acknowledge she committed a large lie of omission and betrayal. She should have told him she used to date Harry before they came to the Burrow. Ryan was likely upset that he had acted like a mild fan-boy over The Harry Potter only to discover Harry Potter used to shag his girlfriend. Well, hopefully he hadn’t immediately gone there Ginny hoped. She would stick to the facts. She and Harry dated for two months in school and then spent two summers messing around. Period, no need to embellish. Perhaps when he was calmer she could attempt to explain the complicated tangle that were her feelings, thoughts, and emotions about Harry.

Ginny needed dinner to end and the family to disperse now. Except of course, Teddy announced that his birthday next week and with slow, cute, politeness, went around the table inviting each person to his party at Stinchcombe. He even invited Ryan and Ginny. Ryan barely cracked a smile at the three year old. Ginny had no recollection of the rest of the meal or what idle chatter she made as she helped clean up with Ron and George. She found Ryan in the living room chatting amiably with her parents, she suggested a walk around the orchard in an effort to get him alone to explain and potentially row.

He smiled back almost cruelly and told her he would much rather continue conserving with her parents. Ginny could not further maneuver and sat stiffly next to him as he chatted. For the unexamined listener he was polite, teasing, and charming. But Ginny was not stupid. She heard his "teasing" quips and barbs about her previous boyfriends to her Mum and his skillful probing about Harry. He made vague comments about reliability versus pomp and flash and remarked in the politest, most innocently confused manner how hard it must be for Harry Potter to find real love when so swamped by easy, shallow, admirers.

Ginny’s shock and guilt quickly turned to anger and revulsion. Ryan was mad at her, upset with her. They needed to talk it out, not engage in some cruel, mocking, theater with her parents where he insulted Harry, cross-checked Ginny’s facts, or insinuated how lucky she was to be dating Ryan. Her Mum, who was easily charmed by Ryan’s polite manner, his winning smile, and his assistance around the house was nodding happily and lapping up the conversation. Molly Weasley had never actually said anything about Harry Potter no longer being in the running for her future son-in-law but much had been communicated in the passive-aggressive push-pull of mother-daughter communications that Ginny knew her mum willing to latch onto Ryan as an acceptable potential replacement. Ginny had always been afraid to think that far out. She was certain her mum was not catching the subtle insinuations about Harry and the barest hints at Ginny being
weak-natured and Ryan being gracious enough to love her anyway. Her father, on the other hand, Ginny was pretty sure was catching every word. Arthur Weasley was a quiet man and many often confused his polite if unengaged interest with approval. Ginny knew better.

People saw what they wanted to see, and most people usually wanted to see Mr. and Mrs. Weasley as a warm inviting couple and Mr. Weasley as perhaps a vaguely eccentric and somewhat hen-pecked husband. The truth was far less cute. Arthur was an unambitious man and his own moral compass and ideals forced his personal family choices. But that did not take away from his particularly machiavellian perceptive ability, something Ginny had inherited more than all her brothers. He was an incredibly, alert, aware, and shrewd observer of people and politics. After all, he had been, and still was, Kingsley and Dumbledore’s wartime consigliere. Ginny had even seen Harry from time to time go ‘putter about’ with her father in the shed, newspaper or files clutched in hand.

Ryan, Ginny realized in that moment, had dismissed her father and everything about him. To Ryan, who had grown up around fathers in power suits with grand influence, Arthur Weasley was probably just a quaint lower middle-class man who had the fortune of Harry Potter’s affection. But Ginny saw the way her Dad’s eyes flickered at the digs, how his smile become more condescending, and his responses more vague. Arthur Weasley had taken the measure of her boyfriend, found him wanting, and then essentially checked out of the conversation. Ginny’s heart clenched. She felt a sharp anguish that her Dad didn’t think her boyfriend worthy. Her father, whose opinion she esteemed highly, did not consider the decision she made for her romantic life worthy. This felt like a personal failure on Ginny’s part, a small failure in being a responsible smart adult. It didn’t matter if it was Ryan or someone else, she never wanted her father to so easily disdain and not value her partner. Later she could rationally, albeit begrudgingly, admit that she wanted her father to share with her romantic partner, the mutually respectful relationship he so easily maintained with Harry. Granted, Harry’s innate goodness and ability to see through the superficial was part of maintaining that relationship...And once again she was back to visceral shame that her father did not value her choice. That her choice was looking more and more like a demonstration that she had been taken hostage by the superficial. She wanted to protest and tell her Dad this wasn’t the norm. She wanted to shout all of the things that made Ryan amazing. He’s not usually like this Daddy! He brought me here no questions asked. That’s not nothing! But of course, she couldn’t say all that. To protest so would be more damning. Besides she was startled and surprised to discover this absolutely disgusting side of the man she thought she knew.

The chat with her parents finally did end, but to Ginny’s horror due to Harry. He had put Teddy to bed and come downstairs holding a file. Awkwardly he interrupted asking if Mr. Weasley could explain something so asinine even Molly knew it was an excuse to speak privately. Ginny’s father immediately agreed and shuffled away. Ginny pointedly asked Ryan to escort her to bed. She was livid and so very hurt by the betrayal of his post dinner performance. Sure, she understood Ryan’s feelings of betrayal but to dig at her this way, in front of her own parents? They always rationally discussed any disagreement. What was this pettiness? Who the hell was he to imply her character weak and impressionable? (This hurt and angered Ginny the most, an echo of a taunt from Riddle) Slowly, still not looking at each other, Ginny and Ryan ascended the stairs.

Putting Teddy to sleep was one of the greatest joy’s of Harry’s week. Teddy was easily the happiest resident at the Burrow these past two weeks. The three year old had no inkling as to why
they were staying there but was ecstatic that he got to do dinner and bedtime with Harry and others every day instead of two or three times a week[1].

Teddy’s nighttime bath was often full of chatter as godfather and godson told each other of all they did that day. Harry would then settle the boy into bed and read a story or two. They’d covered hundreds of age-appropriate tales muggle and magical. Harry loved reading these often incredibly simple books as he never had this experience as a child. The nighttime ritual was oddly therapeutic. Harry’s burdens, frustrations, and fears melted off during- and many things often fell into context.

Surprisingly relaxed and somewhat re-energized, Harry left a soundly asleep Teddy to seek out Mr. Weasley. Hermione had compiled a very good potentials list earlier. Harry wanted to go over some of the names on it with Mr. Weasley and get his opinion on a few other matters. Arthur Weasley, Harry found, was surprisingly good at predicting fall out political, emotional, and social. Ginny too had this ability, wholly different from Hermione who was highly rational but heartbreakingly ethical and righteous that it at times clouded her foresight and understanding of the murky political machinations that often built the world. Mr. Weasley also sometimes had odd but helpful bits of news and information Harry wouldn’t have heard through any other sources. (Admittedly, sometimes this was just the juiciest gossip or advice on personalities and temperaments). Harry found he admired the strong sense of ethos Mr. Weasley and Ginny had more because of their keen ability to also understand the darker layers of people and society.

Harry and his boyfriend were sitting in the living chatting with Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. Well, Ryan and Mrs. Weasley were chatting, Harry could tell Mr. Weasley had checked out and Ginny looked oddly stiff. Harry didn’t know what to make of Ryan. Harry supposed he was a decent sort of bloke, he had after all, insisted he and Ginny see her family after the attacks and even paid for her Portkey. Ryan was weirdly impressed with Harry’s scars and seemed a little clueless about what the realities of War and its fallout and the gravity of what was going on, but that could have just been a sheltered and wealthy protected American thing. Distantly, Harry wondered how such cluelessness, however well meaning, didn't bother Ginny, who had once confessed she found it difficult to fully respect the willful and cluelessly ignorant. Ryan was annoyingly good-looking, like the blokes who dominated the storefront adverts in the shops on Jermyn Street. He probably did own and wear a Barbour Jacket and boots for stupidly stylish reasons in California Harry thought meanly. More fairly, Harry wondered if Ginny was still the same girl he admired and loved. He hoped so, he hoped that like Mr. Weasley she saw some innate goodness in Ryan that was obscured by the superficial. Harry was too polite to point out that Ryan had looked around the Burrow skeptically with surprise and perhaps mild disdain. Harry hoped that Ginny had not changed so much that the small pieces of superficiality and ignorance he had seen in Ryan's eyes was now shared by Ginny.

Harry didn’t want to be obligated to involve Ryan in his conversation with Mr. Weasley; so he asked to be taught how to set the House Wards and Mr. Weasley quickly got up and Harry followed him out the front door. Mr. Weasley looked frankly relieved to have an excuse to leave the conversation. He and Harry shared a knowing look, glancing quickly at Ryan. Harry was not proud that he was elated Mr. Weasley did not have a high opinion of Ryan. (Ron too did not care for Ryan, but Ron implicitly and loyally disliked Ryan for not being Harry.) The two men casually walked around the perimeter of the house Wards as Mr. Weasley read through Hermione’s list. Harry was pleased that Mr. Weasley too thought Harry’s own vaults had a good chance of being called open. They both agreed that discreetly emptying the vaults of physical, non-fiscal, items of value would be best. Fortunately, most of these things, like the invisibility cloak, Harry always kept at his house or on his person. Harry was concerned the Weasley’s could also be called into question. Mr. Weasley assured him that anything of real value requiring privacy had never been in those vaults to begin with. Mr. Weasley was more curious to see if George’s vault might be called into question and how far back into accounting history the zealous
“You really think there would be suspicion about how they good their investment capital?” Harry asked. Mr. Weasley shrugged he knew Harry had given the twins the money and that it had been his Tri-Wizard winnings. Mr. Weasley had deduced years ago that Harry had been the Twins’ angel investor but had kept quiet on the matter. Neither Harry nor Mr. Weasley thought it was a great scandal if this information became part of public hearing, but Harry would rather the majority of the world not know this detail.

“Mr. Weasley, do you think the committee will go as far as listing tangentially related accounts or, erm, account holders?” Harry asked carefully after a long silence. This was one of the bigger reasons he had wanted to talk to Mr. Weasley, but he wasn’t sure how to ask this question indirectly.

“Are you asking if I think they might even pull up accounts someone prominent or suspicious may have set up for causes like Grimmauld Place...or signed as surety for?” Mr. Weasley asked back gently.

Harry looked up sharply in surprise but then became wary, he wasn’t exactly sure how to proceed. He had given his word to Ginny he wouldn’t tell her parents from whom she had received her small inheritance.

“Well, that is a concern. Suppose Warrington wasn’t on the list, he is technically Yaxley’s second cousin. Suppose Yaxley willed him a... book, something innocent as a part of a Will written before the second rising...”

Mr. Weasley took off his glasses and carefully cleaned the lenses on his robes. He put them back on again, sighed and looked up with a forlorn expression at the upper windows, at Ginny’s window, of the Burrow.

“My boy, I never once believed a schoolgirl could have willed Ginny that money. But I do hope you don’t mean to tell me another Death Eater attempted to give my little girl a book?”

“No!” Harry almost shouted horrified. He shouldn’t have said book, his example was convoluted, “No! nothing like that. I checked! Multiple times- er I mean...I uh, didn’t know you knew about it. I promised her...” ”

Mr. Weasley smiled and said he had known Harry signed as surety and that Harry would not be breaking confidence. Relieved, Harry spoke slightly more freely.

“She wasn’t willed anything dangerous. I wouldn’t...I couldn’t let... She only used the money for her education. I don’t think she’s even looked in her vault... but I can check the other items again. I did sign as her surety and people could get suspicious. Also....the, uh, person who willed it to her, I’m afraid the ministry can force the Goblins to trace the connection and discover the secret seal. Its not...anyone bad, but it was someone...prominent and it could get...complicated if it got public.” Harry said.

“I see. I assume you have a plan?” Harry nodded, once again appreciating Mr. Weasley's ability to read through the lines and get to the point. Harry lamented that he didn’t think Ginny would agree with his plan. Mr. Weasley let out a small chuckle. “I’m afraid I can’t help you there my boy. Uni has been good to her in many ways but...well, you know better than most. She’ll only resist harder if ordered. She seems quite determined now to be so utterly in charge of her life, with or without our advice. I have the utmost faith in you but, tread carefully.” Harry sighed.

The pair took another turn around the house chatting of other matters before heading inside.
Almost everyone was in his or her bedrooms.

“Mr. Weasley,” Harry said suddenly before the man went up the stairs, “I wouldn’t have signed surety or helped set up the vault if I thought Ginny could get hurt. I know it’s a breach of her privacy but I tested if everything was safe first… I wouldn’t let anything happen to her…”

Mr. Weasley smiled softly and reached up and squeezed Harry’s shoulder and murmured, “Oh Harry... luckier than she knows,” squeezed his shoulder reassuringly a bit more and went upstairs. Harry wasn’t entirely sure what to make of the parting, but he was glad for Mr. Weasley’s advice and faith.

He realized the problems the hearings could cause to Ginny’s secret inheritance almost immediately. The questions and accusations that could come from the world knowing Snape willed a random pupil all his possessions would be endless. Harry knew just the type of questions that could arise too. The press would have a field day with the idea that a Headmaster willed an attractive school girl all his possessions. But more importantly, Harry didn’t think the assorted research papers, unpublished potions recipes (for very good reasons), and Slytherin’s historical manuscripts should be made generally public. He had only gone through them to check for danger (with much guilt), but he agreed with the deceased Headmasters’ opinion that all this material was easily exploitable for the wrong reasons. There was no need to add more gunpowder to the already volatile situation of the attacks and mounting panic over the bank run.

Harry had been wrestling with how to best hide this material, if and when Ginny's account came to question, for the past two days and finally came to a solution. Unfortunately, he would need Ginny's help to move the materials from her account and he was positive she would not like his idea at all. After loitering a few moments in the kitchen, Harry steeled himself to go upstairs and speak to Ginny. He desperately hoped she was alone, Ryan was not someone he wanted around for this conversation.

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Harry Potter was absolutely certain he’d picked the worst time to be outside of Ginny’s door.

“I admitted I was in the wrong Ryan but it wasn’t some intentional plot!”

“A year Ginny, that’s how long we’ve been together! We’re practically living together! My mom thinks you family!! And you just somehow forgot to tell me? Tell me that’s not intentional!”

“It was force of habit! I told you, people used to get weird about it! Its not different than Dean! You’re being ridiculous, I kept shy about it because people made a big deal, and then later it slipped my mind because it wasn't important to us ”

“Dean was bad enough, but now this? Last summer, when you came home, is that what you did? Sleep with him? Is that what you’d be doing now if I weren’t here?”

“What?! No! How dare you-How can you-...Is that really what you think of me?”

“I dunno Ginny, I don’t even know how many men you’ve been with!”

Harry Potter was at the landing outside of Ginny’s door. He heard noises but hadn’t completely registered the row, stuck in his own musings, until it was too late. His hand was already in swing to knock on the door.

“Excuse me? Are you shitting me? How does that matter? If I slept with three or three hundred that has no bearing on the fact that I'm not a cheater! I would never - is that really how little you think of me?” Ginny shrieked.
The argument was getting louder, Harry tried to snatch his hand back but it was too late. Hoping the rooms’ occupants had not heard Harry started to step back quickly but the wood boards creaked loudly.

“WHAT?” an irate Ginny with suspiciously red eyes opened the door.

“You um….didn’t cast a silencing charm..” Harry said awkwardly truly wishing he could have picked a better moment, why didn’t his Auror reflexes come in now?

Ginny’s face emptied, she nodded and moved to close the door but Harry impulsively leaned his body in and thrust out an arm to stop her. In for a penny…

“I uh…need to talk to you,” Ginny gaped up at him with an incredulous expression. Her face was pinched in stress and her eyes looked overwhelmed by pain.

“Are you shitting me?” Harry heard Ryan say in some mix of aghast surprise and anger. Ginny too made a similar expression up at Harry with note of panic. Harry winced and cocked his head with an open grimace to show his dislike of the moment but insisted, “I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t important. Honestly…it’s about your vault.”

Whatever Ginny had been expecting, it wasn’t that. Her face blanked again and she opened the door and let him in. Behind her Ryan, “What the fuck Ginny!”

Ginny waited until Harry walked to the middle of the room, closed the door, cast a silencio and grabbed the oversized scarf on the chair and wrapped it around herself. Distractedly Harry noticed that Ginny’s night-time apparel was not the ratty top and sleep pants he expected, but a pair of silk mens boxers and a lace-edged satiny camisole. He figured she was warping herself in the scarf to look a bit more appropriately presentable. Or perhaps to appease her boyfriend who was distinctly purple in the face and fleetingly reminded Harry of Uncle Vernon. Ryan was incensed and turned to his girlfriend presumably to shout at her some more when Harry interjected,

“Erm...Obviously this is a bad time, but this is time sensitive and needs discretion. Can I speak with you privately Ginny?”

“Fuck no, where do you get off --” Ryan spit out but Harry, feeling a simmer of anger, hardened his voice and firmly cut him off with, “Its about her private matters.”

It was entirely the wrong thing to say. Ryan’s anger seemed to increase.

“Excuse me?!?! Ginny why the hell does he have private matters with you?”

Ginny distressingly closed her eyes, sighed and shook her head slightly. She was standing but was tense and curled in on herself. Harry felt himself go a little cold and his opinion of Ryan plummeted further. Ryan savagely continued,

“Anything you say to Ginny, you can say to me. Whatever you want to keep secret with Ginny, I won’t allow it.”

Ryan was looking at Harry with surprising contempt. Harry had thought Ryan was a bit psychofantic earlier but clearly that had changed. Harry looked from Ryan to Ginny and cocked his head at her silently indicating, its your choice. Ginny’s stare flicked from Ryan to Harry and with a resigned grimace she gave Harry a small nod to continue. Ryan looked more enraged that Harry and Ginny were communicating by the subtlest of looks. Harry had a supreme desire to swat the man away like a fly.
“There is a good chance your vault may be called to question. If they wanted, the committee could subpoena the Goblins to trace it…” Harry began bluntly.

Ginny stiffened and looked up at Harry. He could tell that she was already contemplating through the various ramifications. He’d always appreciated this about Ginny, she was clever and fast and often filtered through consequences quicker and better than most around her. Ryan also seemed thrown off from his anger and said,

“What? What’s wrong with your bank account? Why is he involved with your finances? Whatever it is Ginny, I’ll take care of it! If you need money I’ll have dad wire you some. You’re my responsibility!” No one answered him. Harry cringed. Ginny flushed in embarrassment. Harry thought it odd she was embarrassed instead of enraged at such gauche possessive claims. Harry knew Ginny and the Weasley’s well enough that Ryan's father wiring Ginny money would be considered the highest insult. Ryan's words and all they implied about him and his relationship with Ginny made Harry grimace.

“Could we set up a shell? Or a false trail?” Ginny asked, she hadn’t turned to her boyfriend, ignoring his outburst and was continuing to stare at Harry. Harry stared back and shook his head, “Would likely focus attention rather than dispel.”

“So I bear out the questioning?” Ginny asked, in her eyes Harry could see her already mentally preparing though she gave very little outward sign. An exhausted but hard, fighting, look was coming into her eyes.

“What the hell is going on?” Ryan asked again but again, no one answered him. Harry certainly wasn’t going to. If Ginny chose to share it was her business.

“If it was just the questioning, well that would get ugly but it’s the research and…” Harry trailed off. He disliked having this conversation with Ryan in the room and didn’t want to disclose more than he needed to. Ginny’s eyes widened slightly and her gaze became startled. There was an oddly long pause where only Ryan’s angry heavy breathing could be heard.

“Emptying will only attract attention,” Ginny whispered in a matter-of-fact voice. Harry nodded. Ginny looked up, assessed him and then realized, “…but you have an idea.” Harry nodded again flicked his eyes to Ryan who was working up another outburst, and looked back at Ginny.

“I do, but you’re not going to like it.” Harry said slowly. Ginny was entirely ignoring her boyfriend and she and Harry were communicating in half sentences and emphatic looks.

“WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON,” Ryan thundered startling Ginny into a full body shudder, Harry felt a sudden jolt of burning anger and cool rage that took all his control to tamp down. His eyes narrowed at Ryan.

Ginny turned to her boyfriend and said, “Ryan please! I received some money to go to school, you know that! But in light of recent events I need to make some changes to my account to, ah… legally protect myself from odd inquiries.”

“Why the fuck is he the one telling you this and not the goblins or Bill?” Ryan said with extreme derision and contempt.

“Are you fucking serious right now? You won’t tell me, and you expect me to fucking trust you, even though Harry fucking Potter sneaks into your room at night to discuss some secret shit that you two couldn’t even talk about in front of your family? How the hell am I supposed to trust you?” Ryan said with extreme derision and contempt.
Harry was surprised at such a vitriolic accusation. Whatever the couple had been arguing about before, it seemed Ryan had no measure of Ginny if he was questioning her trust or loyalty. Sure, Ginny had changed in some ways since going to America, but Harry knew with absolutely certainty that her loyalty and trust when it came to important matters could not be questioned. Granted, he had no idea how he knew this. Admittedly he had just an hour ago wondered how much Ginny had changed to see value in Ryan, but despite all that he simply knew she would never intentionally break trust or abandon her commitments or beliefs. He looked at Ginny who looked as if she had been slapped and the shock was now giving way to tears. One escaped and trickled down her cheek. Ginny was an incredibly silent and private crier. Harry wasn’t sure if he’d ever seen Ginny actually loudly cry or sob after her first year. Sometimes Harry lamented that she was, in some ways, just as private or maybe more so than he was. Couldn’t this asshole see that making Ginny cry like this, instead of hitting back, was huge? In that same moment Harry realized, Ginny must actually be hurt and pained by Ryan’s accusations. Ginny Weasley could row with the best of them, she could throw down in a shouting fight and scream in anger but to row and cry? Ginny Weasley did not get this worked unless the curses landed. Ginny was attempting to calm her breathing to answer her boyfried who was staring at her with a haughty cold look. Harry desperately wanted to punch him. Impulsively Harry interrupted in a curt voice,

“Her inheritance is from a deceased friend who didn’t know her parents were Death Eaters. Upon her death this friend willed everything in her vault to Ginny, including some treasured family possessions that could be misconstrued- in light of the fact that her parents turned out to be Death Eaters,” Harry gazed at Ryan daring him to challenge the story. He didn’t dare turn to Ginny to see her reaction at his lie. Ryan, to his credit, did not break under the full stern gaze of Harry Potter. He stared back challenging Harry to continue.

“There are a few other details, none pleasant, regarding the Death Eater parents. Fortunately for their daughter and Ginny, the fact that these parents were Death Eaters was only discovered after the War and after Ginny’s friend passed away. Very few people know the full details of Ginny’s inheritance and for security reasons the Auror Office would like for it stay that way, which is why I am involved and want Ginny to move the items in her vault to another location.” Harry thought adding the security reasons and the Auror Office was perhaps a bit much but it seemed to have worked on Ryan whose anger dimmed.

“So where are we moving the contents of Ginny’s vault?” Ryan asked. Harry raised his eyebrows at Ryan’s presumption of ‘we.’ Ginny didn’t respond. Her face was red and she was blinking back her tears furiously but she raised her head and looked at Harry inquisitively, again completely ignoring Ryan.

“Hagrid once told me Gringotts is the safest place there is except for maybe Hogwarts,” said Harry elusively. He had absolutely no intention of sharing his plan with Ryan. He hoped Ginny would catch on.

“Safest place there is...except Hogwarts,” she volleyed back, and then her eyes widened fractionally. She definitely caught on but then her brow furrowed and she added with a small voice, “…except until its not. I don’t want some adventurous first-years discovering my stuff!”

Harry, irrationally, couldn’t help the sudden grin that spread out. Ginny gave a tentative smile back. Ryan glowered and asked what they were talking about. Both Harry and Ginny ignored him. Harry tipped his head in acknowledgement and then said,

“I thought of that too,” He said and then more deliberately stated, “There is a place only you, me, Ron and Hermione have been to... and I’d be hard pressed to find someone in England other than me who has the ‘key’...”

Harry stared at Ginny intently. Ginny stared at Harry first blankly and then as she registered his
meaning her eyes filled with revulsion and perhaps fear.

“No,” she said softly. She was completely still, arms still wrapped around herself and staring at Harry. “You’re not serious! Harry.”

Harry frowned sympathetically. He knew this was not an idea she was going to like and he understood why, he really did, but it was the safest option he could think of.

“I’m so sorry Gin, but it’s the safest place I can think of! You don’t have to worry, I can take care of it, I’ll do all the actual moving. You don’t even have to be around!”

Ginnys face became more pained at his statement. Harry registered Ryan saying something rude but it was a background buzz. His attention was on Ginny.

“Oh Harry…no. No, you’re right it is the safest place and well, isn’t that dreadfully ironic. I just… I…” she took a large gulp of air, steered herself, and stared at him straight in the eye and said, “I’ll come with you, its my responsibility and I want to be…involved. Seems well, not right but the thing to do. I can’t let you do it alone.”

And that was why Harry knew that Ginny would never intentionally hurt someone or break trust or whatever else Ryan was accusing her of that was making her cry. They stared at each other both their faces etched with empathy for the other. Harry thought Ginny was one of the strongest, bravest, and most resilient people he knew. He, Ron, and Hermione had spent just a few months sharing the burden of that cursed pendant; but Ginny, Ginny had spent a year wrestling a piece of soul that was only growing more powerful. He had never asked her and she had never shared, but Harry often found himself wondering and fascinated by the willpower of that small shy eleven year-old girl. Harry had felt violated every time he felt Voldemort’s feelings or saw his visions, had Ginny felt that way too? Or was that just him? And now, because of him and his crazy idea, she was going to go back to the worst location of her childhood. She would demand to go with her, there would be no dissuading her now that she decided. He ached with a feeling he couldn’t name. It wasn’t pity no, never pity, but something else and a healthy bit of hate and disappointment in himself for putting her in this position. They were going back to the Chamber of Secrets.

The next afternoon Ginny and Harry armed with his invisibility cloak made a trip to Gringotts. Harry stayed under the cloak until they reached the vault. Ginny’s vault consisted of a mid-sized pile of gold and a small filing crate. The crate was full of various bound manuscripts and files with reams of parchment. Taking a leaf from Hermione’s beaded-bag, Harry had brought a similarly charmed rucksack and he and Ginny emptied the crate into it.

“Have you looked at these before?” he asked, curious. He had looked through all the contents checking for spells, curses, and even bits of soul and blood enchantments soon after Ginny established her vault.

“No, but those manuscripts are incredibly old. I suppose someday I’ll have to go through them properly and I’ll probably need Hermione’s help. Half of this is in runes,” Ginny said. She had been subdued all day, Harry wasn’t sure if it was due to the impending journey to Hogwarts and the Chamber or the row and tension with her boyfriend. Despite her low mood she had performed her public part beautifully. She happily chatted with those standing in line at Gringotts. She casually discussed how she needed to get gold before returning to the states and complained that her vault routing requests always took too long. She sighed, chatted, and acted her part so well even Bill bought the story.
“What did you think when you went through it to check? Did you make anything of the Slytherin stuff?” Ginny asked interrupting Harry’s musings.

Harry shrugged. “I wasn’t really looking for content. But there’s one manuscript in there which is pretty interesting to look at. All the border illustrations are lions and snakes entwined or in scenes sleeping peacefully. Gryffindor’s name shows up quite a bit actually. I didn't open any of the personal notebooks yet.”

Ginny nodded distractedly carefully moving more papers out of the cart. They brought some plastic file covers as well to move the material into for protection. Harry had heard enough about Hermione’s Stinchcombe Library restoration efforts to have some basic idea of how to protect old documents. “They were supposed to have been the best of friends…” Ginny murmured. Harry made a face disbelieving.

“Really! According to the Sorting Hat they were the best of friends, practically brothers, always united…I guess until it all went wrong. I have a The Glories of Godric somewhere in my room, never read it,” Ginny said still subdued and distracted but clearly attempting to make social conversation.

Harry nodded but said nothing. He was suddenly reminded of another pair of best friends. Did Dumbledore see the parallels between his relationship with Grindelwald and the love and friendship of Gryffindor and Slytherin? Swiftly on the tails of this thought came: How did Remus and Sirius feel the sharp pangs of assumed betrayal the night his parents died? They too were the closest of friends, Harry remembered how ardently they had hugged and apologized to each other for their mistrust in the Shrieking Shack his third year. Harry was seized with a sudden urge to find and hug Ron.

An hour later Harry was outside Gringotts in the invisibility cloak, his rucksack full of ancient parchment and unpublished potions research and other notebooks. Ginny, after chatting with a friend she met in the lobby, casually walked down the stairs. They made their way down Diagon Alley slowly as Ginny pretended to casually window shop and then Dissapparated to Hogsmeede. Once in Hogsmeed Ginny’s cheery nature completely vanished. She didn’t speak to a still invisible Harry as they trudged to the Hogwarts gates. Ginny pulled out her wand and cast a message patronus to send to McGonagall to open the gates.

“I thought your Patronus was a horse?” Harry murmured confused at the brilliantly strong but admittedly shapeless white that had rushed out of Ginny’s wand.

“Yea it was. I asked my professors about it, it’s usually stronger than that but…its in flux apparently. It splinters sometimes,” Ginny answered, walking through the gates. It was the first time in the day she had seemed engaged in the conversation.

“Splinters?” Harry asked

“The magical force emitted is the same but sometimes I get two white jets and instead of going straight they diverge from my wand and arc towards the target I point at. I researched it and this sometimes happens when the shape of the patronus is oscillating between two forms or having a dual form. But dual forms are very rare, the DADA professor at Uni said it probably has more to do with me going through life change or personal struggles. I don't believe him.” said Ginny.

“Wow, it’d be cool if you had a dual form!” said Harry ignoring the personal part of the 'diagnosis.' Harry wasn't sure what to think of that. Sure, she had changed but it wasn't anything bad and he didn't think her entirely changed at her core. She was always confident and she seemed far more so now, but also at times unsettled with her thousands of life plans and opportunities. But, she was certainly "doing something" and "becoming something" as she had
yearned for before she left.

“Not really, all the famous people who’ve had them got them after really traumatic life experiences. Well, one witch fell in love with two men equally and they couldn’t accept it and killed each other. I’d rather have a boring patronus if it comes with such angst,” Ginny replied.

They chatted until they made their way to McGonagall’s office. They arranged to have tea with her and Harry informed her that he hoped to use Hogwarts to store some items of importance to him that he didn’t want falling in the wrong hands. Harry wondered if McGonagall’s allowance of his request was because he was Harry Potter or because the request was in line with the principles Hogwarts upheld, he hoped the latter. Tea with McGonagall was pleasant. He was glad to see that Ginny was most out of her funk when talking about her classes and all she had learned. It was a new experience for Harry who almost always had a professional relationship with Minerva. She had always challenged him academically and had very lofty standards which he knew he feel short of a lot during his schooling. But meeting with his old professor as an adult, a far more accomplished, more studious adult at that, was gratifying. They were by no means equals, she insisted they were but Harry could not bring himself to think that way. But, it was very comforting to come back to his first home and chat with a lady he esteem greatly and discuss everything from developments in Transfiguration and Politics to changes at Hogwarts, and the status of his Fantasy Quidditch Team picks.

Ginny also enjoyed talking with her old professor. It was oddly comforting to be at tea with a woman she greatly admired who knew her so well. Also comforting was having Harry with her, interested and enjoying the same warmth and connection Ginny felt to McGonagall and Hogwarts. Ginny’s academic interests and enthusiasm were nothing like Hermione. Hermione, loved everything academic and was incredibly invested in the knowledge she could glean from her beloved books. She loved writing essays and delving into discussions on the texts. Ginny was more like Harry, she excelled in practicum. She wasn’t one to write pages on theory, though she clearly had put in far more effort than Harry in actual reading and solving the complicated sums of Transfiguration. During their chat over tea Harry was intrigued to learn that Ginny was now comfortable enough to experiment with her practical powers and skills and was tentatively working towards experimenting on complex metals and even potions and testing limits of certain inherent transfiguration laws. Ginny was intrigued and impressed at Harry's newfound attentiveness for academia and that he and a fellow Auror were soon to publish a paper on simple charms and their defensive uses! Harry was surprised and happy to find that he and Ginny could argue and debate the tenets and utilities of Transfiguration and other magic with McGonagall in a relatively equal and enjoyable manner. He could see Ginny's open pleasure at being able to discuss such topics with him. He never imagined he would be so easy in an sustained academic dialogue environment and was also surprised that they were laughing and joking! Harry never found discussing anything academic with Hermione this particularly exciting.

Their chat over tea ended and reluctantly Ginny got up with Harry. Once outside the headmistress’ office, Harry informed Ginny it would be best if they both wore the cloak to Myrtle’s bathroom, school was still in session. Ginny agreed and immediately Harry wondered if the close proximity was as uncomfortable for her as it was for him.

The last time he had been this close to Ginny Weasley, they had both been naked. He was filled with the smell of her, that flowery scent that always made him feel at ease. He could feel the heat of her body and was incredibly conscious every time he bumped against her curves. He was used to feeling unfaithful to Ariadne when Ginny was around, he had dealt with this last summer. But now, so confronted and enveloped in the smell of her he wondered at his problematic attraction to Ginny. He remembered as they walked down the Hogwarts corridors, that Ginny’s flowery hair
was what he smelled in his amortentia. So perhaps he would be half in love with Ginny for the rest of his life. That seemed rather sad and unfaithful, he hoped to get married someday and didn’t want his poor wife, who he now had to assume was not Ginny, to have to compete with the smell of Ginny Weasley. Maybe the smells of amortentia, like patronuses, changed. Tonks’ had changed when she fell in love with Lupin. Once again the image of Ginny in a white dress marrying some faceless stranger, and then that stranger turning into Ryan, popped into Harry’s head and he grimaced. For all that they were not together, the idea rankled.

Suddenly Harry felt very discontent about Ginny’s patronus being in flux. Was it in flux because of her relationship with Ryan? Was it changing because she was falling in love with Ryan? Or was it in flux because she wasn’t happy in love or with her current state in life? He had been happy for Ginny when Hermione informed him and Ron that Ginny had found a very kind and reliable boyfriend who made her laugh. Fleur had even mused from Ginny’s letters if Ryan was “the one.”

Harry didn’t think he was unkind, and he thought he made Ginny laugh sometimes but he had been the definition of unreliable. But now, having met Ryan and more specifically, watching their interactions Harry didn’t think Ryan was...“the one.” Exempting the recent row, Ryan was nice, and friendly, and clearly very reliable. He was clearly there for Ginny he had travelled with her to England! But did he really make her laugh? Sure, he was socially funny but Ginny had a wry, witty, perceptive humor that Harry thought was a bit more sophisticated than Ryan’s. Just in the past few days Harry didn’t think Ryan ever caught Ginny’s eye in amusement at the random observational humor that presented. Ryan also didn’t ever respond to some of Ginny’s smarter quips, her quick glib remarks, her play on words, or her subtle sarcasm. Harry wasn’t vain enough to think he was the only one who could meet Ginny’s level of wit and smart humor, but he knew Ryan definitely didn’t and that he, Harry was the one who kept catching Ginny's laughing brown eyes.

“What are you thinking about?” Ginny said interrupting Harry’s thoughts about her boyfriend. Harry shrugged.

They had arrived at the corridor and the bathroom lay at the far end. Harry felt Ginny take a deep breath.

“Have you been in...since?” Ginny asked as they approached. Harry grunted a no and Ginny seemed to wilt further.

“But Ron and Hermione have...they went down during the final battle to get fangs...” Harry said hastily attempting to keep talking. They were inside the bathroom now and Harry took off the cloak and shoved it into his bag. Ginny looked up at him inquisitively, she was pale and her eyes seemed very large.

“Ron I guess...remembered how to say open in Parseltongue...”

“Can you still speak it?” Ginny asked him suddenly.

“Yea, I thought it would go away after...but I guess it’s just wired into my brain now. Hermione has this theory about how language is wired into your brain and all. I do have to think about the pronunciations more though,” Harry replied. He wasn’t sure if this was making her feel better or worse. He noticed when they were dating that she had a distinct aversion to anything snake related, unsurprising really.

“You should try and write a dictionary,” she mused faintly, “I imagine you’re one of the last in England, maybe the last entirely, seems a shame to not store that knowledge. Its never been written down”
Harry hadn’t thought of that. Although now she mentioned it he was surprised he hadn’t. Taking the time to write a Parseltongue dictionary seemed more like a Hermione endeavor than his. That being said, some of the protective Wards at Stinchcombe he had spelled in Parseltongue for the extra precaution. They were loitering and wasting time. Harry squared his shoulders and Ginny immediately stepped closer. She slipped her hand into his, surprising Harry and he gave it a small comforting squeeze. She squeezed back.

“Right, okay. I’m ready. Do you have the brooms?” She said in a small voice.

They had shrunken some regular Cleansweep Seven’s into Harry’s bag as their mechanism to leave the chamber. He felt like he was supposed to say something comforting right now but he wasn’t sure what. Instead he looked straight at the sink and said open.

The entrance to the chamber opened exactly how Harry remembered, the opening this time however, was much larger. Harry pulled Ginny into her body and wrapped his arms around her waist. Clung together and with wands out they jumped down. Once inside the chamber they immediately lit their wands and looked around.

“Ugh, it reeks,” said Ginny and cast a bubblehead charm.

Harry using his wand for lighting and still holding her hand started to march forward from the ante chamber. He opened the second door and they were once again in the heart of the Chamber of Secrets. With a complicated wand movement Harry cast a large ball of light to release from his wand and fly up to the top of the Chamber immediately lighting up the place. The decaying carcass of the 50-foot basilisk lay some feet away with many fangs knocked out. Ron and Hermione’s footprints could be seen in the dirt. Next to him Ginny let out a harsh breath.

“You okay?” Harry asked. Ginny took a few breaths and looked around, forcing herself to look at the dead snake and turned from side to side.

“Oddly…yes. Its not like I remember at all. It looks a tad underwhelming, well less creepy anyway or maybe it’s the perspective of age and awareness,” Ginny replied grimly.

Harry did not think the chamber looked underwhelming. He had forgotten how large the snake was and was shocked to see its body. The pain of its fangs was a distant memory but looking at the cavernous hall with his Auror trained tactical awareness, Harry wondered how he had actually been able to run for cover.

“This is good,” Ginny said briskly next to him. “This is purging. I feel…not satisfied, but… something. Reckon we should clean?”

Harry was not glad he came. He wasn’t sure entirely what he felt but the sight of the snake through his adult eyes rattled him. He saw clearly in his minds-eye, overlaying what he saw in the actual chamber around him, the form of a small eleven-year-old Ginny on the floor pale as marble. It hit him again suddenly that she could have died here. They both could have. He remembered actually wishing for death here. The thought of his time at Hogwarts or the Weasley’s without Ginny…or him without Ginny suddenly made him ache. His grip on Ginny’s hand tightened. She squeezed back emphatically.

Ginny did not say anything and still holding his hand, she fired three rapid charms at the decaying snake carcass lighting it on fire, a slow controlled blaze. She conjured three heavy-duty brooms and dustpans and charmed them to start aggressively sweeping the floors. As she waited for the brooms to finish dusting she cast a few air-freshening charms.

“Are there any other snakes around?” She turned to Harry and asked. He shrugged and then
concentrating loudly began speaking in Parseltongue asking if anyone was there. He waited but there was no response. He shook his head.

The brooms were making fast progress. Ginny conjured a large mop and then with her wand emitted a high-pressure jet of water that smelled like lye or acid which steamed as it hit the stone floor. The mop immediately followed to scrub. Ginny continued to use her wand to acid-wash the flooring following the swathes cleared by her brooms. Harry wondered if this physical cleaning of the chamber was a part of the ‘purging’ and therapeutic for her. He certainly felt better. The now gleaming bits of stone flooring gave off a deep green shine and did have the affect of making the chamber look much less somber.

Releasing her hand Harry walked around taking a larger survey of the chamber. Ginny’s brooms had accumulated a rather disgusting amount of dust, dead rats, and the bones of various other small rodents. Acting on instinct Harry suddenly cast his patronus. The large stag burst out and began galloping around the edge of the chamber. Harry was happy to see it hadn’t yet encountered anything to charge against. There was quite a bit of light in the chamber now, due to the blazing snake-carcass fire, Harry’s ball of light, and the brilliance of Prongs. The massive statue of Slytherin was fully illuminated now and Harry realized he had never really gotten a good look at it before. He also remembered that the basilisk had emerged out of the statue, suggesting a secret passage beyond. Harry had no intention of exploring the chamber further today. Maybe someday he would come down with more tactical gear and Ron and they could better explore. Harry idly wondered if there was a second entrance somewhere. Noticing the large sconces carrying torch staves Harry waved his wand to light them. All the scones in the chamber suddenly burst into brilliant green flames. Behind him Ginny gave a startled gasp.

“That was you?” she demanded. Harry acknowledged it was.

“Do you mind…do you mind if we don’t light them? They are…well a little too familiar,” Ginny said determinedly not looking at the flames and focusing on further scouring the flooring.

Harry understood. The memory Tom Riddle had activated the light in the chamber last time and the emerald green flames gave the room an eerie glow. Harry wondered if he could change the color of the flames. He wasn’t entirely sure how but no sooner had he waved his wand and concentrated, the flames became a startling white-silver light. The chamber suddenly looked as if it was lit by the industrial strip lighting. Everything was thrown into brilliant relief and clarity and Ginny’s scoured floors looked like reflective slabs of dark green shale.

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“Harry!” Ginny suddenly gasped.

Harry whirled around, his wand at the ready but Ginny was simply staring in awe at the ceiling. Harry looked up too and was just as awe-struck as Ginny. The entire ceiling of the chamber looked like it was hewn out of solid emerald. The fan vaulting from the pillars created a delicate serpent themed screen in pale gold overlaying the emerald. Harry had noticed the snake carved pillars as a child but had never quite noticed that the eyes of these snakes were gemstones the size of his fist.

“Of course, Slytherin would have a lavish secret chamber to house his monster.” Harry said sarcastically.

“To be fair, The Enfilade is filled with rubies and gold… and a magically reflective ceiling,” Ginny responded.

“The what?” Harry asked baffled

“The Enfilade, it just means series of rooms aligned in a row,” At Harry’s continued puzzled
expression she said, “Oh, you know, the Gryffindor Chambers! But McGonagall found their proper name was the The Enfilde in some old letter of Godric’s.”

Harry continued to stare at her utterly confused. She began to stare back incredulous.

“You never went back? You never…wondered? The series of rooms you went through for the sorcerers stone Harry, underneath the trap door!”

Harry looked shocked. “You’ve been down there?”

“They were formally opened after Reconstruction. Well, not all of them only the first three rooms. They’ve added a moving spiral staircase. They’re at the other end of the castle…I think probably parallel to where we are actually!” Ginny informed him.

Harry was surprised, he had never really thought about the chambers underneath the trap door on the third floor corridor. He had had far too many other concerns when at school. A series of slightly-less secret rooms built by Gryffindor…did all the founders have secret sections?

“Right. So um, if you’re done cleaning- we should probably finish what we came here for.” Harry said.

Ginny was finished. She banished the accumulated dust, dead rodents, and bones, and ash from the dead and now cremated basilisk. All that remained were the fangs. The acid-washed floors gleamed reflecting the brilliant ceiling with a heavy clean but antiseptic smell.

“How should we do this?” She asked.

“I think we can just take everything out and stick it in the bin we brought. Its plastic and covered so it will be dry- and you’ve cleaned the place.”

“That’s it?” Ginny asked sounding underwhelmed.

“Oh, I’m going to set some wards and blood charms once we close seal the bin. But…yea I guess we’ll just leave it here,” He too felt that after re-entering the chamber this was a tad anti-climatic.

“I suppose if whoever wants it got this far there’s not much else we can do than some wards to protect it…throw some spells on it to prevent the rodents from getting it. The acid and cleaning charms will keep them away for a while but you never know,” Ginny said.

Harry and Ginny set to work putting the manuscripts and papers in the plastic bin. Ginny once again remarked that she really ought to figure out what these papers really contained. Harry offered to go through them with her. Ginny seemed to take this as expected- how else was she to get back into the chamber?

Idly she flipped through an old school notebook. She made some inquisitive noises as she paged through and then suddenly gasped in shock.

“Harry, when you went through these to check for dangerous magic did you see this?” Ginny asked.

Harry scooted over to her to peer at the notebook she opened. It was a book of notes filled in the small neat script Harry recognized as Snape’s. But Ginny pointed to a second script that was scattered among the pages of notes. A rounder hand annotating the various notes around the margins. Harry peered closer and realized that some only some of these were academic annotations or comments. Some of the margins bore the unmistakable evidence of bored note-sharing during a lesson. A small game of hang-man hung in the corner of a page, a few tiny
“She called him ‘Sev,’” whispered Ginny. Harry had recognized the handwriting the moment he saw it. It was odd seeing the childhood notes and distractions of his potions professor and who else would have been his friend other than his mother?

Harry peered closer and realized that there was a good amount academic annotations or comments in his mother's hand. Harry turned the page and saw a full conversation, clearly scribbled hastily during a lesson. Harry had seen his mothers writing before but suddenly he was being confronted with bits of her humor, her sarcasm, and her corrections and comments on a tentative potions idea. Harry knew his mother had certainly called Snape ‘Sev.’ Harry couldn’t imagine the old Potions Master allowing anyone to call him anything other than his given name. It was likely similar to how Hermione insisted on her full name but only Ron got away with ‘Mione.

“Do you want to keep these?” Ginny asked softly. Harry wasn’t sure how he felt. Snape had left these for Ginny, but were they saved because they were actually potions ideas and research or because they had Lily’s notes on them?

Ginny seemed to have an idea of his conflict.

“The notes look like viable potions, looks like your mum definitely had input! Did you know she was a potioneer?”

“Erm…sort of. Slughorn kept thinking my ability in his class was inherited from my mum. I never really thought about it,” replied Harry a tad embarrassed.

“Well, if you ever decide to publish these you should definitely cite her as a contributing or editing author. Look at some of these, she re-wrote entire sections!”

Harry stared at Ginny blankly. He was clearly not processing as quickly as her and hadn’t even considered thoughts of publishing. In fact, hadn’t Snape said that publication of some of this could be dangerous? Also he wasn’t sure if he was ready for the world to know that Snape and Lily Potter used to be incredibly close friends. For all the respect that Harry had grown to have for Snape, and all that he had done to clear Snape’s name…the information about his mum seemed…private. Harry reacted instinctively,

“What? No! No!”

“I didn’t mean now Harry or even publishing everything. Just if we go through it and there is something important or useful, your Mum should get credit! Its only fair. You really should open up to more about her, she deserved to be known for more…” Ginny said.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Harry asked angrily. What the hell was she implying?

“Oh don’t be dramatic Harry, its just everything you know about your parents is through the lens of your dad and his friends and maybe Slughorn. Its also what the world knows about her. Don’t you think it would be nice to know what she was like before your dad? The real Lily Potter before she was a Potter? What was she outside of being just your mum and your dad’s wife?”

Harry was incensed. Where the hell did Ginny get off suggesting his brilliant mum was in some way lacking? Or that his mum was not ‘real’ with this dad? Who the hell was Ginny to question when his mum married and had a baby? Who the hell was she to judge and deem that life option not worthy?

“What exactly do you mean by just your mum and dad’s wife? What, you’re not happy with her choices?”
Ginny made an angry hiss, “You know that’s not how I meant it-”

“How else could you mean it?” Harry snapped angrily, “The Oh-so-liberated Ginevra Weasley frowns at the idea of marriage and children! Sorry the mythos of Lily Potter is too underwhelming for you. Play out your disappointed feminist issues on your own mum not my dead one!”

Ginny gasped and stared at him shocked. Harry too was shocked at himself, he knew he had a temper but it was usually rage and anger, not this perfectly mean precision.

He hadn’t ever consciously thought through everything Ginny said and what it imbued. He was surprised at himself for even realizing that Ginny was slightly against the views and ideals Mrs. Weasely held and wished for her daughter. Harry was not one to really…delve or observe such things- so it was pretty surprising his barb had hit the nail so squarely on the head. He and Ginny were still staring in shock. He wasn’t going to apologize though, he was still angry at Ginny’s judgmental tone. A very snide voice in the back of his head did point out that it would be nice to know his mother and her legacy from a different perspective, even Snape’s.

“Harry I-,” Ginny began but he cut her off brusquely, “Lets just get this done.”

They sorted and stored papers in plastic in silence for an awkward few minutes.

“I’m sorry. You’re right. Its not my place,” Ginny whispered finally. Harry expelled a long breath. He was still angry and hurt by her judgment. “I didn’t mean to criticize your mum. Actually I’m almost certain she was nothing like my mum.”

Despite himself Harry asked, “How do you know that?”

“Oh just everything I’ve heard about her, what you’re like, and Sirius and Remus' comments…” Harry desperately wanted to pry now but was still annoyed at Ginny. He didn't know a maternal figure (that he respected) other than Mrs. Weasely and sometimes wondered if his mum was like her. Harry didn’t know how to ask Ginny to explain after their tiff. He continued to stare at her.

“Ignore me Harry, I was completely out of line. Your mum and my mum were nothing alike. Trust me, it was a point Sirius very firmly made to my mum whenever he was angry. Sirius got along with your mum, he certainly did not, and never would have, with mine. Look, says here your mum wanted to be a potions investigator for the Ministry,” Ginny said pointing to a page of scribbled notes in Snape’s notebook. Harry reached out for the book and his eyes devoured the page.

It wasn’t much, Snape and Lily were clearly discussing their preparations and studies for OWLS. Harry’s mother apparently wanted to work in investigative potions for the Aurors or in pathology at St. Mungo’s. Snape’s responses seemed…discouraging, though he acknowledged that both of them were likely to receive O’s in potions. Harry suddenly felt a wash of despair. Now that Ginny had planted the seed, he couldn’t help but wonder why his mum didn't go on to work in investigative potions or pathology…

“But she didn’t,” said Harry miserably, “She didn’t go on to do either of these things.”

“Oh Harry, you don’t know that she didn’t! Remus said she spent most of her time working for the Order! She certainly brewed potions for them! It makes sense, Dumbledore relied on Snape a lot when the Order reformed, so I imagine he relied on your mum then.”

“But she didn’t go on to work in pathology or CSI for the Aurors! She was head girl she could have been an Auror like Neville’s mum!” Harry wondered what it was about Ginny that made him always blurt out his random fears about his past. It was rather ridiculous they had just been
arguing and he was now sitting on the floor in the Chamber of Secrets no-less blabbing about his feelings.

“Oh. Well Neville’s parents were a bit older I think. And. Well, I don’t think she could have worked for the Aurors or in pathology!” replied Ginny looking very sad.

“What? She was Head Girl she was clearly smart-” Harry started getting worked up again.

“No, Harry… I mean in logistics. Didn’t you ever talk to Slughorn or Remus? Slughorn would have written her the best recommendation and connected her to all the right people but well, politics and fear. I imagine it was hard to get hired as a muggle-born in those days. Seamus’ mum left the Wizarding world to marry his dad and got a muggle job because of all the discrimination! Remus said he and your mum spent loads of time at the Order Headquarters working until your parents had to go into hiding. Besides, think of the timeline, Your parents married almost immediately out of Hogwarts, and then went into hiding soon after!”

Harry felt like he’d been slapped. He felt the sudden burning injustice of it all. His mum was Head Girl, and everyone said she was very clever. She couldn’t get hired?!!?!?

“Voldemort was at his height and I can’t imagine department heads wanted to seem open and ‘muggle-loving’ then! I mean look at Snape’s responses here. You certainly have the qualifications but be careful.. Prejudice was probably ridiculous, even Hermione said the other day she sometimes feels it if people don’t know who she is! And that’s now!”

“So she… couldn’t find work,” Harry said slowly. It rankled in his gut that Vernon’s long ago taunt about his parents unemployment was vaguely true. Harry long ago discovered that his father had immediately started working for the Order and that much of his work was information-gathering via socializing in clubs with other wealthy purebloods during the day and running missions for Dumbledore with Sirius at night. “So she had to suffer like Remus…” Harry trailed off at Ginny’s eye-roll.

“Harry, you have a ridiculous fortune and a house in a posh neighborhood. They had that lovely cottage too. And no, don’t give me that look, I’m not suggesting that’s why she married your dad! Everyone said they were ridiculously in love! She didn’t suffer in the same way as Remus but from the stories I’ve heard she worked as the Order’s full time potions supplier and emergency Healer.”

Harry nodded and contemplated his newfound information. A comfortable silence fell as he sifted through more papers and books. He opened a notebook at random and discovered an old official looking letter informing Snape that his father was dead. Harry flipped the page and saw a letter in his mother’s hand. It was clearly after they had ceased to be friends- it was stiff and formal and dated sometime in the spring of their 6th year. Harry’s suspicions that Snape’s father had been a rather abusive and itinerantly absent figure who hated magic were correct. Lily stated she would attend the funeral if Snape’s Death Eater friends would not be present. Mulciber and Avery apparently assisted with the funeral arrangements. Lily had not attended. Harry couldn’t blame his mother for not attended, it was after all a matter of personal safety. But much as he wanted to, he could shake the biting empathy he had for Snape and the man’s loneliness at the time.

Harry grabbed another file full of loose parchment and started rifling through, here he discovered more childhood notes of his mother. A game of tic-tac-toe. History of Magic notes from 2nd year loaned because Snape had been ill. A letter from 3rd year demanding Snape tell her who had given him his black eye, and urging him to go to Dumbledore. (Harry guiltily wondered if it was
his own Father who had caused this) A lamentable exchange of notes discussing “what a prat” Sirius Black was, and at the very end, a painstakingly detailed sketch of Lily flowers across a margin.

“Ginny, can I.–” “Yes. Everything mine is yours Harry you don't need to ask. It was supposed to be willed to you first, you should have a chance to look at all of this. You’re welcome to look at the Slytherin stuff too.” She said firmly anticipating his desire. Harry felt immense gratitude. He was still annoyed by her previous comments and they hadn't entirely made up but in this they still understood each other. Somewhere in the back of his mind Harry registered that Ginny claimed everything of hers was his. Somehow he knew that when push came to shove, Ginny truly meant that and meant it for more than these papers.

Harry pulled out his wand and cast a replication spell on Snape’s papers. It would be safer to leave the originals here.

“Harry, a lot of this material is experimental potions research and ideas. Can I ask you a favor?” Ginny asked tentatively after a long silence. Harry nodded and indicated for her to continue.

“Can I ask…I think you have every right to look through as me but can you keep it private? Even the bits that have nothing to do with your mum? Please don’t show Hermione or anyone else this research?” Ginny said looking more and more uncomfortable

Harry gaped at her. He only cared about the pieces related to his mum and hadn’t intended to publish or share anything anyway, as per Snape’s request. But if he were…to not tell Hermione?

He was surprised by Ginny.

“Its not a matter of trust!” Ginny said quickly, “Its…it’s a matter of interpretation! She didn’t take the Half-Blood Prince’s potion book well at all and…well, I love her but I think she’ll demand you destroy all these! She can be decidedly single minded about things.”

Harry cocked his head, Hermione was incredibly passionate about right and wrong but…she also was not one to destroy knowledge for the sake of principle. He explained as much to Ginny. Ginny seemed unconvinced and retorted back with examples of Hermione's tenacity from when they were discussing the Hallows.

“Look, a lot of this here could easily be classified as illegal or heavily regulated potions. A lot of these potions use methodologies that many consider arcane and a little Dark. Snape's right, I don’t think the present magical climate is…going to react to it well. And I definitely don’t think Hermione is going to let this go if she see’s it. I wrote a paper for DADA 7th year that argued for some…ambiguous morality with Veristaserum, Imperil, and other related magic and she looked at me like I was Greyback and still brings it up!” said Ginny defensively.

Harry agreed. He could well remembers Hermione's righteous pestering about the Prince's book and the nature of her refusal and later hackneyed acceptance of the Hallows. He resolved that he wouldn’t share any of this information with anyone and that he and Ginny could decide much later if they should ever make any of this research public to their friends. They spent the next hour further sorting, replicating, and organizing in the plastic bin. Harry almost forgot they were in the Chamber until he looked around at the snake carved pillars and emeralds.

As they sorted Harry realized that a lot of the Slytherin manuscript material was probably not originally Snape’s. It looked painstakingly curated from various family records and old libraries. There were small pieces of parchment between some of the pages, notes from Snape and Dumbledore; A delicately inked family tree of the Gaunts, where the two previous Headmasters had attempted to fill in the massive blanks and spaces between Slytherin, Gaunt, and Cadmus Peverell. Harry saw familiar pureblood names, Prewitt and Black spattered multiple times in-
between. On the verso, Harry saw the far better filled out, though still relatively sparse, family tree of Ignotus Peverell ending with his name at the bottom. This was the curated compendium of Slytherin history and research Snape and Dumbledore had conducted when sorting out Voldemort’s past and potential Horcrux’s. Harry was once again struck by how much Dumbledore trusted Snape and the ridiculous amount of work the two men put in to ease Harry’s path.

Flipping through a few more weathered pages Harry discovered with a jolt, an engraved manuscript page scribbled on with a modern, familiar, quill. He made a noise and Ginny looked up. She came over at he stared at the inked page and breathed, “Tom.” If anyone could recognize Tom Riddle’s handwriting, it was Ginny.

As Ginny leaned across his lap, Harry breathed in the calming smell of her hair and read on. Of course only Riddle would be vain enough to mar an ancient manuscript with his notes- It looked like the young Riddle’s attempts to discover his ancestry. At the very bottom written and underlined was,

**Modes of inheritance: Direct Heir or Magical-Transference? Conditional Inheritance?**

Ginny let out a low whistle, “He certainly did his research…” she said.

“What does it mean? What’s Transference or Conditional Inheritance?” Harry asked her.

“I don’t know all that much to be honest. Direct Heir is obviously just normal descent, like father to son and so on. I’m not entirely sure about Magical-Transference and Conditional Inheritance. I’m not particularly well versed in genetics and the biological sciences, I’m better at raw numbers. I’ve only really read about this in novels and stories. Terry has studied this stuff,” Ginny said.

Harry urged her to continue. He was perversely curious about his defeated foe. He thought he knew everything about Riddle’s history and details but here was more information.

“Magical Transference is sometimes talked about with Muggle-born politics, like families that haven’t got a drop of magical blood for eons suddenly producing a witch. Some theorists say it could be because of transference,” Ginny explained and then continued,

“But in stories its always an older ancestor spells that something of theirs or some magical ability of theirs will be inherited only generations later or something. But often times I’ve only heard of it working with Conditional Inheritance. Some cranky old codger enchants something to work or be inherited somewhere down his line only if some condition he set is filled.”

At Harry’s look of confusion she continued slightly embarrassed, “It’s used a lot in love stories. Mum’s favorite tale is the *Carnelian Rose*.”

Ginny paused and then, shaking her head she began, “There are a lot of plot twists but basically: the princess in the story vows that she will only give her heart and hand in marriage to a man who can pluck a Carnelian Rose and bring it back from the Bloodstone Mountains without it dying. It’s impossible, apparently. An evil warlock ends up trapping her in an enchanted chamber and sets some random condition- I forget what-as her only way out, or rather only way to get a husband. The heroine’s dad, the king is all sad because his daughter is his only living child left but god forbid a girl take the throne and now she’s trapped!”

Ginny shook out her hair, took a breath and continued, “The court diviner predicts that the kingdom will have an heir though and that he will be a true-heir, with the power of the past
kings. As per storybook tradition, this heir will be pure-hearted enough and will prove his heart by lifting this huge sword from centuries ago that became a part of the stonework in the heart of the royal rose garden. Naturally, the hero meets all the random conditions. He saves the princess, through some large plot device *happens* to have a Carnelian Rose uncrushed in his pocket, and breaks out the sword. So in the end, he gets all the power of the previous kings and becomes the ‘true-heir’ even though technically he was born a commoner. Oh yea, he marries the princess, duh, and their love is magically sanctified or something stupid like that because the princess is a 7th child, and he gets all her power.”

Harry blinked absorbing the tale and then trying to parse it into what Riddle was researching.

“So here in Riddle’s research he's trying to find what type of inheritance Slytherin used to hide his chamber? I guess it was just normal inheritance, Riddle was the last direct heir of Slytherin in the end,” Harry said.

Ginny puckered her lips making a contemplative face. Harry felt the faintest twinges of low curling arousal in his belly at this expression and immediately looked away.

“I dunno, what do you need to get into the Chamber? Just speaking in Parseltongue? there isn’t a blood enchantment otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to open it, or Ron.”

“But I couldn’t control the Basilisk, even when I spoke to it in Parseltongue,” Harry retorted.

“But I could command it through Riddle even at the very beginning when he wasn’t as strong. He was leeching my soul to strengthen his, but a true blood enchantment would have needed actual blood,” Ginny mused. The two former lovers looked contemplatively at each other in silence. Harry had never spoken to Ginny about the Chamber before this. He wondered what she meant by “wasn’t as strong.” Riddle was clearly strong enough in the beginning to still posses her and open the chamber.

“The Sword of Gryffindor is definitely enchanted by conditional magic!” Ginny said smiling. Harry smiled back and agreed.

“So you don’t think the Chamber of Secrets is bound by direct inheritance. You think Riddle got it wrong,” asked Harry raising his eyebrows.

“I’m not saying anything. I just think 900 years a long time to expect a direct descendent. Slytherin would have been awfully stupid to expect it. What if your line or name dies out? How is the enchantment supposed to detect the ‘blood’ if he last direct descendent died some twelve generations ago? Its definitely more cunning and safer to make it conditional or transference inheritance isn’t it?”

Harry nodded but shrugged, “Maybe, but I have no desire to test it! But how did Snape get this? He must’ve stolen it from Voldemort…for Dumbledore.”

Ginny reached across his lap and opened a loosely bound ancient folio that lay next to Harry’s foot. The verso of the folio cover noted it as also the property of Lord Voldemort in a stylized hand. Ginny scoffed and then shuffled to the first folio page. A good portion of it was in Anglo-Saxon Runes and the rest in antiquated English script. Harry found many of the words and letters difficult to read due to their unfamiliarity and lack of resemblance to modern english.

“That’s Old English a lot of those names are definitely more German and pre-Norman,” Ginny said. Harry looked at her astonished. “I took a few courses in English Literature and history,” she admitted. She turned back to the folio and Harry peered over her.
“Does that say Gyrwe?...Oh look, Guthlac of Crowland and Spalding. This is about Norfolk, no hang on, its about the entire Fens! East Anglia” It was Ginny’s turn to look astonished, “I failed History of Magic, but I didn’t fail English History! And I’m doing rather well in my Auror Cartography and History classes thank you!” Harry said chuffed. Ginny smirked and went back to reading.

“Harry…I think this is about Slytherin’s homeland or maybe castle. He was from the Fens and his castle is rumored to still be there, protected by enchantments. Maybe Riddle was looking for it too!” Ginny said vaguely excited.

“Guess it doesn’t exist. Riddle would have found it if it did. I can’t imagine Riddle giving up easily,” Harry said flipping through the folios some more.

“Or maybe he just didn’t find it. He probably cared more about the Chamber anyway. Besides, its not like he could travel around the woodlands when he was still in school. Or maybe he stopped caring and assumed if it did exist it got converted like Godric’s Manor.” Ginny retorted.

“Where’s that?” Harry asked. He raised his eyes at Ginny’s incredulous look.

“You’re right, you and Ron would have died a long time ago if it were not for Hermione. Honestly Harry, you live in Godric’s Hollow the Chapel, Godric’s Alter? That’s where his manor used to stand,” Ginny said soundly vaguely exasperated.

“Oh right, yea…I think I knew that.” Ginny rolled her eyes. “I knew he lived in Godric’s Hollow! Whatever. Still doubt Slytherin’s fen exists. Riddle was tenacious about stuff like this. I’m honestly more impressed that Snape was able to steal these from him!”

Ginny agreed and said that Snape was probably one of the worlds greatest Occulemens, to have shielded his secrets and Dumbledore’s so well from Voldemort. They flipped through a few more folios (More information about Slytherin) before getting back to their task and storing all the information in the plastic storage crate. Once everything was set and all the wards and protection spells enacted, the two former lovers had nothing else to do but leave the chamber. The torches flickered out as they walked out the entwined serpent door. The outer hall was starkly filthy in contrast to the recently cleaned Chamber. Harry pulled out the brooms he brought and he and Ginny flew out of the Chamber of Secrets.

They floo’d back to the village of Ottery St. Catchpole and were walking towards the Burrow when Harry said quietly, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry at what I implied when I yelled at you back in the Chamber.”

Ginny sighed and there was an awkward pause where Harry wondered if she would not accept his apology.

“Its okay Harry, I’m the one who should apologize. Besides, its not like you’re wrong. I need to get over my issues,” Ginny said resigned.

“Can I ask why…” Harry trailed off uncertainly, it was really none of his business and he wasn’t sure how he would have ended that question either.

“You can, although I’m not sure I can explain it properly,” Ginny said. “Its just…I love my mum and we get on well but sometimes I get the feeling she has this idea of what my perfect life should be and that I’m failing it somehow. Or that everyone looks at me and assumes I’ll want what mum wants.”
“And this perfect life involves getting married and having seven babies?” Harry asked quietly.

“Yes, well obviously I don’t feel like I’m failing her as much now. But ever since I was kid, because I was the only girl I got stuck in the kitchen with her, or stuffed into horrid old dresses, or—”

“Yanked out of Order meetings or confined to the Room of Requirement?” Harry said knowingly. Ginny flushed, but nodded and continued disconnectedly,

“She used to keep forcing me into these proper witch roles. Or assuming that I wasn’t strong enough and will always need protection because I made a mistake when I was eleven. She’s never said out right but its always there, and gets rolled into this whole ‘proper lady’ thing. It’s a lot better now that she has Fleur and Hermione who love cooking with her share her tastes. I also understand her a lot better now. She is just doing all these things she wished for with her daughter and that her mum did with her. I love dresses but not those old proper wizarding robes! Her overprotective thing is because she could never control Ron so she took it out on me, and now that Fred’s gone I bear the brunt more.”

“Makes sense, but she does means well, and it is how she copes. But doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with having kids…” Harry mused. Harry had no idea when he was going to have children— but he knew he definitely wanted them. He wanted Teddy to grow up with siblings and he loved having Teddy in his life, he couldn’t imagine not having his own children.

Ginny made a vague grimace, “I’m not against having children. I want them…eventually, maybe. I dunno yet. I just…it’s different for witches! A Wizard can have a few kids and its expected he goes on with his life same as normal. But how many Career Witches do you know who have children? Especially more than one? And everyone seems so bloody certain I’m going to have at least five!”

Harry did an odd nod-shake, understanding. He worked with only a few women, as the Aurors were pretty gender-unequal as Hermione constantly pointed out. None of his professors in school seemed to have had children and he had noticed the differences between Mrs. Weasely and Mrs. Granger. He couldn’t imagine Hermione quitting her job or her various research projects just because she had Ron’s kids. Meanwhile he loved and respected Mrs. Weasley greatly for her decision to be an amazing cook, mother, and knitter. Nevertheless, he could see Ginny’s frustration and concern. (Cluelessly well meaning people frequently commented on how many children Ginny was going to have, how Quidditch was not a great career for a mother, and how ‘neglected’ Hermione's future children would be if she didn’t 'slow down’)

“And if I want to play Quidditch,” Ginny said working up emotion, “there isn’t a single athlete whose gotten pregnant and gotten to keep her spot! If I make a professional team, you bet your arse I’m going to hang on to my spot as long as possible. Mum knows I want to play Quidditch and so she thinks I’ll either never have kids or won’t give her grandbabies until I’m fifty or something. Which is ridiculous, I don’t have to be as young as she was when I have my first child!. Can you imagine she actually agreed with Auntie Muriel who said wizards don’t like witches who can play better than them? I think she thinks I judge and look down on her choices or something!”

“You shouldn't be with Wizards who can't deal with how good you are on a broom. But don't you? sort of look down at her choices I mean?” Harry asked a bit nervously. Ginny was speaking with passion and Harry wasn’t sure if he’d make her angry by asking this.

“No! Of course not! I mean I would never have seven children or make half the choices she did—”
Ginny broke off at Harry’s raised eyebrow and small smile, “Okay, okay it sounds like I disapprove of everything she did. Who knows maybe later I will want to quit Quidditch for a baby. Who knows. Also, it was a different time. My parents got married because it was an uncertain time and because that’s what couples who ‘courted’ that long did! My parents are a good deal older than yours were and they were raised with very traditional ideals in a lot of ways. They don’t believe in divorce! Do you know, my mum told me that I should wait until marriage to have sex because its apparently more pure that way?”

Harry’s head snapped up and he stared at Ginny with raised eyebrows. “Well,” he said calmly, “that ship sailed.” Ginny burst out laughing.

As her giggles petered out she said, “Sailed far far away. Anyway, my point is it’s a different time, we have radically different views, and I want totally different things out of my life. But, that does not mean I disapprove of her choices. She’s a great mum!”

“You just don’t intend to ever make her choices and that worries her,” Harry finished, “is that why you get so…uh, defensive…whenever she mentions babies or um, marriage and settling down?”

Ginny gave Harry a wry look, “Hermione has to be polite to her future mother-in-law, do you think she’d be so nice if her own mother kept dropping that many marriage hints?”

Harry laughed and shook his head, “I actually think the Grangers would be horrified if Ron and Hermione got married this year. They’re very intent on Hermione finishing her studies and establishing herself independently. There was a bit of a row when she moved to Stinchcombe.”

“That’s good advice for Ron too! Pity my mum won’t ever give it. Dad might, but he would wait for Ron to come to him first.” Ginny said jovially.

They reached the house. Harry unlocked the door with his wand and they walked inside. No one seemed to be around. George had dragged Ryan after breakfast to help him in the shop. Ron was likely picking up Hermione from her campus, he was nervous about her traveling alone. Ginny made a beeline for the ice box looking for something to nibble on. Frowning she looked over at the kitchen table, Harry tossed her an apple.

Grining he asked, “Did your mum really name you because of that book?”

“Yes. Apparently she fell in love with the name and also that it’s a name of Guinevere, yet another lovelorn girl marrying a powerful king who saves her. My mum the ridiculous romantic,” said Ginny dryly.

Harry laughed, “Whats special about a 7th child?”

“They’re supposed to have special powers or be ridiculously powerful. Shame, we only got Ginny. Can’t tell you how disappointed we’ve all been,” said Ron coming into the kitchen with Hermione.

Harry chuckled and ducked when an apple flew his way. Ron unfortunately, got pegged.

“Most of the stories usually tend to be about men. A lot of the 7th daughters get treated as sort of…erm, reproductive prizes,” Hermione said in her usual textbook manner. At Harry’s questioning look she added, “As in, the ‘girl’ the hero gets and because she is powerful magically, he or his children get that too. I think sometimes daughters are portrayed as soothing, ‘dutiful balms to their husbands heart’ was what I read. But there is very little definitive research or knowledge about the exact powers of 7th children other than they have high magical resonance.”
Ginny caught Harry’s eye and cocked an eyebrow, they were both thinking that a “A dutiful balm to a husband” was a largely understated euphemism for sex or knob jobs.

“Why are asking Harry?” asked Hermione looking curious.

“Ginny was telling me the story of The Carnelian Rose, apparently its Mrs. Weasley’s favorite book and one of the reasons for Ginny’s name,” said Harry not wanting to get into the full details about their inheritance conversation.

To Harry’s surprise Ron burst out laughing and began making faces at his sister. Ginny attempted to roll her eyes but grew faintly red. George walked in with Ryan and when he inquired about the laughter Ron said between peals of laughter, “Ginny recounted to Harry the story of the Carnelian Rose!”

George looked from Ron to the slightly flushed Ginny and then looked as if Christmas had come early. Harry saw the humor in Ginny’s name coming from the fanciful story Mrs. Weasley loved, but didn’t quite understand the siblings guffaws.

“Did you show him the book Ginny? Tell him Mum got it for your birthday? Did you tell him you’re named after the princess? That mum said it was fate?” Fred asked gleefully.

“Mum wanted her to take it to Hogwarts the next year!” Ron laughed out, “Thought Ginny could read it to Harry!”

Ginny rolled her eyes and made a rude gesture at her brothers and moved over to stiffly peck her boyfriend on the cheek. To Harry it was obvious they were both still smarting after their fight but attempting to put up good appearances.

“Is that the book you told Imogen was the worst birthday present ever?” Ryan asked, his smile didn’t quite reach his eyes, but Ginny glowed at his efforts.

“Well, I didn’t actually get it for my birthday, we were in Egypt then. She gave it to me two weeks after term ended my first year. Its absolutely huge too! And so ridiculously bound, and my mum kept going on and on about how its such a romantic tale and maybe it would help me feel better! I tried to leave it at home but mum forced it in my trunk before we left for school,” said Ginny smiling and rolling her eyes.

“That was mostly because were in the Leaky Cauldron and Percy was being obnoxious!” Ginny brushed off easily.

Harry had a sinking feeling he knew why the Weasley brothers were laughing and why Ginny had cried when her mother forced her to take the book to school. What did Ginny say the plot entailed?

*The evil warlock ends up trapping her in an enchanted chamber… Obviously, the hero meets all the random conditions, saves the princess…*

If she received the book when Percy was still around and they were at the Leaky…Ginny must’ve been twelve. The summer after her disastrous first year. No wonder Ginny had cried when she read the book. He didn’t doubt Mrs. Weasley thought it cute that Ginny’s eleven-year-old crush had saved her. Clearly the entire family knew. Ginny was probably mortified.
“I thought it was because, you said, all your birthdays growing up were bad,” Ryan said accusingly looking at Ron and George who were still mildly teetering. Hermione’s eyes flew to Ginny’s at this statement.

Ginny tried to shrug it off, “I didn’t say there were bad! Just subdued, quiet. There was a lot going on. I went to the Quidditch World Cup as a belated present for my 13th!”

“You said your family forgot your 15th, 16th, 17th, birthdays entirely! And that you spent your 14th cleaning!” Ryan accused.

The air seemed to leave the room, Ron and George stopped laughing and stared at Ginny. Hermione looked distressed at Ginny. Harry felt like a cold stone had been dropped in his stomach.

“Come off it! There was a war on! Besides we usually just have a nice dinner for family birthdays anyway! You’re making it out like I had some traumatic childhood!” Ginny said with what Harry thought was a forced laugh. Ryan seemed to mutter “Yes you did,” and Ginny shot him an annoyed look. In a detached sort of way Harry could admit that to an outsider, they all had traumatic childhoods.

“Why didn’t we celebrate your 15th birthday Gin? Or the year before at Grimmauld Place? Or your 17th?” Harry asked feeling hollow.

“Oh Honestly! As I said, there was a war on! Besides I’d say a trip to Egypt and the World Cup are rather grand presents!” Ginny protested, “My 17th was fine, Dad went with me to take my apparition test and we had a lovely lunch together at the Leaky on way home. And Fleur made a lovely dinner for mum, dad, and me! The MSE opened for the first time since the war the day before so it was very busy! Come off it!”

He very vividly remembered his 16th birthday, which had involved a lovely dinner and a great backyard Quidditch game. Ginny’s birthday was only eleven days later and Harry could not remember having gotten her a gift or even having celebrated. Admittedly Harry’s 17th birthday was a bit overcast but his 18th birthday had been surprisingly glorious, a celebration of life and the end of the War. Fleur had officially adopted her inner Mrs. Weasley that day as she went mad with cooking and hosted an outdoor party full of the remaining members of the Order and the DA. Ron and Hermione left to Australia the next day. With increasing horror Harry was pretty certain he had spent Ginny’s 17th birthday with Kingsley. She had only been able to celebrate with her parents and Fleur? Harry shared a horrified guilty look with Hermione and Ron.

Harry had been incredibly preoccupied with his trial at Grimmauld Place, but couldn’t recollect a birthday celebration for Ginny there either. She’d spent the day cleaning? Harry had known Ginny since she was eleven and had never given her a birthday present or a card until after the War, but she had always remembered his. In the privacy of his mind he could admit that he hadn’t even known Ginny’s birthdate until his 6th year. The Weasley’s had done such a lovely job showering him with love and presents on his birthdays- just eleven days before Ginny’s! Harry felt certain that Ginny’s unacknowledged birthdays were in some way his fault.

Harry could also begrudgingly admit and guess that her presents from her parents probably hadn’t been as lavish or nice as what other girls got. Ariadne shared one night over drinks that her 17th birthday had been like a dream. Her parents had treated her to shopping in Paris and dinner at a decadent restaurant with her friends. What had Ginny gotten when she came of age? A quaint meal of fish and chips at the Leaky? He’d always been aware of Ron’s frustrations with poverty,
but never really Ginny’s. Objectively as an adult he could see that the teenage Ginny of his memory did have less attractive clothing and far less jewelry than even Hermione. Had Ginny too wished for nicer clothes and…pretty things? Sure she disliked the old fashioned wizarding dresses Mrs. Weasley thrust upon her, and was overall miserable in the kitchen, but still.

Harry felt a sharp pang for the teenage Ginny. Ginny deserved nice things, pretty things, whatever she wanted really, the best! And Harry, who had a fortune to blow, hadn’t ever bothered to give her a half-way decent gift when they were together!

[1] Sunday evenings were always at the Burrow and of course Andromeda and Teddy were invited. Harry always apparated home with Teddy after, read to him and put him to sleep before apparating back to Stinchcombe. Teddy slept over at Stinchcombe on Wednesdays and if Harry wasn’t busy- Fridays too.
Ginny needed to work out if she was to leave in three days time and immediately start Quidditch practice again.

So, two days after her trip to the Chamber, Ginny woke up early and dressed morning workout. There was still an incredible amount to do in England and her family was still operating as the hub of all non-official activity, but she had to return to her classes and her team.

She crept outside into the garden and started on a slow jog to warm up.

She and Ryan had technically made up. They never properly argued before so their apology and make up had been stilted and echoing the “agree to disagree” conversational patterns from when they patiently argued or disagreed before. It was disproportional a response and make-up to the gravity of the fight and the intensity and hurt Ginny felt from Ryan’s anger and cutting remarks. Additionally, their previous disagreements, always small, were often followed by and forgotten about during makeup sex. Outside of the impossibility of this at the Burrow, Ginny also wasn’t entirely sure if they had really forgiven each other. She saw the shadows of doubt in Ryan’s eyes and the intense effort he made to be the perfect boyfriend now, overly cordial among her family. Her stings and bruises were still present and she knew in the depths of her heart that she couldn't go back to seeing Ryan house she did. She had thought he would know her enough, trust her enough, love her enough to not immediately accuse her of infidelity and brand her a harlot. Even in anger. Ryan insisted he loved her and Ginny did like him a lot too. He claimed that they would get back to normal once they returned home and were less stressed. While that was probably true, Ginny was uncomfortable about assuming America as home. Ginny also couldn't imagine her life that was so far removed from the Burrow and she couldn't unseen the ways in which Ryan had stuck out at the Burrow.

During the chilly spring pick up Quidditch game that even Hermione joined, Ryan resolutely stayed on the ground. Ginny winced at his looks of confused surprise at the earthy domestic chores or the money saving habits and practices. It wasn’t so much that he stuck out like a sore thumb, Luna did too in most environments, it was more that his edges and outlines within the tableau were very crisp and looked unlikely to ever blend.
Sighing, Ginny finished her run. She would sort through her relationship once she returned to Uni, it was too hard to do so here. It was also too difficult to properly row and assess clearly under the knowing eyes of her family and Harry.

Harry Potter. When she was honest with herself, when she looked past all her issues and fears about everything Harry meant and represented, she was downright impressed with Harry.

She had noticed his emergence as a strong responsible and powerful man after the war, but the power, surety, and grace seemed to have only grown. He was clearly under a lot of pressure and stress, working almost constantly in the aftermath of the attacks. But unlike immediately after the War, he was oddly more calm and refined in how he dealt with the fallout. He was making time for Teddy and not as emotionally and functionally overwhelmed as he had been immediately after the war.

He now had a deft grace and ability to manage and delegate. The dinner-time discussions were of a higher caliber, and she noticed, he now had the ability to silence a room by barely raising his voice. His posed questions too, and gained a Dumbledore-esq quality as he peered at placidly at his fellow Aurors or her brothers. He had always been quiet but now it seemed that everyone around him took a lot of his silence for time thinking and awaited his answers. Ron was right, he really was channeling Dumbledore sometimes. She also gained a healthy respect for his mind. It wasn’t like she thought him stupid before, but she could now appreciate his newfound analytical acumen, far different from Hermione’s.

He had clearly immediately realized the problems with her vault and thought through a solution. She had heard bits of his conversation with Hermione and was frankly impressed with the political perception, insight, and acumen. In the Chamber, going through the various Slytherin documents, she knew there was a wealth of information Harry Potter was parsing through, making connections with in his head that he hadn’t shared verbally. In some ways she was a little jealous. She had never been able to experience this Harry. Even if they had stayed together, Ginny didn’t think that she would have been able to share this facet of Harry. These facets of Harry were shared with Ron and Hermione, the Aurors, and other official people. Its not like he had ever shared such facets with her and would have probably continued that pattern. The reflection still smarted and she once again was filled with the wash of feelings and reasons for why she had broken up with Harry Potter.

On the other hand, she was pleasantly surprised by her trip with Harry to the Chamber. She had thought it would be incredibly emotionally trying. It had not been, but was instead oddly purging. The tumultuous part of the day had not been the physicality of the chamber but the fight with Harry. They too had made up and then gone on to have a startlingly emotionally open conversation. For all that Ryan was loquacious and Harry reserved, it was ironic that she had made up with Harry far less formally but with infinitely more words and heart than she had made up with Ryan.

She knew she had hurt him deeply when she had judged his mother. For all his formal exoneration of Snape and words, he was still wrestling with the man’s legacy. Harry had also hated that Ginny pointed out facets of his mum that Snape had known first. She was frankly surprised at the deep precision of his returning volley. Hermione (and Ginny) always said Harry was a sweet but often-oblivious boy when it came to social politics and girls.

But he oh, he knew Ginny.

He hadn’t even had to *think* about his comment. He probably unconsciously knew her bruises and insecurities and had lobbed his barb perfectly. They hadn’t explicitly said I forgive you, they hadn’t needed to like she and Ryan had. Instead she and Harry had talked their mums, apologized, and Ginny had confessed more about her mum-inspired angst and fears than she ever had with
anyone else. Harry seemed at peace by the time they had made up and even started teasing her, though she saw the look of forlorn sadness in his eyes when Ryan brought up her birthdays.

She was frustrated with Ryan for that. She knew that he had made the vicious point about her birthdays to later build up and better contrast how well he treated Ginny and how he remembered her birthdays. But, Ginny had thought this was a particularly cheap shot- especially since it only served to further emphasize how little Ryan actually got the War, her family’s poverty, and all the greater issues that plagued the summers before the war. Ginny was also annoyed that this build up had painted her as a petulant, ungrateful child who complained to her boyfriend about her past birthdays the first chance she got!

Ginny turned the corner from the paddock and was finishing her run when she saw Harry, Neville, and Ron emerging out of the back garden. They were dressed in their Auror fatigue pants and light sport t-shirts and were stretching languidly. They looked up surprised as Ginny jogged to a stop in front of them at the garden gate.

“Look at you already up and training!” Ron teased. Everyone knew Ginny was a notoriously late riser usually.

“Of course, people serious about fitness start before 8! I thought the Auror department actually worked its trainees!” Ginny joked back.

“That a challenge Weasley?” Harry shot back grinning and stretching his arms about head in a stretch.

His shirt rode up a bit and the movement emphasized his lean sculpted body. Ginny deliberately looked away and raised an eyebrow. Ron threw her an unimpressed look and said, “alright then lads, lets move,” and the three men formed into a line to began to jog.

Harry got in line behind Ron and as they passed Ginny said, “Try and keep up. But don’t worry we won’t take the mickey when you fall behind.” Gauntlet thrown, Ginny stuck her tongue out at him and fell in-line behind Neville.

The Auror run was pretty intense. The boys interrupted their run every 10 minutes to drop into 25 push-ups. Every third set gained an additional 25 jumping jacks. Ginny was in incredibly good shape and was used to pretty heavy cardio workouts, but she had already done her run and this was a second one without a break. Regardless, she was never one to back out from a challenge. Naturally, there was much ribbing as they ran and during their strength sets.

35 minutes in she was sweating heavily, puffing out her breath as she did her pushups.

“All that flying making you soft Ginny. Not spending enough time on the good hard ground!” Ron goaded.

Neville, “Do those press-ups look like they’re up to form Harry?” Ginny slammed her shoulder into him and nudged him out of the line when she finished her set and began running again.

She put on a burst of speed and overtook Harry and drew level with Ron. Of course, Harry added speed too and now outstripped her and Ron, prompting Ginny to push harder and beat Harry.

The remaining 20 minutes were brutal agony as Harry and Ginny spent each running segment attempting to outstrip the other. Harry quickened his press-up pace to get a running start on Ginny. Ginny muttered obscenities and criticized his form. Ron and Neville openly laughed at the competition and essentially bowed out, continuing their exercise at a normal pace and watching the antics.
Harry upped the ante and told her the last set of press-ups had to be either one handed, Aztec or diamond style. Ginny wasn’t sure what any of those were so she waited until Harry started. He did Aztec style, involving a jump, touching the toes between each press-up. She was behind Harry on this set, and discovered that this exercise was particularly difficult. She couldn’t help but notice the way the muscles in his arms clenched and contracted and wasted a precious half second staring.

Once she finished she put on her full spurt of speed and tore past Harry and slammed into the garden gate, the unofficial finish line.

Harry slapped his hand into the gate two seconds after her, laughing hard. (Well gasping really) She was doubled over the gate clutching it, breathing hard. She let go and flopped onto the ground still taking squawking breaths. Harry had his hands on his knees, he too was breathing hard and dripping sweat but grinning and gasping as he attempted to properly laugh.

“Met your match have you Potter?” rang out a voice coming out of the back door of the Burrow. A pretty blonde woman wearing track-suit bottoms and a sport top with her hair in a tight braid was walking out of the Burrow’s back door. Her athletic wear was emblazoned with the Auror Insignia.

Harry and Ginny were still too out of breath to respond. Ginny rolled over to her stomach and pushed herself up into her knees. Harry, still grinning broadly with the adrenaline and enthusiasm of their workout, gasped out, “Sharon, you’re early!”

“Yes, though I’m rather glad since I got to see this spectacle !” the woman whose name was Sharon replied gesturing to Harry and Ginny.

Ginny got off the ground and managed to stop gasping for breath. She grinned at Harry and with much dignity stated, “As I said, the Auror department really needs to work its trainees!”

Harry burst out laughing again and grinned back. Ginny couldn’t keep her lofty expression and burst into laughter as well. She couldn’t remember the last time she had seen Harry this silly and sweaty. (Possibly dragging his feat after Quidditch practice his 6th year so he could walk back to the castle chatting with her.)

“Both of you are mental, who gets this competitive so early in the morning? Look at the poor buggers, they’re too stupid to know morning running isn’t fun,” Ron grumbling coming to a stop at the gate himself. He turned to Sharon and said, “We still have our strength work out.”

“Oh Ron, you’re just upset Ginny can wipe the floor with you,” Harry said still grinning at Ginny. Ginny beamed.

The healers were right, exercise did release chemicals that made you ridiculously happy. She was out of breath, sticky with sweat, and DEFINITELY going to feel aches in her arms tomorrow but she couldn’t seem to stop smiling.

“Think you can hold your own with some sit ups and squats Gin?” Harry asked cock-sure. He knew from his days as Quidditch captain that Ginny would run for hours to get out of doing any sort of sit-ups. Unfortunately working one’s core was a crucial ingredient for balanced and dexterous flying.

“I already did my set,” Ginny replied airily and attempted to sashay away. Ron, Neville and Harry’s snort of disbelief hindered this exit. She introduced herself to the woman Sharon and escorted her inside asking if she wanted any tea.
Sharon, was actually Auror Sharon Miller. She was two years older than the boys at Hogwarts and was a cryptography and pattern specialist. Neville had apparently invited her over to further discuss something she was working on related to the Falmouth Attacks with Ron, Harry, and Hermione. She was very impressed with Ginny’s educational concentration and said she remembered Ginny’s hexing skills from Hogwarts. Hermione came down and she and Sharon greeted each other warmly and Hermione informed Ginny that Sharon was “one of the smartest witches in England!” (Incredibly high praise from Hermione)

After accepting the cup of tea Ginny made, Sharon and Hermione made to go back into the garden.

“They’re still doing their strength work out,” said Ginny confused.

“Of course they are, we’re going to go enjoy the show. Come on now, love!” Sharon said with an exaggerated lascivious wink inviting Ginny. Hermione, Ginny noticed, colored and giggled slightly in a very un-Hermione-ish manner.

“You’re just going to go stand in the grass and ogle them?” Ginny asked surprised.

“You’re just going to go stand in the grass and ogle them?” Sharon asked casually checking out Neville as he bent over.

“Anyone else joining us this morning Hermione?” Sharon asked casually checking out Neville as he bent over.

“No. Just us. I suppose Harry will fill in Ariadne…later,” Hermione said. Sharon turned to her and smiled knowingly.

“Still not a fan eh? Can’t say I blame you. She’s a great Auror but hard to work with and she doesn’t like you and you’re just aces so…” replied Sharon. She let out a dejected sigh, “you know it’s a pity Longbottom isn’t into the birds, I’d give an arm to just touch that arse.”

Hermione let out a giggle. Ginny was astonished and had snorted a bit of tea at Sharon’s statement.

She and Hermione rarely talked about boys in this manner, mostly because Hermione was shagging her brother and because Ginny felt too shy to share any randy thoughts with Hermione. Ginny and Hermione talked about boys, and clothes sometimes, and boys being stupid, and matter-of-fact relationship issues, but rarely giggly-randy thoughts. Neville, Dean and Seamus, or Demelza, sure but with Hermione it felt…different. Ginny was glad to see that Hermione and Sharon seemed to share that relationship though.

“He was rated for best arse on The Wall at Hogwarts,” said Hermione. Ginny and Sharon nodded.

“So was Potter. I’d give an arm to touch his too,” Sharon said mock wistfully. Ginny choked on her tea.

Hermione giggled again.

Sharon continued completely casually, “He got Hands That Make you Wet to Think About too on The Wall right? Susan Bones down in Potions & Pathology said their receptionist drools over that
picture of him shaking hands with the French finance Minister in *The Prophet*. Said the poor girl shared downright filthy ideas about Potters hands when Susan said she knew him.”

Ginny was busily choking on her tea but Hermione laughed and asked incredulously, “Seriously? What'd she expect? As if Susan’s going to pass that along to him?”

Sharon too was laughing and said playfully, “No idea- I nearly peed myself trying not to laugh when Susan told me, got a knack for impressions that one. Mind you, her fantasies were rather *dirty*, girl better watch out though, Ariadne is *scary*. I should tell her its far better to lust after Weasley’s shoulders and arms or stupid jokes. He’s too blindly in love with you to notice and you’re *nice*.” Hermione chuckled and playfully swatted Sharon.

Ginny wondered if Sharon knew that Hermione was responsible for Marietta Edgecombe’s still persistent acne. Ginny coughed attempting to dislodge a gulp of tea as it went down her windpipe. Hermione and Sharon turned to look at her and asked if she was okay.

Ginny feebly attempted to convey she was fine and asked, “Girls actually say that…openly…about Harry?”

Sharon and Hermione tilted their heads to catch a better view of Ron doing some pull-ups on the bar they had conjured and sighed. Ginny was a tad surprised Hermione didn’t mind Sharon’s ogling.

“Ginny, you know girls have always been after Harry! Romilda Vane didn’t even care when you were dating him, she straight out asked you what snogging him was like!” Hermione said.

Sharon’s head whipped around, “You dated Potter?” she asked surprised.

Sharon turned to Hermione and then asked, “This the bird you were saying was way better than Ariadne?”

at Hermione’s nod she turned back to Ginny assentingly, shook her head lamentably and said, “Damn, wish you two had stayed together. You seem a hell of a lot nicer than Ariadne.” Hermione rolled her eyes behind her.

Ginny was surprised, most girls who found out she dated Harry usually immediately pestered her for details, what was he like? What was he like in bed? What was he like as a kisser? Why did they break up? What types of girls did he like? Or they wondered what it would be like for *them* to date Harry. Sharon however was more concerned that Ariadne was not nice. Sharon was ogling Ron and Hermione did not seem to mind, but she was also ogling Harry and Neville. She didn’t seem to indicate she was into Harry but…

“Perhaps you should ask out Harry…” Ginny said casually but curious. Sharon and Hermione burst out laughing. Sharon shook her head.

“Bloke’s a beauty but so not my style, or at least once you get to know him. Bit of a dope really,” the blonde girl replied.

“Right, like you can talk,” said Hermione smiling and rolling her eyes.

Grinning and rolling her eyes back Sharon continued, “Besides, I tend to go for lads built like Weasley over there who tend to be a tad dodgy and super bad for me….or,” she paused and looked away from Ginny, “…lamentably the plump bear like types who are disgustingly proper.”

Behind her Hermione sniggered, “she’s lusting after Ernie Macmillan, he was at the Ministry Holiday party and they almost snagged, but then he left to France for work!”
Sharon blushed but nodded at Ginny. Ginny grinned at her and patted her shoulder. Sharon was a good sort Ginny decided. The girl clearly didn’t take herself too seriously and Harry had let her be good enough friends with him that she could deem (somewhat accurately in Ginny’s opinion) that Harry was a bit of a dope.

Ginny had no opinion of Ariadne other than mild jealousy at how unbelievably sexy she was, but liked that Sharon thought the notion of random girls lusting after Harry was hilarious rather than something to be defensive or competitive about. Ginny also liked that Sharon hadn’t resorted to any pettiness or cheap remarks about Harry’s girlfriend despite not liking her. She had simply stated that Ariadne was a bit scary and not very nice to Hermione. (Which in Ginny’s observation were all true facts)

Also, any girl who had brains like Hermione and was lusting after the equally clever but definitely not …flashy or conventionally attractive Ernie Macmillan despite the recreational ogling of Harry, Ron, and Neville clearly had her heart in the right place.

The conversation continued as the three girls continued to ogle the men until they were finished with their work out. Ginny felt some mild ethical dilemma forming in her head as she felt the familiar beginnings of the zinging she used to feel with Harry as she watched sweat drip down his back and the flex of his bum. The boys finished and turned to approach the women.

Deftly, the ladies changed their conversation.

“- And so I thought a pair of dark green tights might work well with the dress” said Sharon said skillfully changing her words mid-sentence from how Harry Potter annoyingly runs his hands through his hair during long meetings distracting Sharon’s trainee who can’t stop staring.

(Ginny privately sympathized with the trainee as she knew intimately what it was like to be distracted by Harry Potter’s lovely hands as they worked through his ridiculously lush locks of messy hair.)

With tears and hugs from Ginny, and thank yous exchanged for Ryan- Ginny and Ryan departed back to Boston three days later.

Ginny had lunch with her father at the ministry the day before she left, just the two of them. They mostly joked and talked about nothing, making fun of ridiculous people in the ministry cafeteria. The hobnobbing people who never said hello to her father before but now, since he was the head of a new important department and one of the most well connected men in the ministry, came by with oh-so-casual invitations for lunch and tea. Her father asked her if she is happy with her life and about her plans for the future.

Vaguely there were hints of concern that she would want to stay in Boston forever, and perhaps Ryan forever. Without explicitly saying it, her father conveyed to her that he would fully support her attempts for a professional Quidditch career. He also conveyed that her mother too, would be proud and that he would deal with and stem any…concerns and pestering Molly Weasley or Aunt Muriel may have about Professional Quidditch players having rather delayed and disjointed family planning. At the end of the lunch hour Ginny kissed her father on the cheek and sincerely told him
that she was in fact very happy with her life and that she loved him, and that she is so thankful for everything he has done for her.

Ginny and Ryan returned to America and immediately had to catch up on coursework and classes. Ginny in addition had Quidditch practice to make up, and new formations to learn. Ginny and Ryan rushed through a quick week of rehashing apologies, this time with make up sex, when they first returned. Amid all the catch up, Ginny doesn’t have time to be more intrepid about her relationship with Ryan or parse through all the thoughts and feelings that she experienced so profoundly at the Burrow.

Unconsciously, she and Ryan fall back into the same perfunctory pattern they had before; dinner together two nights a week followed by Ryan spending the night. She’s far too busy on weekends to attend parties or other events with him. Their bi-weekly meet ups mean they often spend time simply updating each other on things. They rarely get around to discussing them or anything of real substance.

Ryan never mentions the two-week excursion to England, or the row. To him, its like that chapter is over, sealed and shut. Ryan doesn’t even seem all that interested in following the news of the Falmouth Attacks, or the public vault hearings. Ginny scours newspapers for information and keeps a stream of correspondence with Hermione for information. She wakes early in the mornings to hear WWN broadcasts of the vault hearings and is thankful for Harry’s foresight in her vault matters as she listens to the complete shit-show they predictably turn out to be. Ginny also takes up a more permanent spot on the Accio, Boston staff, writing for the International affairs column. The research, writing, editing, and deadlines take up even more of her time.

Ginny’s life becomes so very busy, so very exciting, and so very fast paced that her relationship is a comforting and pedantic routine sprinkled in between. She finishes her second year solidly happy. She achieves an incredibly high scoring average, gaining attention within the league and some interest in the UK, decently good marks, and is super excited by the news that Demelza is to arrive in Boston for a year long fellowship the coming fall!

A few weeks before the end of term, Ginny’s friends convince her that she’s worked too hard to not enjoy herself a little and to join them for a few weeks at the beach. Ryan then asks her if she would postpone her summer trip to England and move in with him in his summer flat in Boston until August. He has a summer internship working for some Magical congressman. Ginny agrees, and feels only a little bad that her reasons are more to do with resume building and money saving than an overwhelming desire to be with Ryan.

Ginny’s favorite Transfiguration Professor asked her if she was free in the summer to help out twice a week taking notes during lab experiments. Her mum had been so excited about the opportunity and had stressed building up a non-Quidditch resume that Ginny had practically no choice but to take the internship. Besides, spending the summer in Boston means getting one-on-one morning practice with her Quidditch coach. As neither the internship nor the additional training pay a knut, moving in with Ryan to save on rent costs is an ideal solution. Finally, she figures moving in together will be a good test of their relationship which she feels is ‘good’ but could use some explorations and depth. When Ryan first asked her, Ginny mailed Hermione and Fleur for advice and she feels reassured that both her sisters-in-law agree with her fiscal and emotional rationalizations. Hermione even goes so far as to say that living with Ryan would be true test of compatibility. She does not explain the ‘living together’ bit when writing home to her parents about her summer plans. She idly realizes when writing her letter that despite being an adult, she still feels like she’s asking them for permission to stay in Boston. She’s of age and its her own money, what exactly can they do if they disagree?
The first two weeks of her summer vacation are bliss. She and her friends and respective
boyfriends and girlfriends go to a friend’s house on the cape. The friend is muggle-born so the
beach house is entirely muggle as are all the neighbors and people on the beach but it makes no
matter. It is two weeks of ridiculous beach fun; getting pissed on the beach late into the night,
splashing around in the water during the day, lazy sex at odd hours, sleeping-in till noon, and
partying with friends.

Ginny had never been so decadently carefree in her life. She sends pictures of her and her friends
on the beach to Neville, Luna, and Demelza deeming that they MUST engage in activities like this
upon her return. While Ginny and her friends had fond memories of lazing by the great lake at
Hogwarts, the reckless abandon and freedom that makes up her beach trip is a novelty. On a more
serious note, she writes to Luna saying that she feels sudden sharp pangs of guilt often. Guilt at
being so unconsciously carefree when her brother and Colin are still dead, Teddy's parents still
gone, and England still reeling and once again teetering economically. She can’t imagine Harry,
Ron, and Hermione being this stupidly carefree, living (however briefly) with such wild abandon,
and laughing so hard, and that makes her feel worse at nights alone with her thoughts. Irresponsible
Harry, Ron, and Hermione are actually being adults. Fixing a justice system,
attempting to find sixteen terror mongers, managing a proper country home, building a business
(Ron), and doing all they can socially and politically to unite the people and keep hope about the
economy alive.

Luna responds to Ginny’s guilt-laden letter in her usual vague ambient way. She declares that
Ginny's current enjoyment and exploration is meant to be. Misplaced sadness and guilt unlike
money and labor are of no affect. Luna posits instead that perhaps Ginny will end up teaching
Harry, Ron, and Hermione how to sit on a beach half naked, laughing and getting pissed.
"Laughter and merriment are just as vital as justice and peace” Luna writes in her closing.

Ginny and Ryan go back to Boston and move in together in Ryan’s flat overlooking the center of
the city, at the beginning of June. Ginny hides her mean thoughts that its not really Ryan’s flat, it’s
a flat bought and paid for by Ryan’s parents. But, then she supposes, Harry's Country Home was
also bought and paid for by his ancestral fortune. But the thought keeps swirling around in her
head and she can’t help but think that Its not the same, Harry is somehow more of an adult,
more...responsible? He has an income, a job…he paid for his flat before, Harry’s paying for the
restoration... All in all, she finds herself uncomfortable comparing the financial status of the two
men, though both wealthy, and gets prickly with discomfort when conversations about Ryan's flat
come up.

Ginny doesn’t pay rent because even Ryan doesn't pay rent. But Ginny demands all other fiscal
concerns be split evenly and seeks out a job. Note taking thrice a week at the Transfiguration Lab
and Chaser-Drills in the mornings don’t take up all her time, so Ginny finds employment as a
waitress at a Muggle café three afternoons a week. She feels its a great way to also better immerse
herself in Muggle culture. That summer, for the first time in ages Ginny finds herself with large
swathes of spare time with nothing to do. She’s obviously keeping herself busy with a part time
job, note taking at the Lab, and morning practice; but no revisions, no essays to write, no evening
practice to go to, and no particularly demanding social calendar, charity work to do. And most
guilty, no emotional or social trauma to bask in, the specter of the war, its aftermath, and the
various elements of Reconstruction are so very distant in sun-filled Boston.

She fills the random hours reading and writing.

She stumbles across the Grolier Poetry Book Shop and receives an invitation to a reading circle
with the owners. She buys a muggle cell phone to keep in contact and falls in love with the piece
of technology. She and the reading circle attend poetry readings across the city and meet up to
discuss the poetry and books they’ve read over tea once a week. She works up the nerve to write
some new poems and short stories to share with the group. After all, a few middle-aged muggles can’t possibly associate her with her previous misadventures in poetry.

Also new is how much time she and Ryan spend together now. Sharing a bedroom, meals, and seeing each other every day for hours is a marked increase. Weekends they have almost nothing to do but spend time in their apartment together. At first it is very exciting, the thrill of playing ‘house’ together and the possibility that they theoretically could have sex anytime.

But then, the thrill wears off.

It starts very slowly but they soon run out of things to say to each other. She thinks of her parents who are able to sit together in comfortable silence and wonders if this is what is happening.

It's not.

The silences are not comfortable. Growing up in the Burrow gave her a profound understanding of what a comfortable, loving, silence is. Even her own romantic experiences taught her how comforting sharing silence can be. Guiltily, she thinks of the warm sunlit days sitting under the shade of a tree by the lake at Hogwarts... running her hands through messy black hair without speaking…

Ginny hates the silence. Absolutely hates it a month into her summer when she and Ryan spend an entire dinner saying nothing to each other. Neither of them are boring and are clearly living experiences that they could share but have run out of steam and the desire to talk after just a few weeks of extensive proximity. Their sex life too declines. Or at least it does for Ginny. They never talk about it so she has no idea what its like for Ryan. After the first week of exploiting that they could have sex anywhere, they end up not touching each other than to kiss goodbye as Ryan leaves for his internship in the morning. It takes her another week to realize she’s bored. Once she has this thought she finds it a little less satisfying and little more perfunctory every time they do have sex, even when she orgasms. She observes that her ‘home’ life has become very automated. She finds herself looking forward to time with her poetry group and time out of the flat.

It starts out that on days they’re both tired, they snap at each other a bit more, and get a bit more brittle. By week five, it’s everyday and they never really make up or apologize for the snapping and the eye-rolls. Soon it becomes a slow simmer, an always-there annoyance. She wonders why she no longer sees the charming laughing man she fell for when she looks at him. She tries not to, but the image of him angry, petulant, and yelling at her like a spoilt child as he stood next to a somber, strong and powerful looking, adult Harry keeps cropping up in her mind. Issues that never bothered her before, start cropping up. She hates that he never offers to cook dinner, doesn’t really know how to properly clean- he can tidy and organize but has never actually scrubbed down an oven or sink without magic.

The percolating bitterness makes her notice his flaws and these small issues even more and more.

He complains at her dedication and commitment to Quidditch, doesn’t quite seem to get how dead-serious she is about playing professionally.

He is so casual with money in some ways but oddly judgmental about it in others it actually hurts.

She finds he’s not actually a charitable person.

Everyone who is a half-way decent person is charitable on a surface level and when its easy but it’s the deeper actions and the more holistic views that really matter and she finds it almost repulsive that he’s…not. A random, cluelessly ignorant comment about how everyone needs to "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" makes her dizzy with rage.
Due to an errant comment about “the mysterious boyfriend” from her muggle poetry group, she keenly realizes that they never go out as a couple to the amusements that are ‘her’ things.

He never deigns to read a piece of poetry or book she recommends.

She finds his dislike of hole-in-the-wall greasy burger joints insulting and vain.

She gets the sense he judges her for wanting to go to crazy clubs to dance, now that she’s in a serious relationship.

In light of these unflattering shades, its so much easier for her to see how little he fit in with her family.

He had teased her about a nubby Weasley jumper once, she had acknowledged the rough wool gave it a rather frumpy aesthetic at the time, but now the comment rankled.

Anytime she receives an Owl from her parents she finds it hard to un-see the ways in which her father and Ryan had assessed each other. Ryan had so obviously underestimated her father and overlooked him of being anything important. Just a quaint little man who had an odd little obsession with muggle gadgets, henpecked by his wife. Ginny finds herself wondering if Ryan had really respected her father at all? And if not, how did he asses others around them?

They get into a massive fight about her using the truffle oil he bought on a whim. Ginny had made parmesan fries as a side and had dressed them with the special bottle of truffle oil. She contributed to the groceries too, but considering he never once offered to cook a meal she thought it a bit ridiculous that he complained about how expensive the oil was. Not only was he ridiculously wealthy, but she used it for a meal he happily ate! She finds a lot of what he says during the fight shocking. His words tumble around in her mind, forcing her to assess and reassess his personality. She realizes that she searching for an overwhelming depth of character, a hearty altruism, and a great deal of nobility in his person. The realization is absolutely shocking and at the same time completely, depressingly, unsurprising.

Finally, over the nth fight about cooking duties and her Quidditch dreams, she snaps and their relationship comes to a screeching halt. In her fog she can reconstruct the fight, the straw that broke the camels back.

She accused him of never offering to cook and he retorted by saying he didn’t have time or energy since he worked. She bristled at the implication that she did not work. He asserted that his job was more demanding, tiring, and more of value and if she hated it so much, they could hire a cook. Ginny thought that was entirely besides the point and that his valuation of her work was incredibly insulting. From there the fight had deviated into many other arenas that had slowly been building but had never been discussed. Its revealed he doesn’t think Quidditch a respectable career for a wife of a Congressman or mum (He aspires to be working in the Magical Congress of course) and doesn’t think she is responsible enough with her life.

Ginny had reacted with immense rage when he first flung that comment. Later Ginny finds it particularly galling, absolutely galling that a gilded man-child such as himself could dare accuse her, a woman who lived through the atrocities and decisions of war and its after affects, of being irresponsible. She eventually spits out this sentiment to him and asks how he he can even get the words out without choking on the irony.

After two days of such fighting, saying things to each other they can never take back, words Ginny doesn’t even WANT to take back and is pretty sure she’ll never forgive…

They break up.
Incidentally after agreeing the relationship isn't working, that they are no longer 'in love', and that they need to end it, the situation becomes rather tearful. She mourns for the loss of time, for the loss of this idea of relationship she had, and loss of this man she thought could have been a stepping stone to everything she viewed as her end goal.

Ginny packs up, calls a friend a few hours away to come pick her up, and moves out. Ginny stays at her friends house for a week, being utterly numb and zooming around in a responsible overdrive. She wraps up her various responsibilities and commitments, sorts through her and Ryan’s things, writes his parents an overly polite thank you note for everything they have done, and frantically owls friends and contacts for an apartment to move into for the fall term. Because her previous plan of continuing to live with her boyfriend are now void. Demelza’s fellowship comes to the rescue and Ginny eagerly looks forward to being able to live with her Hogwarts friend.

At the end of the week she splurges on an international flow call directly to her father’s office, explains the situation in emotionless succinct tones and asks for a Portkey home ASAP. Her parents, though by no means rich, are no longer as poor as they were. (Not having to support multiple children at Hogwarts on a low-level salary and her father’s recent minister of muggle affairs appointment have gone a long way but she still feels guilty about the expenditure) Her father buys her an expensive last-minute Portkey for the next day and she is back in the warm embrace of the Burrow by mid-late July.

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The Burrow was oddly empty the day Ginny arrived home after her breakup. That evening she completely broke down to her parents in their bedroom, half ranting and half dejected about her failed relationship. She felt about eleven years old again as they hugged her and tucked her into their massive bed.

Ginny spent the next week alternating between zombie-like grief for her failed relationship and vicious frustration at Ryan while she pegged apples at the conjured goal posts in the orchard. She felt most betrayed by herself and the time wasted. She is distantly glad that her brothers are not around and immensely grateful Ron, Hermione, and Harry did not visit. Harry seeing her like this seems a little too much like failure.

The first few weeks back at the Burrow gave Ginny a new found appreciation for her mum. She is at first surprised how much her mum restrains herself about Ginny’s previous living arrangements (at first). Her mum of course was not suddenly cool with the idea of couples living together before marriage, or that Ginny had hidden that truth from her. But, the lack of admonishment and judgement was definitely a sign of forgiveness. Eventually, over late night hot cocoa, Molly told Ginny that she was proud of her, proud of Ginny’s ability to negotiate her exit gracefully, and that Ginny took responsibility for her actions. The conversation led Ginny to show her mother some of her personal poetry, sharing about her muggle poetry group, her Transfiguration term papers, and even some of her more thought-out professional Quidditch plans.

Being in the comfortable care of Molly Weasley was perfect. Perfect for about eight days. After roughly of week of crying and angry, frustrated Ginny, Molly decidedly pushed her daughter back into the social world. On the morning of day nine, a just-rolled-out-of-bed at noon Ginny was coolly informed that her friends Demelza, Luna, and Neville were arriving for lunch and that Ginny would probably not want to look so pathetic.

Lunch with her friends was the perfect balm for Ginny. They had lunch under the trees in the orchard and Ginny was able to confess to her closest friends all the pieces of her break up and relationship she couldn’t confess to her mum. Luna unsurprisingly is the friend to hit on the deeper
issues and analysis, with that uncomfortable tendency to blurt out the truths her audience may not yet be ready for.

“It’s a bit ironic isn’t it, you were so worried about falling into a relationship with Harry where you were just happy *enough* just content *enough* that you would lose yourself. I guess you didn’t realize that it could happen with someone else too,” she blonde girl said boring her protuberant eyes at Ginny, “Although I don’t think you lost any version of yourself or gave up on anything here Ginny, you fought it and that’s why your relationship ended. Ryan thought you would mold to him. You’re in no danger of that at all with anyone anymore I think.”

Ginny wasn’t quite ready to admit to the first part but easily agreed to the second. She no longer felt that restlessness or angst about ‘losing herself’ or not being able to live out her dreams, or accidentally becoming some caricatured version of her mum. She had changed a lot in the past two years even outside of Ryan and no longer had the same anxieties about her future she’d had after Hogwarts. She was surprisingly content and happy with the direction her career, her experiences, and opportunities were going despite the break up. She’d lived, *was* living and exploring and had gained the confidence and conviction to go out and do anything she set her mind to. Perhaps a confidence and conviction she always had but hadn't so thoroughly tested in this manner until recently.

Her afternoon with her closest friends was helpful in that by the time her friends departed she felt a more thorough sense of closure. She no longer felt her failed relationship was some stain upon her abilities but could now cogently speak about how she had learned from it. She was not suddenly happy again though. She still felt a small ache at the loss and a tad stupid for thinking that Ryan was her Mr. Perfect, her solution. She now knows that that story-book ideal she had constructed for herself was a false ideal. She also now wonders if she had perhaps constructed that ideal to divorce herself from the heartbreak and difficulty the War’s aftermath had brought on.

Her evening with her friends also brought her back into social life. Neville invited her to join him on a trip he was to take with Dean and Seamus to Paris. They were to leave the day after her birthday. Apparently, Dean was being wooed by The Louvre to paint a portrait of Harry. While the Boy Who Lived had not yet officially given his permission for the painting, he had blessed the trip as it consisted primarily of the museum extravagantly wooing Dean. Excited by the prospect of reconnecting with her friends and travel Ginny easily accepted the invitation and asked for Luna and Demelza to come along. Luna already had exotic travel plans but Demelza agreed.

As the trip was not for another few weeks, Ginny decided to keep herself busy to avoid the maudlin and neurotic reassessing of all the flaws and cracks of her former relationship. Also, while she and her mother had come to a new plateau of mother-daughter understanding, Molly Weasley’s subtle urgings to look at prospective jobs and not-so-subtle comparisons to Harry were slowly driving her crazy.

The solution, ironically, is provided by The Chosen One himself, though he doesn’t know it. Harry’s birthday was coming and Molly of course insisted on throwing a lavish dinner at the Burrow. Ginny felt that Harry deserved, at least once in his life, a more youthful, rambunctious, party. She therefore kept herself occupied by conspiring with Ron to throw Harry a surprise party at Stinchcombe.

Harry is not around, gone on a mission with Neville and Sharon gathering information on the Falmouth Attackers network. It is therefore ridiculously easy to prepr for the party as they are all promised to return only days before both planned parties.

Planning and working with Ron is, oddly, a new experience for Ginny. Ginny realized that she and her brother were learning to interact with each other as ‘friends’ instead of siblings. Ginny had always been closer with the twins after she entered Hogwarts. She and Ron had been best friends
before Ron discovered Harry. After, Ron had spent so much of his life at Hogwarts and after being a part of Harry and Hermione that Ginny and Ron had never quite bonded as adults.

It was comforting and interesting to discover the adult man her brother had become and watch him realize the adult she had become. They discussed her back-up careers and the various issues to parse out in professional Quidditch. They joked as only siblings can about the various concerns their mother had about Ginny ‘never getting married,’ and ‘becoming’ a lesbian if she became a Quidditch player, but also more legitimate concerns. The Adult Ron was astonishingly good at understanding Ginny’s legitimate concerns- something Ginny had not anticipated.

He was not explicitly aware of the details of in pay-grade, recruitment, and sponsorships for female players but acknowledged its problematic existence and was able to cogently discuss how it would affect Ginny.

“This is such a reason not to play though,” Ron assured her, “I get that you’re worried about security and stability, and scandal affecting your contract if you get a spot. The best thing to do if you get selected is to go at it on the defensive. Get a Lawyer.”

At Ginny’s smirk he rolled his eyes,

“I realize that’s turning into my go to answer these days because of ‘Moine, but seriously, I mean it. Should you get picked, going into negotiations well-researched on the contracts offered and with a good solicitor playing defense for you is the best option. Its a business negotiation pure and simple. Its like chess and you need to treat yourself as a private enterprise in that situation. Talk to Fleur to make it look like you’re not being an arrogant tosspot or whatever on the media front and interviews, but have a solid strategy in place before you get to the table.”

Ginny was very impressed with her brother’s business advice and strategy. She was glad she was getting to know the Adult Ron, and also that the Adult Ron was so stridently sophisticated and confident in voicing his ideas. He had certainly walked out of the shadows of his demons and was now strutting.

“This doesn’t solve my other issues though! Female Quidditch players are notoriously single because it’s really hard to find time for a relationship and they get so much crap about being slags if they are seen kissing a bloke. You know that’s one the reason Mum’s uncomfortable with it, even though she won’t say it! And...I guess I am too,” Ginny whined.

“You don’t actually care if some rag calls you slag do you? I mean I thought you were all about challenging notions of purity and saying its nobody’s business who you snog! You lived in sin with your boyfriend, I'm sure mum's over it,” Ron responded cocking an eyebrow.

“Oh she most definitely is not. You know its guilt by a thousand cuts with her! Anyways, it’s a bit different if the press is up my arse every time I so much as go to dinner with a bloke! And then they care more about whose touching my bits than my scoring average! Its a hard line to negotiate, especially if my personal life affects sponsorships! Also I do want to get married someday and have children! What bloke is going to put up with the crazy press and...how would I protect my hypothetical children?” Ginny countered.

Ron raised his eyebrows and grinned, “You realize you’re preaching to entirely wrong audience here right? You don’t think we haven’t wondered the same? ‘Mione deals with all that sexist shit all the time, and the press runs some article insinuating that Harry, ‘Mione, and I are part of some salacious threesome pretty much every other month.”

“Still?” Ginny asked momentarily distracted, “You would think they’d have realized by now that Harry’s with that Ariadne!”
“Erm.” Ron flushed and looked away uncomfortably.

“Is that…not a thing we discuss?” Ginny asked confused.

“Uh. Well definitely not to the Press or anyone knowing about it and um, well…they might not be…together anymore. Not sure, really,” said Ron looking distinctly uncomfortable.

“How do you not know? You’re his best mate! What happened?” Ginny demanded

“Dunno. We just don’t talk about that stuff, never have. Besides you know what he’s like, totally tight lipped about that sort of thing!” Ron shot back.

“But isn’t she also your partner?!? Won’t that make it weird?” Ginny asked perversely fascinated.

“No, He doesn’t talk about it all, so I’m thinking no it wont be weird. At least it wasn't weird the last time. He didn’t talk about it when my sister dumped him,” said Ron pointedly.

“Oh,” said Ginny feeling unexpectedly guilty, “that was…more of a mutual decision.”

Ron threw her an extremely unexpectedly guilty, “that was…more of a mutual decision.”

Ron threw her an extremely skeptical look. Ginny looked at him in surprise that he would doubt her. Ron shrugged and claimed he didn’t want to get into it.

“Look, this is weird, I don’t want to …blame you or anything. I mean clearly you’ve both moved on but…he’s my best mate yeah? I worry about him and I know you’re my sister but you’ve got other brothers and stuff, he’s only got me and ‘Mione.” Ron finished firmly, “Besides, its not like you’re ever gonna date anyone better than him.”

Ginny ignored Ron's comment about Harry and tried to question her brother more about the potentially awkward Auror Partner situation but gets very little information. They two siblings continued making arrangements for the surprise party to celebrate Harry’s 20th.

The siblings go down to the pub to order casks of oak-matured mead (Harry’s favorite), but Ginny insisted they also buy healthy helpings of vodka, firewhiskey, and scotch. As they make their trips carrying the barrels of drink and bottles back to the house, Ron reveals to Ginny that he is thinking of quitting the Aurors.

Harry and Ron had just officially graduated from the Academy in May and Ron had the highest written scores. (Harry had second highest but his practical exam results were the highest in a century) So to say Ginny was surprised is an understatement.

Ron describes to her the mini-break down he had recently due to stress and lack of sleep. No one other than Hermione knew about this apparently. Ron had taken on responsibilities at the shop with George right after the war. He still technically worked there thrice a week and as many hours as he could put in on the weekends. After the Falmouth Attacks Ron had taken a bit of a hiatus from the shop as the Aurors had needed all hands on deck. Now that the investigation has turned into a long serious research and network discovery mission, Ron had recommitted to his hours at the shop. Unfortunately, according to Ron, the shop was in some dire need of redirection and managerial restructuring.

To Ginny it seemed that Ron was also significantly more invested in the books and projections for the shops finances than George. Apparently Ron was recently spending nights sleepless, configuring the books and worrying about the shops financial state. His lack of sleep, increased hours at both the shop (unofficially) and as an Auror had caused him and Hermione to have some pretty serious fights and eventually, a bit of a break down for Ron.
Ron showed Ginny his notebook where he had written down various ideas he’d had for the shop. He confessed that he saw a future in ministry contracts and defensive gadgets especially since he now realized how little equipment the Aurors and the MLE actually had. Despite his various ideas, he hadn’t felt comfortable taking any of this to George and also had not had the time to really sketch out these ideas more fully.

“The investigation is going very slowly and the department is almost fully re-staffed so maybe I can take a leave of absence,” said Ron looking worried, “I mean maybe a few months and I can get the finances at the shop back in order and get George to look at some of these ideas…But I don’t want to abandon Harry.”

“Ron, have you told George his books are in disarray? Does he know you’re thinking about this at all?” Ginny asked concerned.

“Oh well, its not really my place is it! I mean I’m just helping out, it was his and Fred’s dream. I mean I still really like being an Auror. I think he’d think I was trying to take Fred’s place…” replied Ron getting more and more uncomfortable.

“Ron! You have put in so much time and effort at that place, of course you have some say in it! I’m pretty sure George would have lost the shop that first year if it weren’t for you and Perce!” Ginny said fiercely.

It hurt her to know that her brother, who had literally spent his entire life putting everyone and everything before him, constantly being ‘second,’ didn’t think he deserved to be heard in a shop he very clearly had come to care about. It seemed to Ginny that George was also carrying on as if Ron was not an equal partner in the business, but simply an employee, doing a ridiculous amount of work. Leaving administrative duties and innovation gaps for the memory of a dead man was the absolute last thing Fred would have wanted.

“You need to talk to George! You need to tell him everything you just told me! If you’re actually thinking of extended leave from the Aurors…Ron, that’s pretty serious!” said Ginny.

Ron nodded but still seemed hesitant, “Hermione said the same thing. Said to call Dad to mediate, but you don’t think…you don’t think its stupid?”

Ginny rolled her eyes, “No I don’t think its stupid, some of your defensive and law enforcement gadgets are pretty amazing and needed! If you think you can keep the shop afloat and make a profit that’s great! But will you be happy leaving the Aurors?”

“Well…I hope to go back. I actually liked studying the strategies, it was like Quidditch and Chess. But right now I’m losing sleep over the shop’s finances…” said Ron.

“You need to have that talk with George! But Hermione's wrong, don't ask Dad to mediate if it gets to that, ask Percy or Charlie. Bill and Dad are bad choices on that front, Percy will be less emotional,” said Ginny.

The conversation progressed and eventually touched on her break up with Ryan.

Ron of course, categorically asserted that he hadn’t liked him. After some mutual teasing Ginny found herself confiding about her discomfort with the wealth disparity that had existed between her and Ryan.

“I know what you mean- a little- about the money thing,” said Ron seriously, “I worry about the differences in how Hermione and I grew up and the small differences in the things we value and spend on. She’s a lot more sophisticated than me and I wonder how I’m going to afford the type
of life she grew up in for our sprogs.”

Ginny was a little thrown at her brothers visceral honesty about his concerns for the future. His casual acknowledgement that he would be having children with Hermione made Ginny grin though.

“If it was just that he grew up rich it may have been okay,” said Ginny returning to her main point, “But it was more that he was so completely clueless and careless to how arrogant he sounded sometimes, or how condescending he was, or how he assumed so much shit, and okay, a little sexist. He wasn't a bad guy but he wasn't...a truly good guy and I dunno… its weird how much you find out about someone when you live with them…”

Ron sighed and drew her into one-armed hug. He then quirked a smile and said, “Yea…did you know that Harry watches telly and drinks tea like an old lady?”

“What?” said Ginny.

“Yea he and 'Mione get all cocooned in quilts and make mugs and mugs of tea and just nest on the sofa watching period dramas or programs only mum would like”

“Seriously?” Ginny asked rather suspect. She knew exactly the kind of shows Hermione had a not-so-secret weakness for, Ron grinned and nodded.

“Are you telling me The Chosen One sits around watching Pride and Prejudice and drinking tea with his best friend in his down time?”

“I think they’re starting Wives & Daughters right now, they just finished The Scarlet Pimpernel last week,” said Ron looking absolutely ecstatic to be confiding this secret.

“No!” Ginny breathed out in horrified glee.

“Yea I can’t tell you how weird it is to hear him tell me I’m Gilbert to Hermione’s Anne of Green Gables while we’re sparring…” said Ron grinning,

“Does the Auror department know?” Ginny breathed horrifically fascinated and elated.

“Nah, gotta keep it a secret. Hermione would literally kill me if she lost her telly buddy because he got too embarrassed.”

Ginny thought this was adorably cute but didn’t exclaim on it because she was sure Ron would read too into any comment she made about Harry. She could admit she was...uncomfortable with Ron’s declaration that she would never date anyone better than Harry. The comment circled back to the realization she had when contemplating Ryan's flaws. How she was looking for that depth of pure goodness and nobility. Setting those thoughts aside, she laughed with Ron and they mused at their ridiculous friends and prepared for Harry’s surprise party.

Harry’s surprise birthday party turned out very well and Ginny was proud of her work.

Harry was incredibly surprised and could be heard laughing hard or seen grinning happily throughout the party.

Ginny’s insistence on the variety of drinks, music, and locking up all the nicer china and heirlooms turned out to be a smart idea. The party got wilder and wilder as the house filled up with most of former Gryffindor House, various other house friends, many of Ron and Harry’s
Auror comrades, and some of the girls from Hermione’s law course. Lavender and Parvati walked in with a massive tiered cake adorned with magical trick candles. Ginny, Dean, and Demelza cleared the solarium-sitting room and started an impromptu dance-floor by charming an old record-player.

Soon Ginny and others were jumping and wildly dancing on the crowded dance floor as music blasted. Luna, dancing oddly in her own world, even got a usually too self-conscious Harry to join in on the dancing. His blush and dis-coordinated dance moves were stupidly cute. He was nowhere near pissed enough decided Ginny watching his adorable dancing. She also thought of her time on the beach earlier this summer. Though gratified Harry was clearly having a good time at his party, she tipsily wondered if she would ever have the chance to teach him how to get ridiculously irresponsible enough to get pissed in the middle of the day, dance at parties sober, and laze about on the beach.

Some time after midnight Sharon and Ginny ended up drawing the crowd into a rowdy, loud, and drunken game of trivial pursuit, where answers and mistakes were rewarded with shots of whiskey or mead. Naturally, Hermione’s team won. The party wound down in the early hours of the morning, by which time a rarely seen Tipsy Harry Potter emerged. Harry hugged many of his guests as they left, effusively thanking them for the surprise. Harry, Ginny noticed, was a surprisingly sweet and earnest drunk. His earnest speech saying how glad he was to be good friends with Lavender and Parvati as he bid them good bye caused the two girls to tear up and kiss him on the cheek.

Pretty soon only Ron, Hermione, Harry, and Ginny remained in the utterly trashed house. Hermione, easily the most sober of the four, stood with her hands on her hips as Ron recounted some truly filthy jokes to a tittering Harry and Ginny. Harry and Ginny were, in Ginny’s opinion, reclined elegantly on the floor. Hermione waved her wand and cursorily cleaned the immediate area and forced Ron up to bed with a glass of water, urging Ginny to be responsible and spend the night in one of the extra bedrooms instead of apparating drunk.

There was a small silence after Ron and Hermione departed and Ginny, still on the floor, turned to look at Harry who was also still on the floor on his back with his head nested in his hands. He was smiling to himself staring at the windowed living room wall.

“What are you smiling about?” Ginny asked moving closer.

“What? Nothing. Everything. Just Happy.” replied Harry softly. His eyes were very bright and his lips very pink.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you this pissed,” said Ginny fascinated by the curvature of his lips and how very pink they were. She had never seen Harry drink period. Their time together had always been dominated by more important things. Harry turned his head on his side to stare at her and frowned.

“I’m not pissed! You’re pissed”

Ginny knew she wasn’t pissed. She scoffed and moved a little closer. If she were truly pissed she thought, she would be rubbing her face in Harry’s t-shirt, trying to find where the amazing smell she found emanating from him all evening was coming from. Was he using new washing liquid? No, she certainly wasn’t pissed.

“I’m sorry about your boyfriend,” Harry said suddenly. “Ryan. I’m sorry you’re sad.” He looked at her and looked genuinely upset about her break up.

Ginny shrugged, “Don’t be, it wasn’t meant to be. I was sad. I’m better now.”
“Neville said you loved him,” Harry insisted.

Ginny sighed. “I thought I did, it made sense at the time.”

“He was boring. He wasn’t funny,” Harry said boldly and then looked startled that he had blurted that and stared at Ginny in shock. Ginny stared back in shock too, but then a few seconds later, giggled.

Harry giggled back and they stared at each other stupidly giggling for a minute.

“Yea, he wasn’t funny. Not really. Ron said you broke up too,” Ginny said. That was not what she wanted to say, she had wanted to say she was sorry to hear that or something profound and mature, except she wasn’t sorry. Not really. She had no opinion on Ariadne but it seemed very important right now that Harry not date someone like her. She was too sexy.

“Oh. Yea,” Harry chuckled and then shook his head, “No, that was my fault,” he said.

“No! You’re Harry” Ginny said vehemently. She really had no idea what she meant by that but was somehow convinced that Harry was not in the wrong. It wasn’t his fault when she broke up with him so it certainly wasn’t his fault now!

Harry looked at her carefully, “We should probably drink some water. No, Ariadne’s time here was ending and she was set to go back to France and she thought I would ask her to stay or something. I didn’t. I didn’t do anything, she was pretty upset.”

“Well did she ask you? Women, am I right? You can’t know what’s in her head!” Ginny responded overly sagely pushing herself up into sitting position, she scrounged around for an empty mead bottle and peered into it. She pulled out her wand and attempted to fill the bottle with water.

Harry’s chuckle rumbled deep and low from his chest and Ginny shivered. Harry also got up to sit, he grabbed the bottle from her and filled it with water, took a deep swig and gave it back to her.

“No she didn’t ask me. But…she told me she loved me,” Harry said blushing scarlet and looking at Ginny’s knee.

Ginny who was taking a swig of water spluttered. She handed Harry the bottle and stared up at him wide-eyed.

“What did you say?”

“I said ‘oh.’ I think I said ‘thank you’ later,” Harry confided looking also rather wide-eyed.

Ginny stared at him. A few seconds passed. Ginny burst out laughing.

“You said ‘thank you?’ why didn’t you say I love you back!” Ginny asked incredulous

“Because! What else was I supposed to say? I…don’t. Love her, I mean.” Harry said defensively and then added hastily, “I mean I liked her, a lot and all that but…”

“You just say it- wait what?” Ginny said thrown

“You just say it? Is that what you do?!! You can’t just say it!” Harry responded looking aghast.

“How do you know you don’t love her?” Ginny countered waving the bottle of water in his nose. He plucked it from her hand and took a swig.
“I know,” he said firmly

“You do? Really? How? I...I told Ryan I loved him and I was wrong,” Ginny said sighing as she grabbed the bottle. It was true. Her experiences with love, romantic love outside of Ryan were so saturated in fear, anxiety, and worry, she wasn't entirely sure what 'normal' love felt like.

“Maybe you just said it back because he said it,” Harry retorted with raised eyebrows.

“I didn’t just say it back! I--” Ginny cut herself off with a startled expression.

Did she just say it back? When did Ryan and she first start saying I love you to each other? Was it just something that slipped in? Like “Have a nice day?” When was it exactly that she decided she had fallen in love with Ryan? She couldn’t really remember. Did she actually decide she loved Ryan? Or had that simply been assumed by him and everyone around her?

“Bleargh,” Ginny exclaimed and slid back down onto the floor. She looked up at Harry cringing slightly. Harry looked down at her with a knowing expression.

“Ron’s right, you do talk to much, is that what happened? You were talking and talking and talking and got over excited and you didn’t know what was happening? Talking so much you didn’t even know it slipped out? Its okay Gin, I’m sure we can find you help for your condition,” Harry stated overly kindly as if speaking to small child.

“Shut up,” Ginny said and stuck her tongue out. Harry stuck his tongue out at her too grinning. She poked his thigh, which was at her face level. He slid down onto his back again and poked her thigh.

“You’re a poop.” Ginny said. Harry huffed a laugh.

“And you, an eloquent University educated Witch. Mind, you did date Ryan who was so dull so clearly you’re not learning much over there. Or maybe you’ve taken a few too many bludger hits?” Harry said.

Ginny made a rude gesture causing Harry to snort.

“Well you,” Ginny began, “You dated Ariadne who…who…” Ginny didn’t really have anything to say, she didn’t really know the woman at all. “who is too tall,” she finished lamely. Harry shouldn’t date such tall women Ginny thought decisively. So what if they had long sexy legs that went the length of Ginny's entire body...

Harry snickered harder.

He rolled on to his side and propped his elbow and rested his head in his hand.

Ginnys eyes followed the curve of his shoulder, the bulge of his bicep, and the line of his tan arm upto his long articulate fingers nestled in his untidy hair. She felt an inexplicable desire to follow the path with her tongue and a sudden bolt of arousal. When had he gotten so comfortably man-like? She yanked her eyes away and looked at Harry’s face and said,

“So.”

“So,” he countered grinning warmly, “what is Ginevra Molly Weasley going to do now? Who is your next victim?”

“Victim!” Ginny spluttered. “Please, you’re the one leaving a trail of devastation and heartbreak!” Ginny said rolling her eyes.
Harry looked at her with a soft expression she couldn’t quite read and with a soft smile shook his head.

Ginny was suddenly very conscious of the fact that she was probably quite flushed from all the whiskey she had consumed and that her hair was a mess. “You could always date Dean, you two seem to get on so well.” Harry said softly

“Hah!” Ginny squawked. Harry looked a bit startled at her loud and inelegant response and raised his eyebrows in question.

“Dean and I dated because it was something to do and because…” she blushed

“Because you’re both ridiculously fit,” Harry finished smirking and rolling his eyes.

“**Because you were unavailable…so. Anyway after sharing a dorm for a year he’s like another Demelza. No, no, I think I’ve sworn off men. No more men. Just Quidditch,”** declared Ginny.

Harry stared down at her still smiling with another unreadable expression.

“I mean, I’ll miss the sex. Obviously,” Ginny equivocated after a few beats of silence unsure how to interpret Harry’s expression and getting too warm as she looked into his eyes.

“Obviously,” responded Harry dryly.

“Well not for you. you’re Harry Potter, you could catch a shag whenever you bloody well wanted!” Ginny said

“Catch-a-shag, honestly does your mother know you talk like this?” Harry muttered.

Ginny rolled her eyes and continued on blithely in a dramatic tone, “But me, oh not me! I’ll waste away like the Silent Witches of Ipswitch no touch of man to distract me, but I’ll carry on, for Quidditch!”

“For Quidditch,” intoned Harry solemnly. They both stared at each other keeping their somber expressions and then at the same time burst into giggles.

Once they recovered from their laughter Harry moved his body a tad closer to hers and asked, “So you’ll be trying out for the Harpies then?”

“Yea- How’d you..” Harry cut her off with an exasperated incredulous look and said dryly “I did spend a good amount of time in your room you know, its only just covered in Harpies posters.”

“Used your Auror skills did you?” Ginny asked cheekily. Harry ignored her. Ginny continued, “So, what about you?”

“What about me?”

“What next for you? You’re an Auror now- what else?”

Harry looked at her puzzled and then shrugged, “What else- I’m an Auror, I’m happy. I have a home, and Ron and Hermione…”

“But what else? What did you want to do before being an Auror or after Hogwarts before the War? Like I dunno, go travel? Visit Brazil- meet that snake you freed!” Ginny asked curious.

Harry laughed softly and shrugged, looking above into the fireplace he said almost dreamily, “I
“No, I mean before that, before the boring happily ever after things. I mean like random other stuff, the crazy stuff.” Ginny insisted.

Harry gazed back at Ginny and smiled indulgently and said softly “Gin, I didn’t think I’d live past 17 and if I did, when I was younger all I wanted was home and family- my life is crazy, was crazy- getting married and having kids isn’t boring for me. Its what I didn’t think I’d ever get to do”

Ginny felt like an ass.

She huffed mildly and said, “I didn’t mean it like that. I just meant…now that you know you’re not going to die and you know we love you and have this great house and the happily ever after is gaureeneteed, you can think about the stupid stuff.”

“The stupid stuff.”

“Yea,” said Ginny bouncing back slightly from feeling like an asshole, “like…do you prefer Chinese food or Thai food? Have a long introspective conversation with that snake! Do you like Alpine skiing? Or…I dunno, develop an exotic fruit fetish!”

“An exotic fruit fetish?” Harry said in a deadpan, “and that would be what? Wanting them rubbed all over me during sex or something?”

“I didn’t say sexual fruit fetish!” Ginny said flushing. She suddenly had a very vivid vision of a naked Harry being slathered in mango juice. “Just, you could develop a great love for exotic fruit!...EATING them I mean.”

“How is that different from being a fruit enthusiast?” Harry asked seriously though the beginings of a grin were on his face.

“Oh this is beside the point! You know what my point is!” Ginny said color still high on her cheeks in an exasperated tone. Harry was openly laughing at her now and she too was losing the battle to look serious.

They grinned at each other stupidly. Again.

After a few beats Harry said softly,

“I don’t have a list Gin.”

“What?”

“I don’t…I don’t have a list like you do.”

“How do you-- ”

“Neville said you had this list, of all the random things you wanted to accomplish in your life,” Harry said quietly and then with a smile added, “all the things you wanted to do before ‘settling down’.”

“Oh that bit was a little juvenile, I wrote most of it when I was 14 after a fight with my mum. But some parts of it…After the war McGonagall was freaking me out with all these life options and I-- I” Ginny stared up at Harry and took a deep breath.
His eyes truly were mesmerizing she thought idly in the back of her mind. Maybe that’s why she always found herself having stupid yet terrifying confession sessions with him. Talking about her feelings and issues. The last time she was home she’s blurted out all her angst about her mum and motherhood to him! He was a surprisingly patient listener though....

“I don’t have some higher calling like you,” She continued after her breath.

He looked like he was going to argue so she pressed on, “No, I didn’t have anything I just knew I wanted to be like you or Hermione or Charlie. I mean Quidditch, but I didn’t want to play for the clubs or on reserve. And also not gaurenteed. So when McGonagall and Hooch told me about all these options I freaked out and ending up consulting this stupid list I made when I was 14 as some deluded effort to take control of my life.”

“Its not deluded, Luna said it had some serious stuff but also all these things you wanted to experience in your life. That’s pretty impressive,” Harry said his voice still rumbling softly.

“Oh. Well yea, I mean it had Quidditch stuff and Uni stuff but also a ton of travel stuff. I... we were poor... so other than visiting Bill that one time its not like we ever traveled anywhere. I would read about all these great places in books and all these cool things in the world and just…” Ginny trailed off and looked up semi-anguished at Harry willing him to understand.

“I get it,” he said, “Well, maybe not entirely or exactly but you want to travel and see and do loads things you never had a chance to before. Things that you’ve only heard of. You’re afraid that if you don’t do it now it’ll get put off and then you’ll never do it, especially with a family because you don’t think anyone else in your life will get it.”

Ginny gaped and nodded.

She stared at Harry in wonder drinking him in; his elegant brow, his straight nose, his to-die-for cheekbones, and his strong jaw and gentle chin. She had always thought he was beautiful but he had truly grown into it by 16 and seemed to only be getting better looking. (Or at least now the rest of the world agreed with her 12 year old notions)

He was looking at her with the softest of smiles and looked indecisive about saying something. He shook his head in the slightest of shakes and dropped his propped arm and rolled onto his back, a hand on his stomach and one under his head.

“On Holiday,” he murmured.

“What?”

“To go away, on holiday. That was something I used to hear of and never got to do before,” Harry glanced at Ginny and said,

“The children at my primary school used to share about going on holiday with their families- to the beach, or some town, or somewhere on the continent. The Dursley’s are pretty xenophobic but used to go on holiday to Brighton or Yorkshire or visit Aunt Marge and leave me with Mrs. Figg. I guess doing a holiday like that would be on my list.”

Ginny wasn’t sure if it was the excess of sugar and spirits she’d consumed all day or the smell she had felt enveloped in for the past few hours, but she suddenly wanted to cry and also burrow into Harry’s t-shirt. A simple holiday. Damn this boy.

“So go on holiday,” she whispered.

She was afraid to speak louder or her voice would crack and she would cry.
“Go to the Cotswolds, walk around the Lake District, I’m sure the little old ladies running bed and breakfasts in Yorkshire would love to have you! Go on a holiday,” Ginny whispered fiercely.

“Maybe I will,” Harry whispered back.

They continued to converse in whispers planning out hypothetical quaint English holidays.

Harry asked her about some of the places she wanted to travel to and she found herself telling him about some of her favorite books growing up and the locations they inspired in her to travel to. She even went so far as to tell him about the heroines she admired in books, how she always feared their lives and accomplishments would be out of reach for her.

He listened to her book recommendations avidly and she learned that his primary refuge in the summers as a child was at the local library. (The librarian was nice and Dudley hated books) She listened to the dreams he had conjured up from books and the aspirations he had had before he learnt about magic.

Somehow, they fell asleep discussing books, travel, and favorite children’s literature.

Ginny was having the most pleasant dream.

She was swimming through a warm lake of the most heavenly scent, some strange mixture of sandalwood and anise. She was following a phoenix and the water under her was making a deep comforting rumble.

“Oi! Wake up!” a petulant voice was whispering.

Something was poking her stomach. Ginny felt herself being yanked and startled silently awake as Ron picked her up off the floor and carried her away from her warm pillow.

Shaking her hair out of her eyes she looked around and realized her pillow had in fact been Harry’s chest. She had fallen asleep curled around and on top of Harry!

It had been surprisingly comfortable for all that they were asleep on the floor.

Her brother unceremoniously dropped her on the bed in a random guest bedroom.

“It’s only 8am. You have pretty much the entire day to get sober and get back to the Burrow to help mum for Harry’s birthday. Hermione is waking Harry now and moving him to his bed.” Ron said matter-of-fact.

He filled a glass of water on the nightstand and made to walk out of the room. At the doorway he paused and said somewhat anxiously,

“You know, I didn’t tell you he broke up with Ariadne so that you could jump him. Please don’t use him to get over your break up- I mean it Ginny, he deserves more than that!”

Ron walked out of the room unheeding of Ginny’s spluttering responses. Of course she would never do that to Harry- regardless of how stupidly good he smelled and how stupidly attractive he was. She couldn’t believe she had fallen asleep all over him, on the floor no less! But they had been having such a lovely conversation…Ginny blushed thinking of how wonderful he’d been listening to her dreams and how they’d both thought the Narnia books were incredibly slow moving or how…. 
Ginny flopped back on the bed and groaned. This was an embarrassingly familiar feeling. She did not have time for this—she was an adult woman who had just gotten out of a year-long relationship. She needed to focus on Quidditch and school and putting the year and a half of Ryan behind her.

Not, fall back into the patterns of a crush on Harry Potter.
Seamus threw-up upon landing from the Portkey in Paris. The Customs Witch was not amused.

The entire landing party had been in attendance at the Burrow the night before to celebrate Ginevra Weasley's 19th birthday. The party had taken a decidedly boozy turn after the sun had set. Ginny's friends being a fair amount more wild than Harry's had brought out all sorts of libations.

Ginny's birthday dinner and ensuing party had gone well. Both her birthday celebrations and Harry's, roughly a week prior, had been absolutely delightful. In fact, Ginny felt her birthday had been a bit overdone, particularly the family dinner at the Burrow. She felt the party was a tad 'commercial' in comparisons to Harry's more heartfelt staid birthday dinner. Her family had brought her particularly nice gifts and the food and decorations had been especially flashy. She couldn’t determine if it was because everyone was trying to be nice to her as a result of her break up, the relative lack of poverty her family now experienced, or if these were the effects of Ryan's pernicious comments about her previous birthdays. After birthday cake, Hermione and Ron had
given her a generous gift charm to one of the nicer clothiers in Paris. Bill and Fleur had also given her gift charms to spend on her Paris trip. Harry had teamed up with Percy and her Father and gotten her appointments with three exclusive sports agents and lawyers who specialized in contract law. Ginny had been, and still was, speechless. (Ron felt it necessary to explain that rendering his sister silent was an impressive feat as she usually "never shut up")

Much later, Harry had had snuck into her room and awoken her a few hours before her Portkey to give her what he deemed was his “real” present. Wobbling out of Customs with Dean later that day, Ginny was still in shock at the eleven beautiful, leather bound books, each a tale she had mentioned loving in her teens. Harry had insisted the eleven books were backlog for all the birthdays he’d forgotten and refused to listen to her sputtering that such a present was too much. Ginny had not brought the set of books with her to Paris but had charmed them against damage or to be read by anyone but her or Harry when she left them at the Burrow. In the privacy of her mind Ginny could easily admit that this was the type of gift she had dreamed about receiving as a teenager, especially from Harry. The thought made her warm and also uncomfortable. It was so easy to fall back into having a crush on Harry Potter, he was after all, an amazingly perfect man. But, Ginny didn't think he needed her infatuation and her tempestuousness in his life. She had already loved him, and had found herself wanting. She was not as calm and as easily able to mold as he was, and her own anxieties with herself would have caused him pain so she had left him. She couldn't go through that again, she was still pretty sure she would eventually cause him pain in the end, make him put on that lost-boy look as he pondered why she was the way she was.

The gift of books was actually part of a larger theme. Drunkenly discussing favorite books and then falling asleep on the floor at Stinchcombe a week prior seemed to have opened (reopened?) the doorway for a new level of intimacy and conversation between Harry and Ginny. The next morning Ginny had made her way down to the Stinchcombe kitchen the next day sometime around 2pm to a small wrapped package and a note with her name.

Wasn’t sure when you would wake up. Andromeda and I are visiting nursery schools for Teddy today- but I wanted to lend you these- I loved them when I was a child, before I knew about magic. I just finished reading them to Teddy and thought you should have a go. Toss them back in the library when you're done with them!

- Harry

p.s. the lemon-curd tarts are in the snitch-shaped jar. I know it is hard for you but please try not to eat them all.

Ginny had unwrapped the package and found two small paperbacked books, Matilda and The Twits both books were by the same author, Roald Dahl. She and Harry had never talked about literature much before and she was surprised to find that Harry was a reader. It wasn’t that she thought him…anti-books or something, but at Hogwarts he and Ron had so preferred to play chess or fool around instead of sitting and reading quietly like Hermione. But, he had said that the local library was one of his favorite spots before Hogwarts. Ginny had been so touched by the books then that she had felt the need to upgrade and add on to the gift she had given Harry for his birthday. She had pulled a few strings with her various contacts and had booked for Harry and a few friends, a day of high end car racing on a closed track. She knew that Harry, however much he tried to hide it, was a thrill seeker and would love a day of carefree high speed racing. After receiving the books, she raced around Stinchcombe upgrading medicine cabinets, stocking potions cupboards, added lavender essence to the linen washing, and called another friend to book a muscle and body massage for an 'anonymous client.' Harry never complained but she knew from Hermione that Ron and Harry both were often sore after extensive training days. She had brought The Twits and Matilda with her as light reading for her trip to Paris. That night in the shared hotel room she felt a little heartache at the trials and tribulations of Matilda and how 9 year old Harry
must have seen himself in her.

Other than the very hungover start, the rest of the Paris trip was enjoyable. The group spent two days exhaustively touring the sites before Ginny and Demelza begged off for some serious shopping. The girls returned to the hotel room that day to find the boys jittery with energy. Dean Seamus and Neville had spent the day eating their way through the tasting menus at three separate fine French restaurants and had then promptly collapsed into food comas. Ginny was envious at all the good food they had consumed without her, and was seriously day dreaming about a multi course dinner. Fed, watered, and rested the boys were antsy for some dancing and shenanigans.

This was how Ginny found herself on the dance floor of the wildest club in Paris. The group had gone for a 12 course dinner before hand so Ginny was satiated. Sweaty and happy she broke off from her group of dancing friends to make her way to the bar for a drink. As she waited to get the bartenders attention the man next to her turned and informed her with perfect English that her next drink was on him. Ginny wasn’t really in the mood to be a conquest, but she was also happy enough to engage in bit of flirting and the man did have pretty green eyes. Not quite emerald, but still a pretty green.

The man’s name was Henri and he chatted amicably with Ginny as they waited for the bartended and insisted on paying for not only her drink, but also the round she suddenly decided to buy as well for her mates. Henri followed her to the dance floor with the drinks and did not seem at all startled that her mates included three men. He didn’t bat an eye at Dean’s good looks or Neville tall fit frame. He was very good at managing to dance and flirt with Ginny without caging her or getting uncomfortably close and was even sociable with the group. He was also, obviously a wizard. He felt the wand at Ginny’s waist inside her clothes when dancing and remarked “smart, always having your wand on you!”

Two hours and many drinks later Henri suggested the party meander to a late night creperie for some post-drink feasting. The idea of delicious dessert crepes made Ginny agree immediately. The rest of the happy group obliged and Ginny let Henri hold her hand as they walked through lamp-lit streets. Henri was a stranger but so far, very well behaved and Ginny felt safe under her friends’ watchful eyes. After all, Neville was an Auror and everyone else was a former DA member. As they ate, Henri charmed Ginny by telling her she was a Pre-Raphaelite vision come to life and quoted pieces of famous French sonnets. Ginny, was tipsy enough to giggle. Fortunately Henri took her giggling to mean she was charmed rather than her laughing at him. They all walked back to the hotel. Henri and Ginny lagged behind the group holding hands and before Ginny departed into the hotel Henri kissed her.

Ginny of course, was teased mercilessly once she entered her hotel leaving Henri. Dean even remarked that Henri’s poetry lines were “all bullshit, he clearly wasn’t watching you eat!” Ginny made a rude gesture and informed them that Henri wished to treat her to hot chocolate and what was likely to amount to a date sometime tomorrow afternoon. Ginny wasn't interested, but she liked Henri well enough to indulge in a casual date. Besides, she liked that vague notion of dating in the abstract, it made her feel like her past year had not been a waste, that she was back in charge despite her break up with Ryan.

It wasn’t until the next day, when Ginny went with Dean for his meeting at the Louvre, that Ginny discovered Henri was an Auror.

Ginny attended the meeting at the Louvre with Dean because Dean figured she was better at parsing through anything Board members and historians from the International Confederation of Wizards might demand of a portrait of Harry Potter that Harry himself would object to. None of the friends nor Ginny questioned that she was the best authority on Harry present. It was during
the meeting that the French contingent of historians proposed Dean also paint a portrait of Auror Henri Deneuve; the savoir of Paris. Auror Deneuve was apparently the man responsible for cracking down the dark artifact trade that flourished in Paris during Voldemort’s second rise and the man single-handedly responsible for vanquishing the leaders of the vampire gangs that controlled major portions of the city during that time. It wasn’t until an excited aged French Wizard pulled out the official photograph of Auror Deneuve that Ginny realized that he was the same Henri Ginny had kissed last night.

The meeting on the whole, was tediously long and Ginny had to sit on her surprise and shock until Dean, who was being shockingly demure and professional, concluded all his business. The two friends walked outside the Louvre office to meet their awaiting friends and Dean recounted their discovery. Ginny wasn’t sure how she felt about Henri being an Auror and apparently a famous one. She was slightly annoyed that the handsome charming strangers with pretty green eyes she had enjoyed flirting with wasn’t simply a stranger. It wasn’t like Ginny was planning some whirlwind romance, it just felt nice to feel fun and flirty and wanted after all the emotion and then numbness from her breakup. But now, instead of simply having had some fun dancing and a nice goodnight kiss and a potentially cute date with a Parisian stranger, Henri became someone more tangible. No doubt, the other Aurors in her life (In her more honest moments she could admit, she meant Harry) would know who he was or potentially know him personally. This fact bugged her more than she cared to admit. Her friends on the other hand, clearly thought this recent development was hilarious, not in the least because they were aware of Ginny’s discomfort about Henri’s famous Auror status and the reasons why.

“Well, you sure know how to pick’em!” Dean exclaimed.

“I suppose its like Quidditch, after you’re played pro you can’t go around playing for the village club team. No third tier Heroes, only top of the line Heroes for our Ginny,” Seamus said with a grin.

“Its cute, she can’t help herself- even her post break up snog partner turns out a Hero,” Demelza teased with a knowing glance at Ginny. Demelza had understood Ginny's indulgence in Ryan and then subsequent discomfort in a few short shared glances. Girls were, superior in such silent communication of course.

Ginny rolled her eyes and threw well-aimed olives at them. Neville, who had heard of Henri through Auror contacts, filled the group in on the Deneuve’s story. (Neville also had thrown Ginny a heavy knowing looking at her discomfort and smiled to himself, the bastard.) Henri was a few years older than Ginny and had just graduated Beauxbatons and joined the Aurors when Voldemort was officially recognized as having come back in England. The streets of Paris by then were already flourishing in dark object trade but the vampire gangs had not quite come in and seized control. The first three mentoring partners Henri had been assigned to had either been corrupt or died in raids. Neville didn’t know the full details but apparently Auror Deveuve had earned himself a reputation as being very powerful, efficient, and ruthless. Neville commented that many of the actions Deveuve had taken during the war would have likely resulted in his court-martial had it not been for the results and the dire time. Apparently the man was somewhat of a shadowy figure despite his legend.

“So you’re saying he’s like a…Dark Harry?” Demelza asked popping a macaroon in her mouth. The group had all but raided Lauduree during Dean’s meeting.

Ginny frowned at her friend, vaguely horrified at the comment. Neville paused and then nodded contemplatively, agreeing that the description fit. Ginny made a pained face. This was not what she needed from her light and fun snogging partner. In fact, a tiny part of her mind could admit
that she thought a carefree song would be the perfect solution to get rid of the warm embers that had been sparked by Harry at his party.

Dean and Seamus broke out into smug grins.

“Dark Harry- excellent! Was it Bad Ginny the one who came on this trip?” they asked her, Ginny glowered. Demelza and Neville laughed.

During her 7th year Ginny had made a large mistake in telling her friends about her childish distinctions between Good Ginny and Bad Ginny. Good Ginny, was the perfect little girl, very sweet, and; chock full of tales of good, pure Harry Potter, King Arthur, and Dumbledore. She aspired to be quiet, sweet, and annoyingly wholesome. Good Ginny had the approval of Auntie Muriel. At age 7, Bad Ginny was the name Ginny gave to the greater pieces of her personality that didn’t fit the tales her mother read her. The Ginny that snuck into the broom shed to fly, guilelessly blamed Ron for anything breaking, and the Ginny that assisted the twins on all their pranks, and played up her sweetness with Bill to get him to buy her things. For a while after Tom, Ginny's twelve-year old brain had rationalized that Tom Riddle could have only used her so against her consent because she already had so much 'badness' in her heart. Fortunately, she had quickly gotten past this deluded frame of mind.

At seventeen, Ginny had tartly informed her friends that Good Ginny would have grown up to be insufferably boring. No one, much less Harry Potter, would have found her worthy of his or her time. Giggling, Ginny and her friends had gone on to prophesize a ridiculously flat, stereotypical, fairytale life for Good Ginny. The soothing sex balm to her knight, the pure innocent consciousness in a story, the side character who baked pies, taught small school children, or worked with babies who no one ever heard more about. Demelza and Ginny even discussed and criticized television characters sometimes in terms of Good Ginny or Bad Ginny. Both figures were of course hyperbole's of any set of characteristics and often stupidly flat.

“I love this story but I wish the heroine was more than just a Good Ginny,” they sometimes remarked about the leading female in one of their favorite weekly’s.

Of course Ginny could appreciate that she was both Good and Bad Ginny in addition to a whole host of other things- but she and her friends still made ridiculous fun of Good Ginny. Although, sometimes Ginny still felt that other people still saw her in these flat tropes. Now after Ryan, she feared that she would end up married to someone who didn't know she existed somewhere in the middle, dabbling in various shades of Good and Bad. With Harry, she had also had this fear but it was also overwhelmed at times by the anxiety that she wasn't good enough and that the darker pieces her persona would eventually horrify him. They had not dated long enough for her to know if he really was as righteously straight and narrow like Hermione or if was simply noble hearted without the righteousness.

“No! not Bad Ginny!” cried Demelza, she continued dramatically, “Light Harry wouldn’t bother with Good Ginny, he doesn’t need her! So we have to assume he dated Bad Ginny. But Dark Harry, oh what did you say Nev? Shadowy figure, yes, well, clearly he needs Good Ginny to center his ambiguous morality!” Demelza finished with a fanciful swoon into Seamus who had been playing Dark Harry to Dean’s Light Harry.

“I hate you all,” Ginny stated flatly.

“We keep you honest, you love us really,” Neville said pulling her into a side hug.
By that evening when Henri came to pick Ginny up for hot-cocoa, her friends had imagined and acted out a full three part play of dreadful melodrama involving both Good and Bad Ginny, and Light and Dark Harry. The drama was clearly a bastardization of Ginny and Demelza’s favorite tv show and *The Carnelian Rose*.

They had pretty much ceased to call Henri by his given name and nearly shouted out the door, “Have fun with Dark Harry!” as Ginny left.

Her date with Henri was pleasant. They walked to *Angelina* for delightful west-african hot-cocoa. Guiltily Ginny immediately thought to tell Harry of the cafe. They talked of nothing and kissed a bit. Henri was incredibly veiled about his job or anything else when Ginny revealed she knew he was an Auror. Ginny didn’t press, she had no intention of further this encounter and was more than a little nervous to find out how many people from her real life Henri knew. Ginny was also very deliberate in not telling him she was Weasley. Ron’s fame and Percy's position was enough that the surname was sure to incite questions.

Ginny had a good time and enjoyed a romantic tour of Paris, but noted that Henri wasn’t particularly funny. Or rather, he seemed surprised and blinked at her quips instead of laughing at them and frowned at her dry at times sarcastic commentary.

That night as she read an amusing passage in *The Twits* in her shared hotel bed, she couldn’t help but think of Harry and how he would have engaged with her witty repartee or peppered the evening with sarcastic asides from time to time. Her mum and the Jocasta-fantasied housewives would never believe it, but Harry Potter could be a sarcastic little shit. Chuckling she thought Demelza might have hit on some truths, *Light Harry* would have been bored to tears by *Good Ginny*, but *Dark Harry* was clearly seeking her.

Upon return from her Paris trip, Ginny thought she was restored to being herself again. Admittedly it had only been a month since she broke up with Ryan but the hurt, the anger, and the misery seemed much further away. She spent a few days puttering around the Burrow helping her mother jam berries and swapping stories before going to Tinworth to spend a few days with Bill, Fleur, and four month-old Victoire. She picked and dried lavender to hang about the rafters perfuming the cottage and pressed it into the trunks of clothing. Also, in her spare time she practiced a bit of Transfiguration and sparred with her brother in defensive transfiguration spells. (Fleur finally made them stop because they kept disturbing the baby)
A week later on a day that her mother and Mrs. Granger were having their weekly MPA meeting, Ginny decided to visit her father at his office. Due to her summer waitressing, time taking Muggle Uni classes, and experience among and with muggles Ginny was incredibly comfortable in muggle-London and treated her father out for lunch at the Fortnum & Masons around St. James Park.

After, she escorted her father back to his office. It was when she popped in at the Institute of Contemporary Arts for a look that she noticed a small well dressed man hovering near her as she walked from gallery to gallery. Thinking she was simply paranoid, Ginny meandered to the museums café for a spot of tea. She settled herself down with her tea and scones when the man approached her.

He was not much larger than Ginny. He was potentially her father’s age but had aged much better and was incredibly refined in features and clothing. Ginny had just enough time to subtly get her wand out, shove her book into her bag, and arrange herself to jump out of her seat, when the man sat down at her table.

The man stared at her from underneath his brimmed hat and stated, “You’re Ginevra Weasley,” saying her name beautifully with his Italian accent.

Cold discomfort and slow panic crept through Ginny and she contemplated sending a wordless patronus to Harry or Neville. She abandoned that idea when she remembered that her patronus was acting up.

“Who wants to know?” She asked instead warily, steeling herself and gripping her wand in a ready position under the table.

“Everyone who has followed the War in any detail knows who you are Miss Weasley. I would like to speak to you regarding a favor,” the man said intently.

“I believe you have me at a disadvantage Mr…?” Ginny asked, she was properly afraid now and was flexing her legs to pounce and run away at any moment.

“Contini.”

“Yes, Mr. Contini, I don’t believe we are-”

“It is said you have the ear of Harry Potter,”

Ginny, already wary, went cold with dread and her heart beat even faster. Nothing about this interaction seemed good but the mention of Harry made it so much worse. Only the shadiest of wizards spoke of Harry Potter in such clandestine ways.

“Not especially, he listens to many,” Ginny countered casually. Did this man know they used to date? Perhaps she could play herself off as an oft ignored younger sister?

Contini ignored her. “I need to get a message to Mr. Potter, and I believe you Ginevra are the most suited to deliver this message,” he said desperately.

Hysterically, despite the fear Ginny's temper flared. “Excuse you? You don’t know me and I am not an Owl! You can write, send him a letter!”

Contini suddenly looks more assured, “Anyone knowing anything knows that almost all of Mr.
Potter’s mail is searched at the Ministry first. And I do know you Ms. Weasley. I have researched all of Mr. Potter’s friends and relations and I think you are best suited for …how do you say, seeing the shades of gray.”

“Who are you and what do you want?” Ginny demanded fiercely, at the same time she wordlessly cast a *Protego* hoping desperately that Contain wouldn't detect the faint electric blue shimmer at the edges of the casting.

“Tell me, Ginevra Weasley, do you still believe spells and magic by nature are neither dark nor light? That it is the intent and prerogative of the caster that determines their nature? Even for unforgivable?” Contini asked looking curious and smug.

Ginny was utterly officially creeped out now. She had defended such a position in a DADA paper her 7th year and later at Uni. Both times, it was a decidedly unpopular opinion and Hermione had been aghast when Ginny first discussed it. Ginny wasn’t a massive supporter of this opinion either, but she felt it deserved consideration and defense, for arguments sake. What frightened Ginny was that neither paper she had written for class had been published in any public way. How had Contini come to know of her coursework? How had he come to read her writing?

“What makes you think I would think such vile things?” Ginny retorted, hoping she sounded properly repulsed.

“Because you have written about them, quite articulately too,” Contini said smugly, “In fact, was it not you who wrote in *Accio, Boston* that most ancient landscape magic judged by modern standards would be illegal or dark? I do believe the article shaming the American government for their ruling of the landscape power at Moundville and Cahokia as Dark was by Ginevra Weasley. What was it you said?- oh yes, that modern Americans calling the landscape magic at Cahokia Dark was nothing short of ignorance and racism!”

“I don’t see why a creative editorial opinion piece has to do with anything. What. Do. You. Want?” Ginny asked tersely.

Her piece in *Accio, Boston* had been unpopular by the masses but lauded by many professors for the critical questions it raised. Such a piece would crucify her in post-war England. Her father had eagerly saved all the clippings of her bylines she had sent him. Ginny had felt too guilty to send him that particular editorial piece. She really hoped she would not be used as the rope to tarnish Harry’s image and authority-but it seemed unlikely that Contini was a particularly pernicious reporter. No, this all seemed far shadier and far more creepy.

“As I have said, I would like you to deliver a message to Harry Potter. I am in possession of some valuable …items that I think would be of much interest to him,” Contini said calmly.

“And what is that? What do you have that Harry could possibly want?” Ginny asked.

Contini looked reluctant. Ginny dropped her Protego and silently cast an Inducement spell. It was nothing close to Vertiserum and lay somewhere between Imperio and love potions in its potency. It made the bewitched have a great desire to talk and confide with the caster but gave them the opportunity to obfuscate should they so desire. She might be fined for doing magic in such a muggle heavy area but hoped her exact spell would be undetectable so close to the underground magic of the Ministry. Inducement spells were legal in the U.S. but in the U.K. they were more heavily regulated and what she did was a smidge illegal. (She wasn't entirely sure the exact legal rulings of these spells in the U.K.)

“I have been safekeeping an item for some associates for some time now and it has come to my attention that those close to Potter were…seeking it before their death. I believe Potter would want
to speak to me about this,” Contini said slowly.

“Yea, that’s not vague at all,” Ginny said with angry sarcasm. She was also annoyed that her spell was not compelling further confession. “If you want me to relay a message to Harry you’re going to have to be more concrete, I’m not passing along some half-arsed message- he won’t believe me.” Harry probably would believe her and immediately investigate- the simple fact that someone had stalked Ginny would drive him, Ron, and Neville into a serious investigation. But, Contini didn’t know that and she hoped her words would spur the Inducement spell.

Contini paused and seemed to be thinking of how best to continue.

“Do you know who Nigel Latimer is Ms. Weasley?” Contini asked. Ginny shook her head and so Contini continued, “He is perhaps the most prominent and well versed Magical Art and Artifact dealer. We did not have a proper introduction but I too am a Magical Art and Artifact dealer thought my specialty is of a different period than the esteemed Mr. Latimer’s.”

The café girl came by and deposited two espressos in front of Contini and Ginny. Contini must have ordered before he approached her Ginny mused- and resolved to not touch the drink just to be safe. Contini skimmed the crema of his shot with his spoon and continued speaking.

“As many know, Albus Dumbledore willed Mr. Potter many things upon his death. A few months before his death, Dumbledore met with Mr. Latimer and discussed certain...pieces that have eluded the market for some time. Mr. Latimer was told to owl Dumbledore should he have any information or come into possession of these items.”

Ginny filtered through what she heard. Did this mean that the items of value that Contini intimated he currently possessed were the items Dumbledore was searching for? Contini assumed Harry would now care for these. Dumbledore had willed Harry the items needed to defeat Voldemort- undoubtedly what Contini currently owned were dark as well, but...related to Voldemort? Ginny also made a note to tell Harry that its possible Mr. Latimer gave up this information to Contini... under duress. It was a hunch but worth looking into.

Ginny also understood why Contini had sought her out instead of Ron or Hermione. Magical Art and Artifact dealing had a mercurial legality. Most art objects, fine or decorative, were perfectly legal regardless of their magical abilities. But, many older objects often had rather dark and problematic magical abilities and the dealers who dealt with such objects occupied a gray space in commercial law. The “status” of the objects themselves usually depended on the temperament of the times and the elements of the law that processed them. A Hand of Glory, Vanishing Cabinets, and even cursed jewelry on their own were perfectly legal. Though Ginny was almost certain Ron and Hermione would not think so. She wasn’t entirely sure what Harry would think either come to think of it.

If Contini owned a Dark object as a part of his collection, sharing with Harry- an officer of the Law- could subject his entire collection and trade for further inspection and issue. A prudent dealer, if dealing with a truly dark object that worried him, would hastily attempt to sell it off and then tip the authorities off to the new owner. Or perhaps endeavor to have a research institute or museum buy the item off them- not do what Contini was doing.

“Severus Snape was Headmaster of Hogwarts during the War- I believe you experienced his term?” Contini inquired. Ginny said nothing and Contini continued,

“Did you know, that he too paid a visit to Mr. Latimer before his death and even Mr. Borgin? According to Mr. Latimer, Snape inquired about the same items Dumbledore was interested in. Later Mr. Latimer has record of sending Snape a package, but no record or memory of what the package entailed. ”
Well, Harry would certainly be interested on a personal level now. Ginny was oddly unsurprised Snape performed a memory Charm on an Art Dealer. Maybe he was simply doing work for Voldemort. Something Dumbledore knew Voldemort would be after and wanted to obtain before Riddle could. She gestured for Contini to continue and added a bit more energy to the Inducement she was still casting.

“Severus Snape seems to have been quite the subtle mastermind. Unlike Dumbledore, the nature of his Will has posed quite a few problems and I could not determine what it was that Latimer sent him. His Will was magically sealed and to be read only in portions by a goblin and an undisclosed entity. But, the contents of his vault have been transferred to whoever it was the other portion of his Will went to.”

“How do you know that?” Ginny asked fiercely. Only she and Harry knew the details of Snape’s Will as far as Ginny knew. How did Contini come by this information?

Contini looked to be struggling internally and then said, “Ah, Inducement- clever girl. I paid someone to make that American’s *Império* potion and fed it to a few goblin friends.” Contini gave Ginny a dirty look,

“It didn’t help much, Snape was careful in his planning. I thought I had reached a dead end, but then Potter publicly lauded Snape for being a faithful double agent. At first I thought it was a publicity stunt but Potter remade that statement at the V-day celebrations in May…I’m certain Potter is the one who received the items from Snape’s vault. Why else would Potter suddenly have a change of heart? There was something in that vault!”

Ginny felt cold all over and it took all her power to remain calm. She was so stupid to not have immediately called for help. Contini wasn’t your run of the mill shady art dealer- this man had no qualms using Imperio potion and bribing Gringotts agents. She was too shocked by how deeply Contini had discovered some of the details of Snape’s Will and she knew it showed on her face. Contini’s look of surprise and then smug intrigue at the reactions that played on her face was proof of that.

Ginny quickly recast her Inducement spell, putting all her willpower into it and asked fiercely,

“Who do you work for?”

“No on-The Zemun, The Serbians,” Contini whispered looking horrified to have admitted this.

“The muggle… Serbian…Mafia?” she asked confused, it had taken her a moment to place the name. Ginny was shocked, that was the last thing she expected. How on earth was everything this man had told her connected to them?

“Yes. Please Ginevra! Relay what I told you to Potter! Please!” Contini said finally losing his aloof and refined exterior and looking rather desperate. “You have to help me!”

Ginny looked at him startled and it suddenly occurred to her that Contini may have a partner or whoever he worked for watching them.

“Petrificus Totalus,” Ginny whispered quickly and Contini went rigid in his seat with a look of surprise. “I’ll tell Harry but don’t leave the country!” Ginny hissed.

Ginny cast a strong befuddlement charm on herself, Contini, and the surrounding area- perhaps a little too strong as she saw some of the other patron’s china rattle- and then grabbed her bag with her wand at the ready she speed walked out of the building. The moment she was outside she took a gasping breath as the immediate tension left her body and then indulged in five seconds of sheer
panic as she wondered what to do next.

*Harry* she thought.

The Ministry was just around the corner. Contini would be stuck in his chair and confused enough to not have seen which direction she left, but she doesn’t delude herself into thinking he would stay there long once the binding wore away. She wouldn’t be able to get the Aurors back to Contini in time but she felt a strange need to suddenly be at the Auror office. Its safer there she rationalized. Ginny all but ran to the visitor’s entrance as her eyes sweep the street around her checking for anyone following her.

She strode through the Ministry telling herself that she would feel calmer and safer once she was inside the Auror office. She tapped her foot, impatiently as Doris, the front desk Witch at the Auror Office made her wait and fill out the sign in and wanded her for polyjuice. When Ginny finally was inside the office she made a beeline for Harry’s cubicle and almost screamed and kicked in frustration to find him not there.

After ten minutes of irritated energy pacing around Harry’s desk, Ginny went to pace by the open area at the entrance to the questioning rooms. She was inside the Auror Office and there were other Aurors milling about nodding hello to her. All skilled men and women. She’s in one of the safest locations on the planet she told herself. But she still felt shaken, nervous and scared. She went back to Harry’s cubicle to sit at his desk.

Thirty minutes later, she doesn’t even bother to analyze, disdain, or worry about her reaction as a flood of relief washes over her when Harry walked in.

She felt safest, next to Harry.

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Harry is more than surprised to see her. He looked at little startled to find her sitting at his desk. He started to say her name jovially but then cuts off as his eyes grazed over her rigid body language. He walked over to where she is sitting, opened a drawer on his desk, and handed her two pieces of wrapped honeydukes chocolate.

“Eat this,” he ordered, “I have to drop off this file, I’ll be right back,”

Five minutes later Harry returned and proceeded to cast a muffliato and conjure a chair to sit across the desk from her. The cubicle he sits in doesn't have a door so the privacy spell is needed. He doesn’t ask her to leave his chair and they’re sitting as if he’s the one being interviewed.

“What happened?” He asked. His voice was even, deep, and commanding but his eyes were kind and his eyebrows were raised in concern.

“A man named Contini, an art and artifact dealer, sat down at my table and told me to relay a message to you,” Ginny responded gulping a hunk of chocolate. She felt very calm suddenly. She searched Harry’s face for some recognition at the name Contini but there wasn't any.

“A man accosted you while you were eating?” Harry asked alarmed.
Ginny waved him off. “I had lunch with Dad and then went to the Institute of Contemporary Art. I noticed him somewhat following me in the galleries and when I went to the café for a bite, he dropped into the other chair at my table.”

Harry looked only more alarmed and drew himself up straight squaring his shoulders.

“I had my wand out and cast Protego.” Ginny interjected hastily, “He didn’t seem… confrontationally dangerous and I jinxed him to his chair and befuddled the entire area as I left!”

Harry frowned but indicated for her to continue.

“Contini said he wanted me to pass along a message because he knew we were friends,” Ginny said. “He...he is apparently in possession of something that he thinks you would want.”

Harry crinkles an eyebrow. “He works for the Serbian Mafia, the Zemun.” Ginny stated as if that would somehow be the clincher to this bizarre encounter.

“How do you know the names of the factions of the Serbian Mafia?” Harry asked looking frankly astonished.


“So this Contini, an Italian, who works for the Zemun thinks he has something I would be interested in?” Harry prompted.

“He made it sound like it was something both Snape and Dumbledore were searching for before they died,” Ginny said and Harry’s eyebrows went back up.

He looked around the cubicle and muttered a few more spells. People talked about Dumbledore and Harry a lot but almost no one spoke of Snape. Almost no one even knew of Snape other than that he was a Potions Master, a Death Eater, but also supposedly, on the word of Harry Potter, not a Death Eater. So a random stranger approaching Ginny with random details about Snape before he died is…suspicious and worthy of investigation.

“Whatever it is, its Dark and clearly very important to him that you know- he used Imperius Potion on a few Goblins to try and track the details of Snape’s Will and vault.” Ginny said.

“What?” Harry exclaimed in total surprise and then suddenly his face morphed to angry worry.

“Wait, What do you mean, try?” Harry asked a moment later, searching her face.

Ginny shook her head, “He doesn’t know - he is convinced its you because Dumbledore gave you things in his Will too. Also, he amounts your exonerating of Snape to discovering something in his vault. And, and a few other details….”

“Hang on, he just..told you this?” Harry asked concerned.

Ginny stared at him debating and then admitted, “I cast an Inducement spell on him.”

Harry leaned back a little blinked at her. Ginny shrugged in response.

“Is this….is this a conversation that may not be best suited fifteen feet from the Head Auror’s office?” Harry asked slowly.
Ginny was pretty sure Harry wouldn’t arrest her about the spell. But she actually would rather not have a conversation about her vault and Snape in the Auror Office. Ginny nodded in response to Harry’s question.

Harry expelled a long sigh and ran his hand distractedly through his hair.

“I…I have a meeting in an hour and we just finished a bunch of interviews- I can’t leave, I am supposed to be combing over them. We can grab dinner after?” he asked looking apologetic.

“Sure. No, of course, you have work. Um…can I stay here?” Ginny asked swallowing her pride, she disliked that the question came out small and sneaky voiced. If Harry was surprised by her request he didn’t show it. Its not that Ginny was still scared, she felt utterly filthy and creeped out that some shady man was so easily able to find her alone. Also if she went back home now, she would just mull and get agitated. Her mother would surely know something was up and then proceed to freak out.

“Um…sure, there are nicer chairs in the open area.”

Ginny declined the chairs in the open area. She moved out from behind Harry’s desk and conjured herself up a squishy chintz armchair in the corner of the cubicle. She pulled out one of the beautiful books Harry had given her for her birthday and settled in the chair to read. The cubicle is quiet but for the sound of rustling paper as both Harry and Ginny attend to their reading. The busy but jumbled background noise of the surrounding office is oddly comforting.

Ginny didn’t notice when Harry left for his meeting but was startled when he walked back in after it ends.

“I ran into your dad and told him you dropped by to say hello and that we were getting dinner,” Harry said awkwardly, “I didn’t want them to freak out if you…didn’t turn up at home.”

Ginny thanked him and stretched out the kink in her neck. Harry glanced at the book in her hand and then at her and she smiled, answering his unasked question that yes, it was one of the volumes he gave her. He went back to his desk with a soft half smile on his lips.

Five minute later Ginny was startled out of her reading again by a buzzing noise. She looked up to see Harry standing looking contemplatively at some maps and papers on his desk- he was swaying and a snitch was fluttering around him. Clearly deep in thought, Harry was catching and releasing the snitch absent-mindedly. The snitch moved all around rather quickly but Harry seemed to be able to catch it, even though his concentration was clearly elsewhere. In between all this at random intervals, Harry reached up distractedly to run his hands through his already tousled hair.

Ginny found it hard to continuously concentrate on her book after that. She was clearly not as used to the faint buzzing of the snitch as Harry was and she kept abandoning her book to gaze at Harry. The sight of a contemplative Harry was addictively endearing and she was frankly a little impressed at his intense concentration while also catching the snitch.

Two hours later, Ginny had not progressed far into her book. Harry had finally looked up about 35 minutes ago to tell her he was stepping out to visit Neville for a bit. Ginny took to playing with the snitch once Harry left and that was how Harry found her when he walked back in the cubicle with Neville.

“Don’t tell me, you got her addicted to your infuriating habit too!” Neville exclaimed.

“It helps me think!” Harry defended. “Ginny, once Nev and I finish, we can go- anywhere particular you want to eat?”
Ginny shook her head and as Harry turned to walk to his desk exchanged in a silent conversation with Neville.

Neville raised his eyebrows inquiringly and glanced back and forth at her and Harry as if to ask *is this a date?* Ginny rolled her eyes and shook her head. Neville cocked his head and shrugged.

For dinner Harry took Ginny to a young, trendy, Italian new-concept place in Covent Garden. On the walk over they discussed the random shenanigans of Ginny’s trip. Harry, Ginny is unsurprised to find, visited Paris quite a bit over the past two years and was familiar with its various neighborhoods. Ginny did not share about Henri.

Over dinner, Ginny gave Harry a super in-depth account of her afternoon with Contini. Harry did not belabor her use of an illegal curse and in fact seemed rather glad to have gained so much information. Instead, after delving and confirming the various details of Ginny’s encounter, he focused more on the unknown elements of Contini’s story.

“Everything Dumbledore gave me was to defeat Voldemort, short of something that could have helped there- I can’t think of what Contini may own,” Harry mused sipping on his Prosecco.

Ginny admitted that she thought of that as well, and wondered if perhaps they are overlooking something really obvious belonging to the founders or the Peverell brothers.

“Well, we know its not a horcrux, or a hallow. I wouldn’t have been able to finish Voldemort if there was still a horcrux out there…” Harry said.

“Whatever it is, he’s willing to risk his entire collection getting investigated for it instead of just selling it off. But he wouldn’t tell me whatever it was- despite the spell. Also he didn’t give me contact information or anything, just said to relay the message. How exactly does he want this play out?”

Harry paused taking a few bites of his risotto.

“Assume you didn’t cast an Inducement, that was a variable he didn’t predict and plan for. He would have come to you- said he had some item and information of interest to me. Presumably in his plan you would naturally, pass along the interaction and what he said to me.”

Ginny nodded it was very interesting to watch Harry think. He was sitting laconically in his chair, the sleeves of his button-down rolled up and his tie loosened. His long fingers were playing with the stem of his glass and his other hand was fiddling slightly with his fork as he gazed at the tiny floating candle in the middle of the table contemplatively. Distractedly Ginny realized that most of the other diners probably thought she and Harry were a young couple on a date. The formal vestiges of his office clothing did make him look like a young, sleek, handsome City-banker who was taking his girl to dinner.

“Assuming that was his original plan, I would have started an investigation into the dealer Contini…compiled everything that’s easy to gain about him and possibly tracked down his London lodgings. I would have put Neville in charge of deeper research.” Harry said.

“So whatever he wanted you to find, is either in the surface information about him or…he wants you to come to wherever he stays in England?” Ginny asked.

“He didn’t want to *give* me whatever he had yes? But he’s clearly not interested in…keeping it or
selling it. He could have sold it and then come to me pointing out its new owners if he was that afraid of it. I can't imagine an art dealer turning away a profit.”

“I am almost positive its not his to give,” Ginny interrupted, “He said ‘my associates’ a few times and I think he is supposed to be dealing this object on behalf of the Serbians?”

“So then in his original plan, I either discover who he works for and…get more Aurors involved or confront him and…he tells me what? That he’s peddling something dark and dangerous for the muggle Serbian mob and….what asks for protection? Why though? And are you sure he’s working for them not with them?” Harry countered.

“That was the only part of the conversation he seemed nervous or desperate about. When he said ‘Please’ and he did directly make a help-statement. That would not have been affected by the spell. Also he’s a wizard obviously, and his business is magical so why would he be dealing with the Serbian mafia anyway? If he bought something off of them or stole something magical that Mafia didn’t know about or realize was magical…he doesn’t seem above obliviating them or something. Wouldn't that be easier?” Ginny mused.

“Maybe he wanted to contact me because he’s notifying us that the Serbian mob isn’t as muggle as we think they are?”

“He didn’t seem that noble,” Ginny scoffed. “But maybe the Serbian mob got taken over by an aspiring Dark Wizard?”

“So best-case scenario, he acquired something from the not-so-muggle mafia that is very dark and dangerous. Something both Snape and Dumbledore were searching for before they died- so probably something Voldemort also wanted- and is now running scared. Presumably the mafia doesn’t know how dark this object is and he has an inkling. Worse case scenario…” Harry trailed off.

“Worst case scenario?” Ginny prompted.

“This is a set up, for what and how I don’t know- I couldn’t guess. But it’s the first part of a diversion and we can’t be entirely sure who the target is and Contini is just a player in a larger organization.” Harry finished grimly.

“Well, wouldn’t the target be…you?” Ginny asked a tad confused. Harry shook his head, “The target could very well be prominent Ministry members in general. Or eventual general mayhem like at Falmouth. If I was the target there are so many other ways to get to me. Why follow you?”

“Well, he is a dealer. I mean can you imagine if he tried to talk to Hermione? And Ron’s an Auror too so that might have been too difficult?” Ginny said. Ron and Hermione, particularly Hermione being muggle-born and both war heroes had a small discreet Hit-wizard as security detail. Ginny was at present one of the few members of her family who didn't have a security detail. Both her father and Percy were now important enough to have one.

“Well neither of them would have cast Inducement that’s for sure!” Harry said. Ginny was relieved to see that he was grinning at her illegal spell work. “That’s also pretty worrying. How the hell did he research you so well? Accio, Boston articles aside- where did he get your 7th year term paper?”

Ginny squirmed. She was the most uncomfortable with how well researched Contini had been about her and also that she had to share her term paper with Harry.

“I think Professor Roe asked to keep it. She, erm found it interesting and thought it was well
written,” Ginny admitted.

Harry cocked his head and raised an eyebrow, “I bet! A paper arguing unforgiveables as *not* dark probably had to be damn well researched and quite well written.”

Ginny looked away. She was a little ashamed she had to tell *Harry Potter* of all people about her morally ambiguous research paper. She was surprised and anxious that his reaction had been almost nothing. He hadn’t ranted like Hermione or looked at her horrified like Neville—instead he had looked surprised but intrigued and asked her what prompted her to take that position. He had gazed unseeing at his prosecco glass after her explanation and then simply uttered a soft “huh, well, there is value in forcing ourselves to defend our views...” and moved the conversation along. Ginny *desperately* wanted to know what he had thought about.

“Roe could have shared it with anyone then,” Harry said softly jarring her out of her angst. “Still worrying. Although I’m glad we moved your stuff to the Chamber- I’ll need to make a formal report about goblin’s being Imperiused.”

“Maybe whatever Contini has had to do with the manuscripts in Snape’s vault! All that Slytherin history stuff,” Ginny exclaimed hoping to change the topic off of her paper.

“It amounts to the same thing. Most of that stuff, even the Slytherin stuff Dumbledore and Snape worked on compiling together, a *lot* of it, was either stolen from Voldemort or things Voldemort wanted. He was obsessed with his history. So if Dumbledore and Snape visited the same dealer asking about the thing Contini now owns...I would be very surprised if it wasn’t some Slytherin related object that was cursed or something,” Harry finished.

They had exhausted the conversation regarding Contini. Harry did her the courtesy of laying out to her all the actions he would now take via the Aurors and also on his own. There were elements of the Contini encounter that Harry did not think the entire Auror department needed to be involved in. These elements were of course related to Snape, and now Ginny’s vault. They were only halfway through their meal and as Harry dexterously ordered a round of small plates they moved on to other topics of conversation.

“You’ve eaten here before. How did you find this place?” Ginny asked. The food was very good and Harry hadn’t looked at a menu for his order.

“I’ve inadvertently become a ‘posh food snob’ according to Ron,” said Harry grinning. “Ariadne was very well versed in food and she didn’t cook. I’ve picked up a lot about food culture and ‘foodie’ eats in the city from her.”

“Nice,” Ginny said approvingly.

“Yea, I’ve...also started to explore on my own. I mean especially since I started really cooking at Stinchcombe...and because Ariadne told me my palate was boring,” said Harry ducking his head.

Ginny chuckled, “So was mine I think until I moved to Uni. I mean mum cooks great food and all but its not like she or Hogwarts were going to introduce me to hotpot or what good sushi is really like. English bastardizations of curry and chutney, yes- actually diverse food-no.”

Harry nodded, “Yea, that is the one thing I’ll never regret in dating Ariadne, I think we explored literally every type of cuisine and I’m pretty sure I’ve eaten at every restaurant in Covent Garden.”

“That’s impressive. So...you know food now. Molly Weasley better watch out!” Ginny joked.

“No, nothing like that. I mean I *can* cook- and Hermione and I have started experimenting with things, gotten to be aware of some very cool spices and stuff. I read food reviews and actually
know what they’re talking about now…but nothing like your mum. She owns cooking.” Harry assured her.

“So what’s the most impressive thing you’ve made?” Ginny asked surprised and impressed with this developing hobby and self-assured persona usually only exhibited when fighter Dark wizards.

Harry paused to think and then finally said, “I think the hardest was this stuffed eggplant South Indian dish but technically, I tried making béarnaise sauce with steak once for Ron’s birthday…it wasn’t a success. Well the sauce part at least.”

Harry recounted the story of his steak and béarnaise sauce attempt as they finished their meal. The story involved Old man Dodderidge who, so pleased with his gifts of chicken, offered a large section of freshly slaughtered cow to Ron as an early birthday present. Unlike the fresh headless chickens he offered them, Dodderidge (fortunately) gave them mostly processed beef.

While Ron and Hermione had been aghast, Harry had taken the gifted 30 kilos of prime grade, bones and fat-caps intact, beef ribs as a challenge. It was at this point of the story that Ginny felt the need to ask if Harry had ever been to a proper butcher’s shop (He had not), or ever touched a live cow (nope there too). Ginny was impressed, and a tad horrified as Harry told her about how he had processed and then aged and cured the beef himself from instructions out of various library books. 35 days later Harry cooked a steak and attempted to prepare a béarnaise sauce with it for Ron. Ron had spent the next day in bed with food poisoning, but not surprisingly because of the steak! Or at least was Harry’s claim as he and Hermione had both eaten the steak and had been fine the next day. Ginny was gasping giggles by the time Harry finished his tale and the waitress came to take their plates.

“Oh! They do a great Zabaglione with persimmon fruit here for dessert!” Harry said excitedly. At Ginny’s startled look at Harry’s perfect pronunciation and excitement over persimmon fruit…and frankly a dessert not treacle tart, he backtracked and added, “I mean…if…you’re interested in dessert…I didn’t mean to-”

“I’d love dessert!” Ginny said and nodded at the waitress who was waiting. Harry added two glasses dessert wine to the order as well. Once again not looking at any menu.

“So you know wine now too?” Ginny inquired mildly jealous.

“Erm…no, I just know the three or four I really enjoy. Hermione keeps trying to get us to learn by buying a different bottle every week,” Harry said blushing slightly.

“Are you learning?” Ginny asked, thinking Hermione’s method was rather clever.

“Erm..no, not really. Our rating method is pretty much ‘it was good’ or ‘it was bad’ or the occasional, ‘we got too drunk to remember’,” Harry admitted. Ginny laughed.

“That’s on my list…” Ginny mused softly. Harry looked up at her gently inquiring.

“Yea...learn to be all posh and sophisticated about wine and food pairings,” Ginny admitted blushing. She almost never talked to anyone about her list but since Harry already knew it existed…

“I have it on good authority that most of that is faking it,” Harry said dryly.

They proceeded to take turns making up wine and food pairings in increasingly obnoxious accents until the waitress brought back a single elegant bowl of zabaglione with sliced persimmon. It was
beautiful just to look at. At the table next to them, a couple was sharing their dessert bowl. Ginny and Harry glanced at the couple at the same time, shared a look and grinned. Harry nudged the bowl and spoon towards Ginny and promptly ordered another bowl of the zabaglione chuckling.

Sharing dessert was serious business.

The dessert was divine. Ginny took another spoonful and sighed.

“You know, I knew Hermione was the love of Ron’s life when he offered to share dessert with her,” Harry said still chuckling, tucking into his own bowl once it arrived.

Ginny scrunched her nose and made a face at the implication but agreed, “Not believing that happened until I see it. I don’t think I will ever love someone enough to share dessert with him. Definitely not this!” she said savoring another spoon.

Harry nodded solemnly. “I might share this, definitely not your mum’s treacle tart though.”

They both glanced at the couple at the next table lovingly sharing their tiny dessert again and burst into laughter.

It was late when Ginny apparated to the Burrow. She was high-spirited on good humor and sugar, the more somber events of her day proper tucked away. Her mum had gone up to bed but her father was in the living room reading the paper and commented on her good mood.

“You have to try this place Daddy!” Ginny enthused reverting back to her childhood title for her father. “Make Harry take you- he knows all the right things to order. He introduced me to this amazing dessert!”

“Had a good time then?” Her father asked mildly disappearing behind his paper.

Ginny fell into the sofa in a contended sigh, prodded at her food-filled tummy, and pulled her book out of her bag to read. “Yes, it was lovely. Did you know Harry can cook a rather fine steak? And Indian food? And béarnaise sauce?” Admittedly the béarnaise sauce might have been what caused Ron’s food poisoning. Small details.

There was a rustle of paper and her father’s response was noncommittal as he looked at her with a critical gaze. Ginny paid no matter- and continued to chat idly about her dinner as she paged through her book trying to rediscover her spot. Some time later her father moved from his chair and said he was turning in for the night.

He came over and touched a hand to her head affectionately and said,

“Glad you had such a good time with Harry. Its good to see you laugh like this again- if anyone can make you laugh its Harry, Goodnight.” Smiling, he shuffled away and up the stairs.

Ginny fell asleep not quite registering her fathers smile and words.

Harry left on a mission the week before Ginny had to depart for Uni. Ginny learned about the departure when she came back from a morning run to find a note tacked to her pillow on her bed.

The note is typical Harry in that its not overly descriptive and a little disjointed but basically informed her that he had taken care of everything Contini related for the immediate future and not
to worry. He urged her to still be safe but promised to do everything he can to make sure nothing happens. Ginny smiled sadly at Harry’s earnest promise, thinking that such things seemed to be simply hardwired into him.

Ginny returned to Boston that fall excited to be sharing a flat with Demelza and more focused than ever before on her Quidditch. She thought returning to the places and spaces that she exited with Ryan would be difficult but it turns out to be laughingly easy. She no longer is especially close to the friends she made through Ryan but her teammates, and her friends outside of Ryan were still around and she was happy.

Two weeks into the start of term Ginny received an official looking letter informing her that due to her father’s new found prominent ministry posting, and a classified threat made on his family; the American Auror Office would now be providing, as a courtesy, an Auror bodyguard for Ginny’s protection.

Ginny was perceptive enough to realize this is entirely Harry’s doing. Yes, her mum and dad and Percy now had a semi-invisible hit-wizard posted to them anytime they went out. Yes, Ron, Hermione, and Harry also had a secret security detail anytime they were in public areas outside of Godric’s Hollow or their workspaces, but thus far the rest of the family had not been included. Admittedly the protective wards around the Burrow had not lessened after the War but the remaining "less prominent" members of the family had not required security details. Ginny's notion that this was Harry pulling strings was confirmed when she discovered that her new guard, Patty, was someone who actually worked briefly with Harry and Ron when they consulted on the Maslow case. On the bright side, Harry who had ample experience being guarded and put under protective detail, knew how restrictive it could be and Patty turned out to be a pretty mild imposition on Ginny’s life.

About a month into term Ginny received a massive package by muggle mail from Harry. She and Demelza opened it and stared confused at the massive mechanical machine. Ginny finally read the letter and learned that the machine was an authentic WWII German Enigma Machine. She had no clue what that was but the letter indicated that the shipment also contained a book on the history and working of the machine and cryptography “for her Uni research project.” It took Ginny a few seconds before she realized that Harry must have some larger message to convey. The p.s. on his letter is also odd as it discussed his favorite number- 6789567. Diving into the task at hand, Ginny spent the next week reading the entire book and taking extensive notes. It was a rather weighty tomb and she had absolutely no background in WWII history. Apparently the machine created a poly-alphabetic substitution cipher. It took Ginny a few more days to figure out what exactly Harry wanted her to do with this. On the one hand she was excited by this cloak and dagger business, on the other she felt exceedingly stupid for not catching on to Harry’s meanings and intentions right away.

Harry’s p.s. discussion about his favorite number was not, drunken rambling as she first thought, but the sequence for the rotors to set the cipher of her new machine. He must have a version of this machine keyed to the same sequence. She wondered if this was simply the testing of an idea for Harry or if there was actually secret information he wished to share with. She settles on "a bit of both" as if it was truly serious, Harry might have taken further precautions. After all, "for her Uni research project" is a bit of a pathetic cover as it was pretty obvious to anyone that she was studying Transfiguration.
Regardless Ginny sent Harry back a letter effusively thanking him for his big help to her research. On the verso of this very letter she wrote out a coded letter asking him if there was a true need for Patty and if there were any new developments. She then translated the already cipher-coded letter into Runes. Ginny did not take Runes past her OWLS so was very elementary, but Harry did not take Runes at all and she considered it decent payback for Harry making her learn all the details of muggle cryptography.

The coded portion of Harry’s letter back to her insisted that Patty was a needed precaution, at the very least to make him feel at peace. The letter also detailed that he had been unable to find Contini- the man’s London lodgings look abandoned. Harry’s visit to the dealer Latimer revealed that both Dumbledore and Snape had inquired about a 9th century illuminated codex. Latimer apparently had been subject to heavy memory tampering and was now being treated at St. Mungos with a guard at his room. Harry had strong reason to believe that the 9th century codex was actually what Contini had. Apparently it was missing from a museum for roughly 50 years and was never known to have been a dark object. The letter also detailed that Harry hoped to go back into the Chamber soon and sort through the Slytherin manuscript material for any clues.

Ginny wrote back immediately. She described a rather mundane party she attended with Demelza last weekend on one side of paper as a cover. On the verso she demanded Harry make a copy of some of the manuscript material for her- she wanted to be involved in any research or translation that occurred. She also demanded for further details on this codex and she insisted she could be of assistance in research regarding that as well. For whatever reason, Ginny felt that she needed to prove that Harry could turn to more than just Hermione for background research. A week later Ginny received a book via muggle express mail. It took her a minute to realize the book was actually a transfigured box containing an envelope sealed and spelled to be opened only by Ginny. After a few moments marveling at Harry’s clever spell work, she undid the enchantments and unearthed the envelope containing the copy of the Slytherin manuscript pages. The envelope also contained a dossier on everything Harry (possibly Hermione) was able to compile regarding the codex as well. Ginny wasn’t entirely sold on Harry’s belief that the item Contini currently possessed was the Codex, but agreed with Harry that the item Dumbledore and Snape inquired about was probably most likely, most definitely the codex.

The codex, titled somewhat oddly The Princess Codex, was an 9th century codex supposedly written by Æthelthryth- the most famous princess of East Anglia.

Both Harry and Ginny, who never paid much attention in History of Magic, had to search through their old school books to find out the details of who Æthelthryth was. Ginny vaguely remembered the name as having significance in both Muggle English and Anglican religious history. After digging out her old notes and reading Harry’s dossier she learned that Æthelthryth was known in Muggle history as princess of the Kingdom of East Anglia and noted to have caused many miracles and to have eventually retired from secular life for religious reasons. It wasn’t much- but armed with this information Ginny rushed to her old History of Magic books for greater detail. She also went to her University library and pulled all the books she could about Æthelthryth. She painstakingly wrote out and coded all the information compiled to send back to Harry- who she knew was an absolute dudder at History.

The life of the witch Æthelthryth was far more detailed, and Ginny thinks, filled with more sadness than her muggle story hinted at. A younger cousin and ward of Godric Gryffindor’s, Æthelthryth was promised to marry the Lord of the Fen and sent off to live in East Anglia as a very small child. She was the princess, of East Anglia, but not because she was a daughter of the
Muggle king, but because she was the witch wife of the Lord of the Fen, Salazar Slytherin, the ruling elite of East Anglia.

Raised by Salazar’s elder sister Salawyn, Æthelthryth grew up to call the region her home. Æthelthryth didn’t meet her betrothed Salazar, a man almost 15 years her senior, until she was 20. Salazar was of course in Scotland, with her cousin Godric, teaching at the newly established Hogwarts. Two years later, they were married. Salazar remained at Hogwarts to continue his life’s work and while the dates and details are unclear it was noted that Æthelthryth lived at Castle Fen. Not, at Hogwarts.

Ginny grew to be vividly curious as to the nature of Salazar and Æthelthryth's relationship and marriage. Unfortunately for Ginny, her history books were very cut and dry and other than the Princess Codex there were very few records about Æthelthryth. Harry expressed shock and surprise that the wife of such a famous wizard was not more commonly known and promises to scope out the Stinchcombe library for any books on Æthelthryth in his response letter. Ginny’s responded tartly, asking if he knews the names of the spouses of any of the founders and notes that historians until recently, tended to focus only great men, not their significantly younger wives. Ginny also added in her response a rather lengthy discussion on the political and social history of Æthelthryth’s time. Her and Harry's history of Magic books were incredibly limited in their discussion of social change and perspective. Ginny felt that Harry understanding the social context of Æthelthryth’s story, which she gained from her more detailed books at Uni was somehow vital. (Admittedly, Ginny had a tendency to search for the 'full story' and she could admit that this was a carry over habit from days working for Accio, Boston )

Discussed greatly in history books was the great social and cultural changes that were occurring during the time of the Founders- the disappearing of open-magic culture in England, and the political unrest the kingdom of East Anglia was going through. Though far before any official Statute of Secrecy, many historians pointed to this era as the beginnings of magic becoming secretive, muggles becoming less integrated in magical culture, and magical culture and knowledge disappearing almost entirely from muggle society. Before this period, muggles having open knowledge of magic and engaging in low level spell work (now often considered "superstitious") was incredibly common.

After the death of Salawyn, Æthelthryth went to Godric’s Hollow for the delivery of her and Salazar’s first child. She lived the later months of her pregnancy and first few months after the delivery in the company of her great-aunts. There she wrote one of her few remaining letters to her cousin brother Godric, remarking how her birth place still had a “happy mingling” of magical and common-folk unlike the Fens and how “happy she is” that her midwife, “though common, had the good sense and awareness of magic.” Ginny agreed that this letter was further evidence of the changing of times during this period. The region of Godric's Hollow clearly still hosted an integrated magical and muggle society but east Anglia did not! Æthelthryth moved back and forth between Godric’s Hollow and East Anglia for the births of her five children.

Harry wrote back stating his thanks for Ginny’s pithy and useful political and social history synopsis. He was far more used to Hermione's detailed discussions where the bushy-haired girl often lost herself in her own passion for the subject. Apparently he had asked Hermione for a quick history of the Founders and their times and was released three hours later not remembering much. Ginny's to the point, yet narrative style helped him better search his library for potentially relevant titles. His search led him to a copy of Godric Gryffindor’s family tree- which only lists up to his great grandchildren, and the ancestral details of the various wives who married into the
family are missing. Ginny sent him back a highly editorialized (with her own emotional comments) version of the next segment of Æthelthryth’s history. She had just finished reading a feminist re-examination of the Founder’s lives and gleaned far more knowledge of the oft ignored Æthelthryth.

"It was Æthelthryth’s 6th delivery that spells the beginning of the end of her marriage the dissolving of friendship between Godric and Salazar," Ginny wrote as her opening in her letter to Harry. Ginny also ended up adding a pretty lengthy explanation about pre-modern delivery and birthing practices. In a previous letter Harry had been confused about why Æthelthryth went to Godric’s Hollow to have her babies and Ginny decided to explain how women used to go to their mother’s or maternal locales to give birth - as midwives and mums were far more helpful in these things than the likely clueless spouse. Harry easily agreed with Ginny on this fact but was shocked and disappointed to learn that neither Gryffindor nor Slytherin were likely to ever have been around for the births of their own children. "I can't imagine not wanting to be present for the birth of my kid, even if I can't do anything!" Harry wrote vehemently. The passionate comment made Ginny smile with warmth.

Unfortunately for Æthelthryth going to her maternal home and being around her aunts and great aunts was no help for her 6th child. Her child died soon after it was born and her husband, Salazar in (supposedly) fit of rage and despair cursed the muggle midwife. Salazar was not welcome in Godric’s Hollow after that and Æthelthryth apparently joined her husband in this banishment though technically she was still welcome.

Here Ginny also shared with Harry the footnotes she compiled from various books that mentioned Æthelthryth. One such footnote directed Ginny to letters between Æthelthryth and Helga Hufflepuff; with Helga assuring Æthelthryth that her husband and cousin were friendly as ever at Hogwarts, and with Æthelthryth urging Helga to persuade her cousin to take-back his banishment of Salazar, a banishment she which she was sure was made in haste.

Sadly, Æthelthryth did not return to Godric’s Hollow for the remainder of her life. She birthed her next child in the Castle Fen. Two days after the delivery, an incredibly confusing and violent revolt broke out in East Anglia as tensions between the native british magical and muggle factions, raiding Danish ships (muggle), and magical Roman forces reach boiling point. The local populace upset with the almost constantly absent Lord of Castle Fen, usually considered the unofficial arbiter and protector of the region, attacked and set fire to the Castle.

Æthelthryth, with new-born baby and her children around her, magically defends herself and flees the castle. According to legend, she spelled the swamps and marshes to trap her attackers, for the rivers and streams to swell and flood behind her, and called upon the snakes and serpents of the land to slither beside her children for their defense. She was said to have conjured a fortress out of some ash-trees for her family to take shelter in, some distance from the Castle Fen. The impressive transfiguration is glossed in muggle history as a 'miracle.' Despite the impressive magic and marshy-defenders, the new-born baby did not survive the night.

At this point both Harry and Ginny wondered about the degree of veracity of the story. Conjuring a full on defensible stone structure out of a single ash tree is no small feat and a stretch even by magical standards. Gramps other laws of Transfiguration made certain of that! Ginny wasted a full three days drowning in Transfiguration equations trying to determine the formula and proof for an ash tree to stone castle transfiguration. She complained to Harry later that the laws of Transfigurational energy output prevented such extreme magic. Ginny determined that the
'miracle' transfiguration must have comprised of more than an ash tree, and that some other magic must have been used as a sustaining or binding agent. Harry, far less annoyed at the impossible mechanics than Ginny, wrote back stating that his unofficial birthday present for Hermione was to set her on a quest to find the supposed Ash-tree fortress. Apparently there is much day tripping across the English country-side among the three friends now, to peruse old magical homes and the libraries these great houses contained.

Slytherin, hearing of the attack to his home and family, rushed to the Castle Fen from Hogwarts to find his family gone. Assuming them dead, he dueled aggressively with the leaders of the magical factions and after defeating them, went on to curse the muggles with plague, famine, and terrifying snake attacks. Sated in his blood lust, he returned to Hogwarts to discover his distraught wife and children taking refuge at the castle. His relief, according to the letters of Rowena and Helga was short-lived as he discovered the death of yet another one of his babies. He and Gryffindor quarrel. Godric blamed Salazar for Æthelthryth’s hardships and became enraged when he discovered that Salazar cursed the muggles of the fens.

Despite the awkward tensions, Salazar and Æthelthryth continued to live at Hogwarts and her children are educated at the school, the youngest alongside Godric Gryffindor’s eldest offspring. Ginny wondered if Godric allowed his nieces and nephews to come to Godrics Hollow during breaks with his own children. While Godric and Salazar disagreed they continued to teach together, work together, and overlook their differences on the surface at least, for another ten years.

During this time, the tensions of East Anglia spread across Briton and many magical communities began to self segregating. Godric’s Hollow, due in no small part to the weighty landscape enchantments placed by Godric, remained one of the few integrated communities. Meanwhile, despite the self-segregation the magical populations are increasingly marrying with muggles. While populations married with muggles before, it was usually with muggles who shared magical culture and lived in mixed communities. Those muggles, due to the relative lack of technology and education of the times and by comparison, the sophistication of magic-tended to view magical folk as better. But the increasing segregation of communities and the separation of culture and loss of magical culture in muggle society resulted in independent, resilient muggles who did not “look up to” wizards. Additionally, urbanization meant that people started living as relative strangers in cities where magical folk kept their talents secret. Marriage between magical and non-magical people in such spaces often meant that the magical person kept their magic secret for the rest of their lives. Many historians noted this as the beginnings of modern-day Pureblood ideology of which Slytherin was of course a forebearer.

When Ginny sent this portion of the story’s historical context to Harry, he wrote back a rather philosophical letter wondering if this was also the beginnings of the “Magic is Might” mentality. Harry also wondered to what degree the politics of East Anglia as opposed to the West Country and Godric’s Hollow contributed to further such views. East Anglia was under constant attack from multiple parties attempting to gain control of the resource poor region. The West Country, in addition sporting a smaller population, was rarely the seat of political power plays. Ginny is surprised to find that Harry even questions to what degree Gryffindor, despite his opposition to pureblood supremacy, considered muggles actual equals as opposed to simply viewing them as benign simple creatures.

"It would have been easy for Gryffindor to maintain a happy status quo with the smaller population," Harry wrote. "He was the largest landowner in the region and even without the
magic people probably viewed him as superior, so it would have been easy to maintain a 'magic is might' mentality even without the pureblood supremacy. Having no dispute with Muggles or thinking them ‘vermin’ is not the same as considering them your fellow man and that distinction is pretty important. It worries me that people assume a rejection of blood purity automatically means they are good muggle-friendly people.”

He elaborated to discuss how the lack of this distinction had led to many backslides into overt racism against muggles in the post war society. He and Hermione encountered tinges of this structural racism most places in the Ministry, even among those who reject pureblood ideology. When Ginny wrote back with more of Æthelthryth’s story, she apologized for any unconscious racism Harry or Hermione may have suffered at the Burrow.

After all of Salazar and Æthelthryth’s children graduated Hogwarts, the couple returned to The Fens to restore their castle and reclaim their home. Salazar, still angry with the people of the region rebuilt his home with the most secretive enchantments, protecting it so that only his direct family and their explicit guests have access. Godric and Salazar’s differences on the rebuilding of Castle Fen coincide with discussions on the direction Hogwarts should take with future students.

The dispute over blood purity in magical education becomes the last nail in the slowly built coffin of Godric and Salazar’s friendship. Godric, enraged that Salazar built a Secret Chamber forbids his family from contact with their cousins or aunt. Salazar returns to Castle Fen and prohibits his children from interacting with Godric’s as well, leaving Æthelthryth utterly distraught. Ginny remarked that such a cessation was not only traumatic, but probably functionally difficult. The children of both men grew up as cousins at Hogwarts together and it is clear that Æthelthryth had always considered Godric a brother. The Slytherin couple spent two years living together at Castle Fen, likely unhappily, before Slytherin left to travel across Briton to help the young entirely segregated magical communities and forward his agenda.

Gryffindor and Slytherin did not meet again, but it was Gryffindor’s sword in the hands of a muggleborn that killed Slytherin. Gryffindor was refused entry at Castle Fen for the funeral.

Æthelthryth sealed the Castle Fen, enchanting it to be concealed to even wizards, and retreated entirely from public life. She went to live in the fortress she conjured out of an Ash tree for the remainder of her life. Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff are some of her only visitors and refer to it as 'the sanctuary'. Upon Æthelthryth’s death, and much later Rowena’s, Helena Ravenclaw reveals that Æthelthryth spent her time in the Ash-tree fortress writing a detailed codex and gave it to Rowena for safe keeping. It was generally accepted that this Codex was in fact, the Princess Codex.

Harry agreed with Ginny that the entirely story was a deplorably tragic tale and states he now understands the Sorting Hat’s pain in the words of “were there ever such friends as Gryffindor and Slytherin?” Harry added that though slightly irrelevant, a boring but careful comb through Stinchcombe’s library finally yielded information on the confusing and problematic story of Cadmus Peverell and his ties to the Slytherin family.

Cadmus was promised to marry the eldest of Æthelthryth’s grandchildren whom he loved dearly. Upon the death of the eldest grandchild before marriage, the families arrange for Cadmus to marry her sister, another grandchild of Æthelthryth and Salazar’s. Harry remarked that the marriage was likely unhappy as both parties lived in the shadow of the deceased girl- but that it did result in two children. Old gossiping letters at Stinchcombe speak of the scandal caused when Cadmus Peverell suddenly left his wife and family upon the birth of his male heir- only to be discovered dead a year
later in, coincidentally, a strange fortress some distance from East Anglia. Harry conjectured that this was when Cadmus must have recalled his dead lover. Harry went on to say that these details coincide with Dumbledore’s view that the Peverell brothers created the Hallows- as it seems unlikely that Cadmus would have agreed to marriage with another woman if he had the resurrection stone all along.

Cadmus’ assets and jewelry were given of course, to his son once he reached legal age- ensuring that this heir’s descendant, Marvel Gaunt, inherited the ring with the stone.

Overall, Ginny found the story depressing and creepy. She tried to imagine what it would have been like to be Æthelthryth. Uncomfortably, these musings lead her to some *situation where she marries Harry and then Harry and Ron have a massive falling out. Ginny of course prayed that nothing like Æthelthryth’s story ever befell her family but she though the hypothetical Ron-Harry-her analogy was an apt modern comparison to get a sense of the pain and trauma of a family splintering. Ginny also marveled at how such an aged and powerful history came to eventually intersect in the most humble man she knew- who really wanted nothing more from life than a family to belong to. Ginny also wondered what became of Æthelthryth’s other children and grandchildren, and if they ever interacted with Gryffindor’s heirs again. She supposed a detailed survey of pureblood family histories could potentially fill in the gaps and resolves, grimacing, to visit Aunt Muriel once she returned home.

For Ginny, research into the Princess Codex and slow translation of the Slytherin documents from her vault felt like reading *The Carnelian Rose*. It was distant, full of powerful wizards and witches, great betrayals and loves, and often even the historians commentary was written in the old fancy language of her mothers favorite book. Lacking the Codex itself and any immediate danger, Ginny took to reading history books and the Slytherin documents as part of her bedtime reading.

Outside of this little deviance, Ginny’s life went on as normal. For the most part she could usually ignore that Auror Patty was somewhere nearby, Disillusioned. Ginny had no doubts that Patty unofficially reported to Harry as much as she reports to her actual superiors and felt some faint anger at this- but more for forms sake than anything real. She mused it would have been much more awkward if she were still in a relationship or still had any desire to meet any new man or flirt with anyone.

Except Ginny was not searching for a relationship and has spent three years being too good friends with her male classmates that random flirtation was out of the question. Flirtation when she went out with friends was also rare as her third year brought an even more serious focus to her Quidditch practice as she has trials for the professional teams in the spring.

Her meeting with sports agents and lawyers before she left England ensured that every professional Quidditch team received a professionally curated portfolio of her player statistics and details over the past three years. Percy Weasley was truly, the best brother to have around sometimes. Even without the portfolio, a smattering of teams had already shown interest in Ginny and sent scouts to her games. Ginny splurged and bought her own International Standard broom at the beginning of the season to break in. The Uni team provides her with high caliber equipment but she would not be allowed to use that broom for her trials.

Ginny at first declined the opportunity to write a capstone dissertation for her concentration. It was the general practice for most students but as a competitive athlete, Ginny felt her time could be better served at practice. But, then, living with Demelza and chatting with her about her research
and bouncing ideas- Ginny felt herself pulled back into the magic and would up talking to her advisor and working out a plan for a mini-dissertation bouncing off Demelza's work. Quidditch after all, was her main priority and she did not have the time nor interest to engage in full on dissertation work, but it did seem a waste to not produce something with all her gained knowledge and work. Her mum was of course ecstatic that Ginny “isn’t limiting herself!” and that she would graduate with not only the degree but a rather a weighty academic laurel on her resume. Just in case, Quidditch didn't work out.

As a result Ginny’s final year at Uni was of a slower pace than her previous ones. She could no longer afford side Muggle Uni classes, extensive partying, or engaging in tons of clubs with her schedule. Her meet ups at the poetry store decreased drastically- but she kept her cellphone to stay in touch. She didn't mind the lack of extensive partying in her life. She had grasped and lived those experiences when she first started Uni. They were in such opposition to responsible Ginny, sad Ginny, keep-everything-in-check-for-later Ginny, for-the-greater-good Ginny, the Burrow Ginny. Those experiences were also in opposition to everything somber and responsible from the War and its aftermath. She still enjoyed and engaged in a good rousing dance floor or pub crawl but she no longer feels that tempestuous antsy need to not miss out and attend every party, every bar crawl, join every club and keep saying yes to everything just because it was new and live had to be lived. As Luna had noted, she was incredibly comfortable in her skin and so very firm in her desires and tastes now that she felt no loss to herself or her person when she opted out of activities she previously was intent to experience. She also realized that a good portion of her List (exempting the ridiculous bits) was complete and that much of what she tried to express to Harry when they broke up no longer held true.

To her surprise she actually loved her nights in studying with Demelza or writing a letter to Harry or her family and friends back home.

That was the one thing that was very new experience.

She and Harry corresponded now.

In actual letters.

Via owl.

Possibly the first time in their lives really.

Granted, the backs of these letters were still full of encoded information and technically the reason for starting the correspondence- but the front of the letters were not mindless pleasantries either.

Ginny wrote about her classes, her friends, and Demelza's research. She recounted, with shocking detail and analysis, the matches she played and the new drills from her practices. Harry raved in his responses. Her write-ups made him feel like he was there and that the analysis was riveting and perfectly complimentary. He flattered her by stating that he even read one of her game reviews out loud over a lunch break to his fellow Aurors who were also just as riveted. Harry in contrast wrote about the idiosyncrasies of life at Stinchcombe, funny anecdotes involving his odd neighbors, and about his various adventures with Teddy introducing the boy to new books and food and life. Ginny exclaimed he was shockingly good at re-accounting everything everyone said and jokes, that he had a talent for making life’s usually mundane moments seem riveting and sweet.

Around the three-month mark Harry wrote her a letter after a two-week hiatus, (he had been on a
mission) that Ginny felt displayed more of Harry than she had ever seen before.

He started by recounting his summer trials with Andromeda in finding Teddy the perfect nursery school. Harry apparently had pretty lofty standards in what he required. Security for Harry Potter’s godson, the offspring of a werewolf, was also a pretty serious issue. Teddy now attended nursery school three days a week from 8am to noon and spent his Wednesdays after school and nights at Stinchcombe.

In his descriptions Harry contrasted Teddy’s school with his. He feared that Teddy may not fit in or be teased or be unhappy, which Ginny was pretty sure was the result of Harry’s experiences and fears rather than Teddy’s. Harry described the absolute chaos that resulted in getting Teddy ready for school, the surprising amount of effort to wrangle a preschooler into uniform, get his bag, and feed him before 9 am. He marveled at Andromeda for her energy as Harry was often exhausted with just once a week duties. He wondered absently in half penned sentences how it was that his Aunt Petunia, despite his hate for him went through at least some of the same motions he now did with love for Teddy.

Ginny cried for a good twenty minutes after reading this particular letter because she felt so many emotions at once. She thought back to Harry’s note when he lent her Matilda and wondered how early in life Harry had learned to dress himself, start reading, and become completely self-reliant. She thought darkly, that after the initial spirit breaking efforts of Petunia Dursley, Harry was unlikely to be as exuberant or energy-requiring as Teddy was now. It didn't surprise Ginny at all that the book was a favorite of Harry’s as a child- the comparisons were startling and heartbreaking. To soothe herself more than Harry, Ginny wrote a subtly worded letter intended to spur her mum into extensive Harry-smothering.

Ginny responded to Harry in a much more cheerful tone. She was somehow certain that Harry would not appreciate a particularly sympathetic or overly emotional letter. But despite the upbeat tone, Ginny felt incumbent to share just as deeply as Harry had. She described living with six brothers, and the smaller turbulences of her teenage years. She described the sudden shame at liking dresses, and dolls, and frilly things, after a childhood spent surrounded mostly by trunks and blocks and mud cakes, only to have these 'girly' things be used as reasons for exclusion from Quidditch or other games. She detailed the brief period when she experimented with denying her femininity to legitimize her “cool-cred” among boys and “prove” her love for Quidditch and laughs at herself through her penned words.

She of course added she realized what patriarchal hogwash all that was by fourteen- and how she once punched Michael’s friend Benjy Stubbins for questioning her commitment to Quidditch because she also loved hair ribbons, nail polish, and lip gloss. (Stubbins was hexed quite harshly later that year when he stupidly remarked that girls just tended not to be as good at DADA or Potions as men. The fact that he also was insulting Harry and the DA earlier during his soliloquy also probably contributed.)

Ginny very briefly and hesitantly confesses her Hermione-caused angst as a teenager. She’s hastily to prefaced with how much she loved the girl but admitted in her letters to having felt particularly judged by Hermione’s superior intelligence and her attitude on girls who enjoyed make up or hair, or clothes, or boys. She described Ron demeaning her intellect at fourteen because his unconscious standard of a smart girl was Hermione and his surprise at her friendship with girls like Lavender despite her good marks.

She explained that discovering makeup and bras in a houseful of boys who were quick to take the mickey was particularly traumatic. Ginny could almost see Harry’s blushing laughter as she recounted these tales. She almost confessed her crush on Sirius but instead settles for describing
how humiliated she was those first days at Grimmauld Place when her brothers called her out on wearing a padded bra and dressing up a little every time she came down for dinner.

She relayed a particularly nasty fight with her brothers where Sirius defended her wearing skirts and curling her hair and how she cried to him when Ron said something truly vile and cruel about her looks. She relayed Sirius’ roguishly charming words of comfort to her because she was pretty sure Harry would find them funny. She does not share how embarrassed she was when Sirius told her he’ll have “to watch another Potter fall arse over teakettle over a fit redhead again.”

She closed by describing the twinge of anger she felt at everyone’s surprise at her good OWL results- but also how guilty she felt for caring about such things when there was a war on and Dumbledore had just died.

Ginny feared she may have freaked Harry out when she didn’t get a reply for almost a week. But when the letter finally came it was neither freaked out nor lacking in understanding. Instead Harry shared with her a rarely exposed and rarely shared insight into his primary and nursery school years. He shared that his only companions in nursery school were the girl who cried too much who sometimes let him play with their dolls. He described at length, a lovely tea party he was once invited to on the play ground after having been punched by Dudley and how this tea party had been a lovely respite. Harry also described the confused feelings he felt when lauded by his teachers for something, (Be it academic or simple attempted kindness) only to be shamed for it at home by Dudley and his Uncle. He haltingly described his youthful angst as a child. He had been happy and comforted with his occasional and peripheral set of quiet female friends at school- they let him play with their dolls and books and were kind. They also, being female, were outside the immediate and direct access of bullying by Dudley and his cronies. Harry went on to relate an amusing anecdote where the Hogwarts dormitory boys had been baffled that Ron and Harry were best friends with not just insufferable and swotty Hermione, but that they openly considered a girl their best friend.

He was not a particularly expressive writer nor was he particularly skilled at identifying and describing his own feelings. But, the halting descriptions of comfort, happiness, shame, embarrassment and confusion showed Ginny that he understood. He confided his pride and amazement at her refusal to diminish despite social pressure. He apologized on behalf of her brothers, and more shockingly, on behalf of Hermione- who he thought condescended on ‘overly feminine normative’ girls more because of her own issues with identity and all things Ron-related than anything else.

Four months later, Ginny casually mentioned a few lines from her favorite book of poetry- relating them to an incident Harry described. Harry responded in surprise stating he didn’t know Ginny read poetry. After two days of awkward hesitate and internal waffling, Ginny sat down and penned back a rather confessed letter admitting that she’d always loved poetry and writing and plays. She even confessed that she had never seen a proper play in real life until she came to Uni-as her family obviously could never afford such an outing for the family.

Harry’s responded absolutely fascinated and overly laudatory about her writing efforts (of which he had only seen the Quidditch reporting). He apologized, she’s not sure if its on behalf of himself or the greater world, but he apologized profusely for the fact that she felt she needed to hide her love of poetry. He also admitted to have never viewing a proper play himself and demands that they both make a point to go once she returns. He saw through the subtle jokes she had written
about herself and poet-stereotypes and countered with examples of her own behavior that defied these notions. He jotted a few subtle funny digs at himself and his relative illiteracy, his introverted-ness, and his relative apathy that far too often showed! But these pieces of self mocking humor only served to further endear Ginny to Harry. He closed his letter by describing himself as a philistine and asked to be inducted into her world of words and rhyme via some recommendations. In the post script he asked, shy and halting only as Harry could, if she would be willing to share with him some of her writing.

Ginny was not entirely sure what the perplexing feelings she felt after she read Harry's letter really were. All she knows is that she felt something. Intensely. Finally, filled with much anxiety and nerves, she sent Harry back a short funny little story she wrote about the imagined happenings of some of her customers from her waitressing job. She also wrote him a list of some of her favorite poets and particularly favorite poems. The waiting period for Harry's response was agony. She was half terrified and half ashamed. She had never ever shared her favorite poetry or her stories before. Or rather, the last time she had shared her writing and words the receiver turned out to be an incarnation of evil and had insidiously and perniciously mocked her and destroyed her esteem.

Harry's response was perfect. He returned her offering of her writing with some original writing of his own. Harry's return letter contained appallingly drawn comic of Teddy's Sports Day claiming it was the some total of his abilities in the arts and his humble thanks. He went on and surprised her with extensive thoughts and questions about some of the poems she had listed- clearly showing that he went out of his way to actually read them and reread them and ponder why they were her favorites. He also openly confesses to not understanding a few of them and once again asked forgiveness for being a philistine. His praise was the perfect tenor, not too much not too little and his curiosity and not mockery warmed her and burgeoned her confidence.

Ginny didn’t explicitly realize it then, but years later she told everyone that it was the letters that led her to fall in love with Harry Potter: an Ordinary Man, as opposed to Harry Potter: The Teenaged Hero. Ginny was popular and has a strong network of friends so, unlike Harry, she never felt any holes or lacks in her emotionally intimate relationships. She was used to sharing her heart openly with Neville, Luna, and Demelza and also in a completely different way with her parents. Yet the correspondence with Harry brought her an emotional intimacy and comfort that she had scarcely ever felt before.

Ginny's parents surprised her with a visit for Christmas and she reveled in showing them around Boston and the adult life she navigated for herself. She felt a warm pride that her parents were proud of her independence, her accomplishments, and her management of her flat, friends, finances, and work. Ginny could literally see her Mum’s insanely, possibly overly protective notions and overbearing need to control and care, begin to pull back when she saw this accomplished Ginny. Ginny had always been fiercely independent but her University experience gave her a platform to truly exert it and challenge herself. It became rather exciting to begin to get to know her parents as carefree adults who spoke to her almost as a peer instead of the stressed out worrying parents of her youth.

Her parents came bearing gifts from her family and friends. In addition to the weasley sweater, she was surprised and touched when she received a paid Portkey ticket to London in the spring for professional Quidditch Trials. Her brothers banded together to buy her all new, top of the line, Quidditch gear to wear to her trials. Here again, she wouldn’t be allowed to wear her University provided gear. Percy of course sent her an updated summary of the portfolio’s she had sent out,
the teams interested, and a very detailed color coded schedule of all her tryout events and dates. He also sent exhaustively researched packets of player and team info for each team she was interested in. Her love for her 'returned' brother shined and burned fiercely when she opened these particular presents. Percy was a very busy and important man and all this research and preparation was a rather time consuming task. Ginny made a mental note to send an incredibly effusive and heart-felt letter conveying her love and thanks. Hermione (and a likely dragooned Ron) sent her a set of smart new business clothes for job interviews (Hermione and her mum were still most insistent on backup plans), and Fleur sent her a few sexy eyebrow raising dresses and strappy heels. (potentially to annoy her mother or simply offset the seriousness of her other presents) Harry surprised her with a beautifully bound book of poems by her favorite magical poet, Zerlina. Ginny ignored the private look her mum and dad exchanged at her stunned shock and the looks they continued to exchange later when she reverently turned the creamy pages of the beautifully bound volume.

The Easter holidays arrived with gnawing anxiety for Ginny. She spent the entire winter and Quidditch season working hard and putting in as many one-on-one sessions with her coach as possible. She took the Portkey to London for her try-outs and performed exceptionally at seven out of nine of the trails and was solicited by a Quidditch Weekly reporter for a short prospective interview afterwards. She was glad to be rid of the stress and tension upon completing the trials, but was immediately filled with the anxiety of anticipation as she waited the next two days for the results. Her family threw her two celebratory dinners. One for finishing the trials and one when she found out she was accepted by three Quidditch teams. That she would pick the Harpies was a foregone conclusion. Ginny was exuberant and happy but also blindsided by the strange emptiness she felt when Harry didn't turn up for either of the dinners. The trials occurred during the work day and in relative professional seclusion. While her mother made a huge fuss of accompanying her to the stadium and waiting in the area until each trial finished, Ginny had not really anticipated anyone else to spend a day essentially loitering waiting for her. But she did assume that everyone would be at the Burrow to celebrate. She had, after all, mentioned the dates of her trials in her various letters.

Finally, Ginny swallowed her pride and pestered Neville about Harry's whereabouts. Ginny felt like she swallowed a large cold stone when Neville finally admitted that Harry went to France on personal leave citing private business. Neville of course was perceptive enough to wonder at this new-found insistence on Harry's whereabouts. Ginny had not been so particular about visiting Harry and seeing Harry in any of her previous trips home. However Neville's assurance that Harry's personal leave to France was 'nothing' only annoyed Ginny further.

"We've gotten to be incredibly close friends!" Ginny said at Neville's raised inquisitive eyebrows. "We have! We've been writing loads and I just thought...he knew I was coming home and having trials. I just thought..."

"Demelza said you've been writing tomes each other- What's going on?" Neville asked gently.

"Nothing's going on, we've just gotten to be very close. We're actually very good friends now, we never really were before. Just lovers or... friends of circumstance," Ginny replied mulishly, "I mean, he knows my favorite poet and shit and I'm...maybe almost Ron-and-Hermione-level close! I just thought he'd want to be around when his very good friend who lives abroad is in town for a week!" Ginny finished, her voice sounding petulant. She was unsure about who exactly she was annoyed at.
“Its Harry, he’s not intentionally inconsiderate or rude- he probably had urgent serious business,” Neville defended. Ginny had a fleeting mean thought that she disliked Neville and Harry getting closer as a result of Auror training-Neville was supposed to be staunchly on her side!

“Without telling Ron or Hermione?” Ginny countered unconvinced. Ron had recently taken a leave of absence from the Aurors to focus on the shop and had known any of the details of Harry’s trip.

Neville didn't have a response. “He didn’t mention he wouldn’t be around?” Ginny shook her head.

“Well maybe he is doing a sudden favor for a friend- that’d be like him!”

In the brief silence it was apparent they were both thinking of the same friend in France Harry would leave at a moments notice to help. Ariadne.

“Does it bug you?” Neville asked hesitantly after some time.

“No,” Ginny responded quickly, “Why should it? He’s allowed to still care for his ex girlfriend.”

“Yea but you guys are now…” Neville began.

“We’re nothing. Just really good friend now. Really! There has been nothing to indicate anything romantic!” Ginny pressed.

“Yea but…that doesn’t mean you don’t feel that way,” Neville responded probingly.

Ginny shook her head, “No, no. I mean I’ll always love Harry I told you that ages ago- but that doesn’t mean I’m in love with him now! Its also...well, we've never been such friends really. We've just gone from friends of circumstance to boyfriend and girlfriend. Its like we're really discovering who were are, as friends and its rather nice actually. ”

Neville looked skeptical but didn't press.

Later Ginny mused that for all that she and Harry had shared about their childhoods and insecurities, Harry rarely spoken of himself in the now, his work, and his in-real-time feelings. For all Ginny knew Harry could have been seeing someone all this time. Yet despite all the rational thought Ginny felt very punched in the stomach when she returned to Boston a week later to find the feeblest of Harry’s letter’s waiting for her.

Dear Gin,

I’m sorry I missed your trails- but I knew you would be brilliant! I had some urgent business to take care of in Paris and had to leave immediately. Ron said you received three offers! Congrats

I’m also sorry to tell you that I won’t be able to continue our correspondence anymore because I’m leaving to Croatia for a few months and won’t be able to write back from the field. I will miss your letters a lot.

Congratulations and good luck on your dissertation!

Yours,

Harry
Chapter Notes

Fear not readers, we are so so very close to Hinny finally happening. But alas, some plot and character development first.

When Ginny Weasley came back to England, she came to conquer.

The English Magical community may not have taken particular notice when the youngest Weasley child left the country, but one would be hard pressed to find an English Witch or Wizard who was not aware of Ginevra Weasley’s return.

Even before her official return, Ginny's name had made waves in certain communities. She received a full page spread in Sport & Hunt Weekly that lauded her as the most exciting player in the professional Quidditch drafts. This, a full three days before draft picks were announced. Once she was announced as starting chaser for the Harpies from coming season, Quidditch Illustrated, Magical Sports Quarterly, and even the sports section of the Daily Prophet ran full spreads on her impressive athletic stats.

In addition to the usual discussion of her flying style, passing & scoring averages, Quidditch Illustrated titled her an “explosive package of brawn, startling beauty, and brains in a deceptively petite frame.” The excitement of her pick was helped in no small party by the full-body picture of her that ran with the article depicting her reclining casually on a broom, tossing a Quaffle in the air, and grinning mischievously at the audience. Ginny Weasley gained the fervent adoration of thousands of teenage boys that week. Being a Quidditch centered magazine; the article only detailed that Ginevra Molly Weasley: a cum laude University graduate, had recently co-written a Transfiguration Dissertation copyrighted and patented by Blazeburn Technologies an emerging and reputable Magical Tech company in the States.

Transfiguration Today interviewed Demelza Robbins’ advising professor to understand the details of the dissertation (not actually co-written, nor in anyway really related to Ginny) and the affect it could have on Wizarding Technology.

“Demelza Robbins was deeply interested in the radio-frequency waves, the application of Transfigurational Theory and Magical Theory. Robbins, who had originally been studying at Magical Oxford had received a 1-year research grant to conduct further study to round out the theoretical elements of her work at the Muggle Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Her Hogwarts classmate and good friend Weasley offered to share a flat with her as she was at the time attending University in Boston where she was majoring in Transfiguration with a minor in Journalism. Apparently it was Weasley’s habitual use
of muggle technology and failure to see a “pragmatic application*” of Robin’s research that brought the young women together in experimentation and Robbins to her breakthrough discovery.

By the end of the year, Robbins had been able to successfully transfigure Muggle radio-frequency waves for magical reception and key them to send a few short messages to and from magical locales. After hours of copious research and experimentation, supposedly inspired by Weasley’s muggle mobile gadget, Robbins excitedly showed her advisor the result. Weasley who intends to play Quidditch professionally, had not been engaged in proper dissertation research. Robbins claims however that Weasley was a vita research assistant and instrumental in experimentation.”

* Ginny had actually cantankerously whined about her Muggle mobile phone going haywire anytime Demelza performed experimental transfiguration in the house. One night when Demelza was explaining her research in full to her friend, Ginny had asked what exactly Demelza planned to do with the transfigured radio waves. Demelza’s lack of answer and the sudden purring of Ginny’s mobile phone had resulted in gobsmacked expressions of realizations on both the girls faces. Ginny was insistent that the brilliance and handwork behind the depth of the discovery was all Demelza. But Demelza attributed Ginny and her mobile as the ”apple” to her newtonian Eureka moment.

The MSE Journal meanwhile, focused with an impressed-tone the play by play of the Blazeburn’s acquisition and copyrighting of the noted dissertation.

“Founder and CEO of Blazeburn Technology Hank Burn announced six months ago that the company was planning on establishing a London based division. Blazeburn, a company that has dominated the Magical American communication markets, hopes to make big changes in England as well. In the announcement Mr. Burn also noted that the slow tapering off of the Post-War Depression and the decrease of protective tariffs and trade regulations in England have paved the way for this venture. There is of course speculation the degree of success Blazeburn will see in the English Markets and if Britain has the infrastructure for such changes. Ministry analysts have been hopeful and aggressively citing an upcoming market boom. Blazeburn is clearly hoping to cash in on this potential boom and hopefully increase the consumer products industry of the Magical English Economy.

American Wizards are far more used to the synthesis of Muggle-technology in their daily lives and have as a result built up the magical infrastructure alongside Muggles. In fact, Blazeburn’s earliest product, The Ear-Floo, is simply a sleek adaptation of Muggle telephone technology. At the most recent press conference, Mr. Burn confidently promised that there would be “great demand in the English markets and that English Wizards just don’t know what they were missing yet!”
In what will be lauded as a brilliant move for decades, Demelza Robbins and erstwhile partner Ginevra Weasley refused public access to their full research notes and the pensive memories of the Weasley-Robbins in house experiments. They also declined the direct financial compensation offered by Blackburn for the research and memory vials. Represented by the legal team of Chang, Finch-Fletchly, & Corner (and many people also speculate, the financial and political machinations and advice of Weasley's brother Percy Weasley, chief of Staff to Minister Shacklebolt to prospective Financial Minister) the two women successfully negotiated instead, for a seat at Blazeburn’s corporate table. The official remarks from Blazeburn cite Robbins research and experimentation as instrumental to the changing face of magical technologies.

Robbins, who describes herself as a researcher at heart, was recently announced as the director of R&D for the company’s soon to open London operations. The English sector while technically still a division of the greater company, will for all intents and purposes operate as an independent entity on the MSE and in the markets of London and New York.

As director of the company’s most critical department, Robbins is also a member of the Board and received 35% market value of the company’s shares. Blazeburn, conceding to the protective emerging Magical Market structure regulations of England, has agreed to hold a tai-annual public meeting of their general share-holders. As per the latest regulations any share-holders who have more than a 2% or more share in any publicly traded company on the MSE will have a voting voice. Though many of these economic reforms were made as safeguards in the post-war economy, it is interesting to note that these same regulations have enabled for two British voices a seat at Blazeburn's table....Weasley received 6% and a position as a Brand Ambassador. Though not holding the weight or voice of a true board member, Weasley will no doubt be a powerful ally for Robbins in public arenas. Blazeburn is smart to use Weasley as brand ambassador and capitalize on the new Harpy's Chaser Quidditch celebrity. Combined, the two women own 41% of the London company making them the only two English voices on an overwhelmingly American Board…”

*The Sorceress*, a feminist leaning magazine lauded Ginny and Demelza as the new age champions of women in the workforce. The magazine had become a bit Hermione Granger centric over the past year (it was hard not to- Hermione really just was that amazing, and an endless ball of productive energy), and many grasped at the change in focus and attention.

“Last month Weasley and Robbins became the first English Witches to sit on the board of a multi-national company, the first witches to independently gain substantial or any large ownership of any publicly traded company, and Robbins the first Witch director of an R&D department in any company...Many leading analyst hope that Weasley's visibility as Quidditch player and brand ambassador for a leading technological company will have a positive influence on the visibility of women in technological fields in magic as well. To what degree Weasley herself views herself in this light remains uncertain as she seems most focused on her athletic career.
Meanwhile Robbins' board seat is sure to be an impacting legacy for corporate structure and technological advancement!"

(Technically, Lady Zabini and Narcissi Malfoy all held vast shares in various companies and substantial power but their shares and power were the result of inheritance. Madam Malkin, was also technically a leading business-witch but her company was still privately owned.)

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Harry Potter was lounging in a hammock in Brazil and relatively unaware that all of England was going crazy over Ginny Weasley and Demelza Robbins. He was on the last leg of a serendipitous motorcycle journey and was reflecting on his experiences and changes over the past six months. Across from him, nursing a beer was, Neville Longbottom, his companion for the past three weeks.

Four months ago Harry Potter had taken a four-day leave from his work to visit Paris. The trip, despite what everyone presumed, was not romantic in nature.

Incredibly frustrated and concerned at the art dealer Contini’s disappearance, Harry had asked a few of his trusted contacts abroad about the man, the Serbian mafia, and any suspicious art trades. Two months later, Victor Krum had owled Harry. The letter among other things invited Harry to a fancy party and private auction of the borderline illegal in Paris. The auction had been enlightening and confusing. Harry with the help of Victor, gained the contact of various elite art collectors, perused private magical collections, and through other art dealers, learned more about Contini.

Though unconfirmed, others in the trade told Harry that Contini had been hired by the elites of the Serbian mafia a year ago to sell an item the Zemun had come to possess. It was very likely an incredibly illegal object, as Contini had not perused the normal routes by which the assembled dealers disposed of their regularly unethical objects. Contini’s fellow dealers too were puzzled as to how the Serbian mafia came to possess what seemed to be a Dark Magical artifact. Unfortunately Harry had not been able to discover more as there had been an incident involving some Russian business scion, his “girlfriend” who was definitely a spy, and his reluctant betrothed, a terrified and rather wan ballerina named Lisette.

Harry and Krum may have set fire to a room at La Tremoille.

That wasn’t the especially terrible part. Kingsley was only really annoyed about the fact that they had been spotted by photographers flying out of the hotel windows on brooms carrying a half naked girl between them.

*La Monde Magique’s* page six had speculated of Nero-style orgies and other debauchery for days due to the seemingly incriminating photographs. *Witch Weekly* of course, picked up on the story and continued the silliness and speculation for the next month. Harry was in some ways glad he
did not have to be in England for the weeks that followed his broomstick style fenestration.

No, for Harry the truly terrible part had come after. Kingsley, though not disagreeing exactly with Krum and Harry’s decision to rescue Lisette, had had to apologize to the French Aurors for the mess they’d caused. The French had had an undercover operation in progress dealing with the same business scion which Harry and Krum's do-gooder interference had blown open. Politically, it was a bit of a covert-ops nightmare. Robbers was perhaps more than a little annoyed that rescuing Lisette had involved one of the most premiere hotel rooms in Paris being set on fire, an international Quidditch Star, and half-nude broomstick acrobatics.

As punishment Harry was required to stay another three weeks in France working without pay to assist the French Aurors in any capacity. As punishments went, all things considered, it wasn't actually that bad. Harry was incredibly conscious that his celebrity and the public nature of the incident prevented Robbards from enacting a harsher punishment. He therefore, quietly negotiated to pay for the damages done to La Tremoille himself. The docking of pay was inconsequential for Harry but unsurprisingly, the French Auror office was not at that moment a fan of Harry Potter or Victor Krum.

It absolutely did not help that Harry did not get along with the Deputy Head, Auror Henri Deneuve. Everything about Henri, especially his decisiveness and compromising morality, bugged Harry. It was clear the feeling was mutual and that the older Deneuve found Harry to be a naive, untempered, and potentially dimwitted about the finer nuances of their work. Harry was also irrationally annoyed that Henri was not only older, but buffer, conventionally attractive, and had dark hair that fell artfully across his brow instead of as an untidy stuck-up mess. It annoyed Harry that these were even points he was annoyed by!

Even having Ariadne, his former lover and good friend around, was not particularly appealing. Ariadne had gained great respect an admiration in England but in France, many of the junior French Aurors only knew her as the woman who had babysat Ron and Harry. Harry begrudgingly admitted that at least Henri wasn’t stupid enough to see it that way. He wasn’t sure if it was lingering anger over their break up or her desire to maintain the strictest professionalism in the already hostile office, but she was positively frigid to Harry. Overall, it was a miserable three weeks.

On Harry’s last day, Ariadne agreed to a goodbye dinner. Over the course of the meal Ariadne asked Harry not too kindly where and how exactly he saw his life going. She had reflected after their breakup and had apparently come to realize that she would have hated who she was if she had stayed with Harry. Harry surprised and unprepared for this reflection and discussion. He sat mutely as Ariadne went into a serious serious critique and interrogative introspection of his person; under the guise of listing all the reasons they were smart to break up. She said her words calmly as if they were mere facts but her barbs were most insidious. She stated the incredibly high divorce rates Aurors suffered and asked him how he could still hold onto his quaint married life fantasy when he was clearly, toxically, married to the job. She acknowledged her ideological differences with her boss Henri, but then also pointed out that at least he was not pathologically secretive and dangerously independent. Ariadne underlined once again, how this was not particularly conducive to a healthy partnership professionally or personally. With Ron having taken a leave from the Aurors to pursue other ambitions, the idea that Harry was a bad Auror partner was particularly wounding commentary. Ariadne also expertly shredded Harry’s social life and tendencies. She posited that perhaps Harry was afraid of trying new things or making new friends. She argued he used his job and fame and history as a defense against these things and dared him to name one good friend who wasn’t from the DA or a part of his adoptive family. There was no yelling or taunting, but calmly, cleverly, and with an artful precision she deconstructed almost every positive
notion Harry felt about himself. Finally, Harry lost his temper and the evening ended in curt angry tones.

Harry returned home simmering with rage and anger. He was particularly peeved that he had to miss Ginny's visit. He had originally hoped to to finish the auction business with Krum and make it back in time to at least catch her on her last day in the country. He snapped at Hermione and accused Ron - when he was attempting to share some WWW related ideas- of abandoning and betraying him. Having successfully hurt his two closest friends, Harry went on to surprise and shock Sharon and Neville over drinks with sarcasm that was a little too mean and a little too rude.

A day later he discovered a letter of Ginny's he had over looked, sent before her trails. By the time he finished reading, he found his anger vanished.

A day later, feeling like an utter asshole, he apologized to Ron and Hermione. Naturally they asked what happened in Paris that put him in such a state. They had heard of course, about the hotel room incident. Harry told them about Henri and a little about Ariadne. He does not share his miserable dinner and her various accusations and then immediately wonders if he was actually “pathologically secretive.” Later he apologizes to Sharon and Neville as well and they end up having a rather enjoyable evening rambling around Convent Garden getting pissed. (He even briefly vindictively thinks that Sharon was a perfect example of a good friend made not from the DA) He felt better but in the post-anger calm realized that Ariadne’s words still bothered him.

They had after all, dated for a year. He never considered that she was someone who knew him so well but she had found ever bruise, every insecurity, and every self-doubt. As a teen he had worried about death. He now worried about injustice and inherited prejudice. Before, he had worried about loneliness. Now he worried and wrestled with notions of pride, ego and the flaws and fears of his father and godfather. Sometimes, he struggled and worried about what it really meant to forgive completely.

Had he spent so much time worrying and being self-critical of these things that he had become a proper wet blanket? No, a bumbling but kind wet blanket would potentially be better than the pathologically secretive, socially inept, and emotionally stunted man Ariadne painted. Had he survived Voldemort to eventually still live alone? He loved Ron and Hermione with all his heart and they of course returned the feeling- but eventually everyone knew they would get married and have children. Would he simply be that Uncle who was always around and lived with them? Harry remembered and feared Alberforth’s words about his brother operating in secrets and lies. Troublingly, the fact that he was still unraveling some of Dumbledore's secrets did not help matters.

Harry also contemplated Dumbledore’s words at Kings Cross about power, responsibility, and the hearts true desire. Harry was not unconscious of the distinct and relatively powerful position he held in wizarding society. He knew that even his mere opinions and statements had a tremendous impact on what many people thought and did. Granted, he wasn’t some all-powerful being- but he was surprisingly conzigant of his social and political capital. It was never a position he wanted and never a position he actively sought but it was a position he had to accept and shoulder. So, shouldering it, he was always aware of its tremendous responsibility and its affects but now for the first time in a long time, he feared it. For all that he had loved Dumbledore, he hoped his life would require fewer secret, fewer plans and machinations, and fewer tragedies. For all that Dumbledore had been sought by many and friend of many, he was in the end a very lonely man. Dumbledore had confided in Snape most of all, but even Snape had not really been Dumbledore's true confidant. Ron and Hermione were his sounding boards and confidants Harry supposed.
But...he knew they confided even more to each other. They certainly knew each others flaws, fears, insecurities, and traversed that territory with familiarity. They knew him well too but not...to the depth they knew each other. Harry desperately wished for that familiarity, for that comfort and assurance in a partner or friend. He had no desire to become like Dumbledore.

Inexplicably, he thought of Ginny.

He thought of the evening spent in her room when he had exposed his angst with the memory of Snape and his father. She had understood and made him feel infinitely better. He thought of the summer before they dated, before the world completely fell apart, when she coolly informed him of his own “stupid logical fallacies and assumptions”. She was unafraid to call him out on his bullshit and usually her bracing punches left him feeling better. She knew him best after Ron and Hermione. Or perhaps better than Ron and Hermione?

He was also pretty certain he was in love with her.

He was certain he loved her when the war ended. But he had also felt pressured. There seemed to be some vague intangible notion and momentum to be with her and 'establish' as Ron and Hermione had but he had found himself unable to truly commit. In the recesses of his mind he could admit that he had sighed in relief when she had convinced him they weren’t being good to each other. They’d only really dated a few short months and he could see her itching to go “be something.” He didn’t really understand that desire as his entire life had been a struggle for the exact opposite, to be nothing. But, he wanted her happy and he couldn’t really argue with her various excellent points.

He’d set aside his feelings and assumed them faded and gone on with his life and it had been laughingly easy. He never loved Ariadne, but that didn’t mean he played her false. He did like her, admired her, and had cared for her. He thought his love for Ginny was waning and wrote off the jolts of desire and affection he felt whenever Ginny was around as lust. Fortunately, she wasn’t around much, they didn’t keep in touch, and he thought she had moved on so greatly; it was easy to think his feelings had faded.

Soon after, she had claimed she discovered THE ONE. He had weirdly been happy because she was happy. He hadn’t even been jealous like he had been with Dean. This was in part because he hadn’t met Ryan for a long time, and then after meeting- he totally dismissed Ryan as someone utterly unworthy and boring. He had been oddly confident that Ginny would never settle for such a boorish prig. And yet, she was happy and smiling and content- so oddly, he felt okay about it. At the time, he thought it was simply more proof that he no longer loved Ginny. Admittedly, he had met Ryan when most of his concerns were elsewhere and on more serious matters. It was only recently, after having read a line from one of Ginny’s favorite poems about the altruism of love-did Harry realize that his placidity about Ryan probably had more to do with his love for Ginny than Ryan’s utter dullness. In fact he had felt a Horcrux-like wave of rage when Ryan had yelled at Ginny in her bedroom. Last summer, when she unexpectedly came home after a breakup, Harry had thought they would become good friends and he would finally get over his pestering lust. Halfway through their conversation the night of his birthday party, Harry had known that was an impossible dream.

He didn’t think there was anyone in this world that he could so easily talk to, who could so perfectly match him in conversation, and who he was so perfectly unafraid and eager to share
with. Falling asleep on the living room floor, breathing in her flowery scent as her hair coiled over him- Harry felt as if he’d fleetingly touched the definition of nirvana.

Harry was pretty certain he was in love with Ginny Weasley but it wasn’t the love of a schoolboy. His love for her was far more calm. He wasn’t irascible for the sight of her, the sound of her, or the touch of her. Obviously, he desired all those things- but he was oddly okay with the pieces of her he did get. Perhaps it was another version of the altruism of love, or perhaps it was simply maturity. Ginny was clearly very happy and thriving. He had no desire to impede that. He was content to simply drink in the moments when she intersected with his life. He didn’t want to become Snape who chose misery when he lost the woman he loved. Harry himself was happier with most of his life and friends than he had ever been before and did not want to actively choose misery. Besides, Harry hadn't exactly been living monk-like celibacy after Ariadne either. He hadn't been cutting a swathe exactly either but still.

Harry debated writing Ginny a long letter. He wondered if she was miffed at him for going to France when she was home for her trials. He belated realized he hadn’t exactly explained. He contemplated incurring more of her wrath and confessing he went due to Codex related business and blithely did not tell her. Unlike with most of the other women in his life, he was painfully aware of what exactly was likely to piss Ginny off. But unfortunately for Harry, just as he decided to write this somewhat confessional letter– his Auror team was called in for an emergency rescue mission.

Elphias Dodge, close friend of the late Albus Dumbledore, was abducted in broad daylight over tea with Dedalus Diggle in Muggle London. The case would have normally come under the jurisdiction of the MLE but was bumped to the Aurors because Diggle, who had pursued the abductors, had to dodge bombs and curses thrown out of the speeding van. Bombs similar to those found at Falmouth in the spring.

The investigation and subsequent rescue of Dodge, Harry’s first as a tactical operations leader, took Harry to Croatia for the following two months During the hasty prep to put together a team to go partially undercover in Croatia, Harry took a moment to write to Ginny and ask for a halt in the exchange. Harry knew himself well enough to know the temptation Ginny’s letters and continued correspondence would pose. It annoyed him to do it, but he was more than a little nervous than he cared to admit on his first mission as leader and did not want distractions. Dodge was finally discovered in a dingy flat on the Croatian border only mildly abused and fortunately armed with a wealth of observed information to relay.

Wizards had kidnapped Dodge. But most of Dodge’s handlers in Croatia had been potentially imperioused Muggles! When Harry and his team discovered Dodge, they also discovered a quickly vacated small-explosives laboratory in the flat adjacent. With Dodge’s observations the Aurors learned that the explosives manufactured in the laboratory were a combined Muggle and Wizard endeavor. From Dodge they learn that the bombs, identical to those seen during the Falmouth Attacks, were enchanted to be activated by wands.

Harry’s team and Robbards were ecstatic. The Falmouth Case, now officially open and unresolved for over a year, had become incredibly frustrating. (And a PR disaster) The breakthrough was received with much excitement at the Auror office. Neville and his team were dispatched to do further investigative research in Croatia. The Auror press secretary, a middle-aged half veela who Harry was frankly intimidated by, was ecstatic as well and ambitiously went to work. She pestered Robbards to utilize Harry in her press releases and media coverage. As a result Harry was unable to go with Neville back to Croatia but instead spent the following weeks
being interviewed by various news sources about the developments of the case. He was also disgruntled that he was posited (unsurprisingly) as leader of the rescue and breakthrough when most of the work was done by his team.

Also bothersome, Harry couldn't shake the feeling that he was missing something painfully obvious and important. He obtained permission to further question Dodge in an attempt to try and find something that will 'click' and make this feeling go away. After the 7th interview both Doge, Robbards, and Dodge’s recently hired solicitor get very irritated with Harry’s badgering. Meanwhile, Harry’s investigation into magical artifact trade (Legal and illegal) also resulted in nothing and Robbards, lacking evidence, was unable to authorize opening the search into Muggle trafficking in Serbia and Croatia. Ron and Hermione are no help. Harry was technically not allowed to share the more confidential details of Auror case-work with them. (Only those with clearance and some small exceptions for spouses was allowed) Besides, Ron was overcome with such a forlorn and frustrated look that Harry decided it was unfair to tempt him in his decision to leave. Harry also badgered Hermione to find legal loopholes that would enable Robbards to sanction the types of investigations Harry wanted but naturally, she was too ethical and refused.

Work on the Falmouth Case continued but frustratingly, Harry was denied his requests to meet up with Neville in Croatia or to survey and monitor local Muggle imports and exports. For all that he is Harry Potter, he is not Head Auror and also not the Senior Auror who was first put in charge of the case. Harry was conscious enough that to further press the issue would make him an arse and be an abuse of his social capital. Harry could also admit that being allowed to lead a team into Croatia was generous of Robbards' part as he had been on formal reprimand not two months ago. But all that maturity does not help with the fact that Harry was irritated, and restless, and plagued by his errant suspicions and felt overall under-utilized. It was in this frame of mine he broke the semi self-imposed letter-writing hiatus by penning an incredibly cranky and vaguely angry letter to Ginny. He doesn’t detail actual Auror work but described, in the broadest outlines, the frustrations of paperwork, legalities, and access denying Senior Aurors. He also accused her of avoiding him and never taking the initiative to write to him first.

His whining letter was responded to with tart directness, witty yet visceral barbs, but also understanding and patience.

She pointed out the ridiculousness of her writing first when he had explicitly stated they could no longer write due to his mission. She allowed him his complaints about paperwork and access denying rules but gently points out that this is just him being cranky as he knows as well as her the virtue of such rules and protocols. She pointed out that he could conduct his investigations after hours as a private citizen. She immediately recants this statement and with much pleading asks he not do this- especially alone.

Ginny also noted her surprise at his crankiness and frustration and marked that she had not seen this in him in years. Far from being disappointed, she told him she was comforted by this as she had worried sometimes he was getting too mature, too serious, too into his work, and too intent on shouldering everything without complaint. Ginny stressed that Harry also take time to vent and break out of his socially demanding roles and presence. She also iterated that there was no such thing as the perfect job. That all jobs, even ones that were ‘perfect fits’ or something someone felt destined to do were often peppered with lulls and frustrating junctures. Ginny stressed to Harry that succumbing to the small pieces of rage and frustration that the work life sometimes brought was not aberrant and it was completely normal to rant and whine. She offered to always be there to listen to his rants or anger and heartaches or even just frustration with the annoyances and
irritations of life. Ginny concluded by stating she was always willing to listen and lend an ear when needed and only half joked that Harry have no qualms making her party (illegally) to Auror secrets. In the post script she apologized, for not writing to him first in other situations, and for taking out her disappointment that he missed her trials through silence. Ginny even goes so far as to admit that Harry's letters brighten her day and that she looks forward to them eagerly.

Her letter was direct and admonishing but also funny in its dry sarcasm. Harry felt far better about his work life and the pressures of his public and personal personas afterward. Harry contemplated writing to her about his encounter with Ariadne but instead asked her to recount her trials and apologizes for missing them. (Harry was vaguely gratified that her response to that in which she stated that Auror work would always take precedence over and Quidditch)

Ginny, sensing Harry was still a tad frustrated in his work limbo and also recent uptick in public attention, urged him to take a vacation. Of course Ginny could not do this directly so she started by telling him his commitment to his job and his “saving people thing” were what she most admired about him but thought a holiday would do him well and help keep him sane and well rounded. Ginny informed him Neville was looking for a partner on a family-related trip to Brazil. She shared with Harry the amusing anecdote of Neville’s eccentric uncle retiring in Brazil. She informed him that Neville was hoping to go check up on the eccentric uncle and suggested Harry tag along.

Over drinks two nights later, Harry asked Neville if he could join. Neville agreed easily and excitedly and the men spend the week planning their excursions. Harry wrote to Ginny about their plan and Ginny whole-heartedly approved and was more than a tiny bit jealous at the travel opportunity. Privately Ginny was surprised Harry actually took her advice and that he was willing to take himself away from ‘the job’ for a while. The Harry of her youth and even a few years ago would not have. Harry and Ginny are both disappointed to find that as a result of the trip, they will not see each other until mid July.

As the men wandered and toured through Brazil, Harry reflected that his friendship with Neville was a full grown friendship now and distinctly different from his friendship with Ron. With Neville, Harry realized he opened and explored very different facets of himself than he did with Ron or Hermione. Neville, curious and excited, insisted on exploring the nightclubs of Brazil. This would have never occurred to Ron or Harry who were very much not the usual nightclub people. But after self consciously dancing amid a throng of people, Harry was glad Neville forced him into the experience. It will certainly not be his new favorite activity, but he now better understood Ginny’s affinity for it and could admit he had fun.

Neville was also far more patient than Ron and indulged Harry’s burgeoning foodie hobby. He happily trekked through neighborhoods and waited out long halting conversations Harry had with the locals to find small hole-in-the wall restaurants and local food specialties. Neville had an easy sweet charm and Harry had the face every ‘woman of a certain age’ felt the need to feed. So, unsurprisingly, the two men found themselves invited to many family meals and grandmothers’ kitchens.

Harry hadn't exactly been celibate after Ariadne, but he hadn't exactly been cutting a swathe either. Once again, he was not unconscious of his social status and the issues of romance therein. Averse to any sort of press attention, his random and few romantic liaisons had been with muggle women to whom he was simply just another bloke. His celebrity and status meant that he had
never had any sort of social pub going experience where he and his lads attempted to chat up
customers. In Brazil, Harry was positive Neville encouraged him to chat up the local women just so
that he could laugh at Harry. He also jokingly refused to believe Harry's non-celibate existence. It
was weird and different to have a male friend who would engage in such banter with Harry, as
Ron and Harry assiduously avoided any humor or chatter of that vein. Harry, with many a rude
gesture, eventually got to chatting up a girl at pub (with Neville looking on a few yards away) and
even ended the the night snogging her heavily (without feeling the sheer embarrassment that
Neville was still in the pub and likely nearby). Unfortunately and hilariously this only validated
Neville who increased his dogged encouragement.

The boys learned to paraglide and their paragliding instructor was a very pretty short athletic girl
with alluring dark eyes. After shared jokes, a bit of flirting, and the euphoric accomplishment of
paragliding, Harry suavely and skillfully asked the girl to dinner surprising Neville. He threw his
jacket at Neville’s very surprised but smug face when he walked back into the house the next
morning for breakfast. Two days later, Harry spotted two lovely motorcycles for sale and made an
impulsive buy. Convincing Neville turned out to be surprisingly easy, a task Harry felt (guiltily)
would have been far less easy if Hermione was around. The boys rounded out their holiday by
taking a long, circuitous, multi-day journey on motorcycle from Rio to the Uruguayan border. The
trip was full of rough road, creative resting points, sometimes sleeping past noon in hammocks,
and extemporaneous decision-making and side excursions. Harry decided that he loved the purr of
the engine under his legs and the feel of the open road almost as much as he loved flying on a
broomstick. Harry made a note to ask Mr. Weasley if he could work on putting Sirius’ old bike
back together. He would like, and is finally ready, to have his godfathers machine back and also
amended to buy or assemble another bike for regular use as well. Harry and Neville gave away
their motorcycles to a few teenagers in a small town at the end of their journey and Apparated
back to Neville’s uncle’s to pack up for their Portkey home.

Harry and Neville parted at the International Porkey office. The trip was curative and balancing.
Harry was relaxed, happy, and refreshed mentally and socially to readdress his Auror work.
Travel dirty, his dragon-hide leather jacket in good need of conditioning, and his broom over his
shoulder, Harry decided to Apparate to Godrics Hollow and walk up to Stinchcombe.

He walked in and found Ginny Weasley sitting alone at the kitchen island reading a book, her
bare feet swinging from the high bar stools. His heart swelled and he intensely thought

*Home.*
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Ginny Weasley, in transition

Molly Weasley was annoyed.

Specifically, Molly Weasley was annoyed with Ginny. Her recently returned daughter had only two months before a month long training and initiation in Holyhead in September. After the month of private-to-the-public, sequestered training, the Harpies would have a month of 60 hours a week, pre-season practice. Then, the training schedule would lighten to roughly 3-4 days a week, but the match schedule would ensure that Ginny was away every other weekend. Despite having been away for three years and having only this liminal two months to spend with her family, Ginny never seemed to be home.

“Honestly Arthur, you would think its intentional!” Molly grumbled to her husband as she aggressively jabbed her wand at the stove.

“She’s catching up with her friends dear,” Arthur Weasley murmured, his gaze focused on various important papers he had spread across the table.

“Coming in at all odd hours of the night, not so much as a by-you-leave! Who knows where she is going! Just because we didn’t comment when she lived with that boy…that does not give her free range..”

“She is an adult Molly and is managing her own finances, we can’t control her movements…”

“She is still living under this roof! There are certain courtesies! Would it kill her to have lunch with her parents? Inform us when she will be home?”

“Come now Molly, I had lunch with her just yesterday, and on Tuesday. And I saw her for lunch twice last week, and the week before” Arthur responded calmly to Molly’s increased agitation.

Molly looked over at her husband a little surprised. Since Ginny returned, she had become a fast moving buzz of life-managing appointments, and social engagements. Once the hustle and bustle of squaring away Ginny’s finances, her responsibilities and expectations with Blazeburn Technologies, the rush of reunion social engagements finished, Molly thought she would see her daughter all day at the Burrow. Instead Ginny breakfasted with her parents and then rushed out the Floo, usually returning after dinner. Molly rarely received an actual answer from her daughter as to what she was doing with her days and was surprised that Ginny had spent so many lunch hours with her father.

“Since when do you have time to take so many casual lunches out in your work day?” Molly asked, a little annoyed that Arthur had gotten so much private attention from Ginny.

“We only went out for lunch last week. Ginny’s come to the Ministry all the other times. She brought a basket with lunches for me and the boys. I thought you’d packed them all.” Arthur said looking up at his wife a little confused.
Molly Weasley’s look of surprise increased.

“Ginny,” she said flatly, “Our Ginny?”

“Yes, they were quite delicious. The lunches, I thought you’d packed them and sent her. Four lunches every time. For Percy, Harry, and Neville.”

Molly Weasley was very surprised and suspicious now. Her daughter was kind and responsible and considerate yes, but not in the pack lavish lunches daily to deliver to her father way. No, Ginny was kind and considerate in a more unseen way, taking on burdens, responsibilities, and care for causes and issues less obvious, unnoticed, and rarely did she make a production of her work. Molly Weasley could easily believe Ginny making daily deliveries of pastries to Grimmauld Place or the Ipswitch Witches shelter, or quietly sorting, filing, cleaning and organizing her fathers office unasked, but not this.

“Lavish lunches?” Molly queried her husband.

“Oh yes, singapore noodles with pork and grilled peppers, bakewell tartlets, beet salad, scalloped paella, chicken marsala, one time she even brought these lovely pork chops stuffed with spinach and sun-dried tomatoes,” Arthur said reminiscing about the truly excellent lunches he had enjoyed over the past two weeks.

“Ginny made all this? Our Ginny?” Molly asked utterly shocked. Ginny could function tolerably around a kitchen all her children could, but of all her children, Ginny was depressingly the least interested or talented in the culinary arts.

“Yes, that’s why I thought you’d packed them dear,” Arthur replied, now also curious as to where his daughter was procuring the amazing lunches.

Before Molly could respond the Floo flared and Ginny stepped out in a sleeveless green summer dress holding a large wicker basket.

“Ginny! Where have you been all day?” Molly Weasley asked intent to discover the mystery of the lunches. The basket was no doubt further evidence.

“Out,” Ginny said faintly and hummed as she made to go up the stairs.

“Ginny!” Molly raised her voice exasperated, “What’s this I hear about lunch baskets you’re taking to Dad and Harry and Neville? You’re not buying take out from somewhere fancy are you Ginny?”

Ginny stopped a little startled, and then began, “Oh! Oh. Its nothing, I’m just…well experimenting. I don’t have anything to do all day, all my friends are at offices and have work. Hermione is in class or doing her trainee hours at the law firm. So I thought why not? I figured it was stupid to let food go to waste and remember? Director Robbards saying that Harry spends most of his lunch hour just walking around St. James park? Well, I just thought…Anyway I get to see Dad and Percy and Neville then,”

This raised more questions than it answered. Molly shared a look with Arthur.

“Where exactly are you cooking all this?” Molly asked.

“Oh, at Stinchcombe,” Ginny replied as if it was the most obvious answer in the world and then added, “I’m not very good, so it takes me ages.”

“At Stinchcombe,” Molly repeated, still more confused. Ginny nodded. “You’re just there, by
“Well, not really. Kreacher and Winky help me quite a bit. I’m not very good you see,” Ginny admitted.

A few months ago, Kreacher asked Harry if he could serve his master “properly,” and relocated to Stinchcombe. A month later McGonagall had written informing Harry that Winky, who had surprisingly bonded with Kreacher, was very lonely and if Harry would be interested in employing her as well. Kreacher and Winky now resided in one of the bedrooms at Stinchcombe. Winky received a salary though Kreacher refused and both enjoyed weekends off. Both House-elves had very little to do as Harry, Ron, and Hermione had long ago settled into their housekeeping routines. Harry therefore sent them to housekeep at his elderly neighbors residences twice a week.

“Does the distinguished owner of Stinchcombe know you’ve usurped his house elves for cooking experiments?” Ginny’s father asked with a wry smile.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Kreacher and Winky practically begged me! Ron, Harry, and Hermione all cook dinner together twice a week and it drives Kreacher barmy that he has nothing to do. I went over there to read in the library a few weeks ago, and Winky and Kreacher practically begged me to get involved. Harry apparently told Kreacher not to bother with making lunch.”

“And you…agreed,” Molly asked still surprised that her daughter so easily agreed to making a lavish lunch much less being so agreeable to personally deliver it every day.

Ginny shrugged and stated she had nothing better to do. Molly thought that Ginny often had had nothing better to do the many times she asked Ginny to work in the kitchen with her.

“Well. Its late, have you eaten? Your father and I finished a while ago but I can heat something,” Molly inquired.

“No, I had dinner with Harry. Ron and Hermione went to that Wizarding Literature Fundraising dinner tonight so Harry and I went to The Oak. You, that little Italian place in Notting Hill? I had so much burrata, we had to walk around for about an hour before I stopped feeling stuffed! I think I’ll head to bed actually,” Ginny said breezily and marched upstairs.

Molly blinked, then turned to her husband wide-eyed with surprise, her eyes communicating ten-fold more. Arthur shrugged poorly hiding an emerging grin.

“Well, I’ll be damned. She’s never cared to cook a thing in her life but a grand kitchen and a house elf’s request and she’s Julia Child!”

Arthur chuckled and muttered, “I don’t think it’s the grandeur of the kitchen my dear…”

Molly’s eyes met her husbands, she too suspected but was hesitant, “You don’t think…”

Arthur shrugged, “I’m certainly not the first person she’s visiting when she delivers those hot lunches.”

Husband and wife shared another look.

“But I thought she’d decided she was done with all that!” Molly said, a small excitement building up in her.

Her husband, frustratingly shrugged again. At Molly’s exasperated and then inquiring look he added, “Who knows mollywobbles, I understood where she was coming from when she decided
all that. Things do change. At the very least, your daughter, who has resented even the slightest suggestion she slave away in the kitchen for someone, just for fun, has suddenly started spending hours laboring in a kitchen. Perhaps as they say, actions speak louder than words? I dare say you should get your hopes up though or meddle. You say something to her and she will quit just because you said so.”

Molly huffed out a frustrated noise and then denied anything about her hopes, much to her husband’s amusement.

Later in the tender privacy of their bedroom, Molly loyally defended Ginny’s somewhat tempestuous nature when it came to cooking and cleaning. For all that Ginny complained and made clear her resentment whenever she was asked to cook, clean, or “be stuck in the kitchen,” she took to such tasks when the time called for with a quiet and startling dignity. Without prompting, ceremony, or fuss Ginny had spent the summer after the War cooking, cleaning, and seeing to any task that was required efficiently and silently filling in for an absent mother, a morose and vacant father, and taking care to cook, clean, and nurture all the extended family, friends, and injured as needed. In truth Molly very clearly remembered her surprisingly upbeat daughter cajoling a morose Sirius Black at Grimmauld Place, never complaining about the social restrictions or the work. Most vividly Molly remembered her heartbroken daughter, assiduously assisting in wedding prep not two years later, often anticipating needs before they were voiced.

“She was always emotionally mature for her age,” Arthur admitted softly turning in the bed.

“She grew up too fast,” Molly agreed sadly, “She never complained, blow after blow and she just adapted quietly. Even when security cancelled her 15th birthday party because Harry was staying with us, or before when we told her she couldn’t meet any of her friends over the summer. Never complained. In some ways, she grew up faster than Ron or any of the other boys.”

Her husband nodded, and then knowing his wife’s thoughts were headed in this direction anyway added faintly, “Except Harry.”

Molly huffed a little and said peevishly, “Poor darling didn’t even have the small comforts Ginny had! And yet, somehow he’s found more peace and happiness than my daughter.”

Arthur rolled over and gave his wife a faux-exasperated look, “She’s happy Molly. She’s succeeding in everything she set out to do. More than I ever thought possible and more than I ever dreamed we could provide her. No, I know you want her settled and calm and content but we agreed, she deserves some irresponsible floundering. You just said she spent her youth being too responsible and mature!”

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The proper Quidditch season started and Ginny found herself increasingly at Stinchcombe.

Inadvertently, Ginny had spent almost every day at the house over the summer. At first it had simply been because it was a lovely space to catch up with her brother, Hermione, and Harry. Then, it was because the ‘family meal’ at Stinchcombe often included Neville or other guests, returning with Harry from the Auror Office. Pretty soon Stinchcombe became the hangout place for most of their friends. Harry was always excited and happy to have guests but Ginny was usually the one who made the invitation. Ron of course teased and complained that Ginny treated Stinchcombe like her own private café, inviting friends for cocktail hours, Sunday Roasts, and evening picnics. Despite Ron’s mild criticism Ginny was careful to keep the steady gatherings full of mutual friends. Ginny was far better friends with Terry, Micheal, Ernie and Padma Patil than Harry was and was circumspect enough to invite them to only larger gatherings at the house or met up with them at pubs and cafes. Once Ginny involved herself with Kreacher and his Lunch-
mission, it seemed silly to go back to the Burrow for the few scant hours between lunch and dinner. (Despite Kreacher and Winky’s guidance Ginny was still impossibly slow and incredibly untalented at cooking and set up, clean up, and planning often took up most of the day.)

Ginny enjoyed her time at Stinchcombe. She was surprised that despite the many pitfalls and frustrations, she didn’t mind cooking the lavish lunches. She had found the whole cooking ritual incredibly frustrating when living with Ryan. His lack of input or help and assumptions about it being her duty had slowly but surely built up simmering resentment and rage, but cooking with the House-elves was a chatty fun affair. In contrast, Harry often came home from the office earlier than Ron and Hermione and he was usually the one who started cooking in the evenings. Ginny thoroughly enjoyed being his assistant or simply sitting at the island counter chatting with him. Ginny was at Stinchcombe even on the evenings Ron and Hermione were out. She and Harry made a methodically study of every local take-away spot and were halfway through mapping and rating Camden’s take-away options when the summer ended.

Though excited about Quidditch and ready for her first professional season, Ginny was sad when the summer ended. She knew she would miss her time hanging out at Stinchcombe. Being silly with Harry in the kitchen, rambling around various neighborhoods of London with Harry, in search of the perfect fish n’ chips, and lazy picnics with their friends on the Stinchcombe lawn, and sprawling out on the floor in front of Harry’s television giggling and commenting when watching movies. (Ron and Hermione found Ginny and Harry incredibly annoying when they did this)

All of this, of course would not be possible once Ginny started her job and had serious practices.

She didn’t terribly miss her lazy, fun, days at Stinchcombe during pre-season training. September was spent in the middle of the Orkney Islands extensively bonding with her team and living, eating, and breathing Quidditch. Making new close friends, the extensive training, and the world-within-world feeling left her little time to miss Stinchcombe. She did sometimes wish, particularly when something ridiculous happened, or something funny was said, that Harry was around though. She had forgotten, or perhaps never really realized, the depth of sarcasm, dry wit, and observational humor she and Harry shared. She loved her new teammates but sometimes they didn’t quite get it.

By October, after a month of living in each others’ pockets, Ginny and her team were ready for the freedom of the regular practice season. Ginny welcomed her re-entrance into the real world with open arms and excitedly told her family about what “professional quidditch training” was like. For the first month or so Ginny lived at home and enjoyed the comforts of the Burrow as she adjusted to her new life. Her entire family and extended friends circle came to her first match – causing an inadvertent rise in Harpies tickets for the weeks to come due to the celebrity citing’s. (There was also in Invisible Hit Wizards for security)

By mid-November however, Ginny was ready for a place of her own. She loved her parents dearly but her mother’s social and philanthropic schedule, the inadvertent slip back into “child” mode, and the continual conflicts with her own schedule made her realize it was time to move out. Ginny bought herself a sleek, elegant, though admittedly expensive, flat in Notting Hill with an Extensionable Entrance door that took her directly to the back door of The Leaky. Her mother pestered and nagged about her safety living alone until Harry and Ron and Bill came to add protective and security Charms all over the flat.

Ginny practiced with the team three days a week from 6 am to 3 pm. Team practice days were usually broken up into sections with lunch at the training grounds. In addition to team practices, once a week Ginny met with her personal trainer for a day of staggered on-ground exercise and
on-broom drills. Personal trainer days were truncated on away-match weeks. The team usually left Friday evening and returned at noon on Sundays. Though grueling and extensive, the schedule gave Ginny a decent amount of free time. Or rather, a decent amount of time spent bored, alone, and missing her summer days at Stinchcombe.

Most of her friends had more normative jobs and did not get off work until about 5pm. Every other week or so, especially on the weeks she was not away for a match, Ginny would meet up with various groups of friends for drinks or dinner, or a house party. She went to the pub with her team after every match whether they won or lost, although the partying after a victory usually extended will into the small hours. And of course Sunday nights were always for dinner at the Burrow, so it wasn’t as if she wasn’t socializing and keeping in touch with her friends and family. But, her regular work week still left a decent amount of time to miss her summer schedule, especially as she was coming home to a sleek, clean, and chic but empty flat. Try as she wanted, Ginny could not make her flat the place her friends flocked to, the place to hang out. So, once into the proper Quidditch season, Ginny Weasley found herself increasingly at Stinchcombe, hanging out with Harry.

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“Why are you always here?” Ron asked chewing his chicken.

“Ron!” (an exasperated Hermione)

“Isn’t it obvious? She’s here for the food,” said Harry grinning.

“Its an honor that I dine here. You should all be thankful for the pleasure of my company,” Ginny said haughtily. Harry snorted and Hermione rolled her eyes.

“Really, why are you always here? You did spend all those galleons on that posh flat,” Ron persisted.

“I told you, she’s here for the food. How would she feed herself otherwise?” Harry repeated.

“What do you mean? Ginny knows how to cook!” Hermione said and then looked shocked as Ginny opened her mouth to retort and then gave an embarrassed pause, “But…I’ve seen you help your Mum! How did you…How did you feed yourself at Uni?” (Hermione wasn’t as well informed about Ginny’s summer lunch deliveries)

As Harry sniggered, Ginny explained with as much dignity as she could muster her cooking problems.

Four weeks into living in her new flat, Ginny realized she was living almost entirely on take-away or the tart and bread baskets her mother gave her. She was in trouble with the Team nutritionist for not hitting her protein, calcium and electrolyte requirements. Ginny was fairly certain that were it not for Quidditch she would be the size of Harry’s cousin as her go to dinner was usually greasy pub food and her go to snacks were large wedges of cheese, crisps, and chocolate biscuits. In fact not last week she had messaged Harry (via her new mobile phone!) beggin him to bring chips, fish and curry to her flat instead of meeting him in Camden. (She had also remained in bed all day reading a novel out of soreness)

Technically Ginny knew how to cook, she had spent the summer working with Kreacher and Winky making succulent lunches after all! Ginny knew how to cook large lavish meals with a cookbook and assistance, how to make desserts and her favorite items. She knew how to cook for two, in a manner of speaking, due to living with Ryan but all those meals took more than a little preparation and Ginny was often too exhausted after practice to make something nutritious and
hearty for herself. Making a “normal” dinner for oneself was surprisingly hard. Ginny was also, much to Harry’s amusement, very bad at grocery shopping, usually overestimating grocery needs. She was prone to inadvertently mimicking her mothers’ shopping cart but without her mothers skill in utilizing all the raw materials. A tad too proud to ask her mum, Ginny found herself in a muggle grocery store a last week with Harry trying to compile a rational and “easy to cook” list of grocery options. (Their silly antics had gotten them kicked out of the Waitrose in Holborn.)

But the more immediate solution to her inability to properly feed herself was Stinchcombe. Ginny was there chatting, assisting in cooking, and hanging out with Harry almost every day anyway. Harry (and friends) almost always cooked well rounded, well balanced, nutritious and tasty meals. Staying over for dinner almost every night was a seamless transition that no one had questioned… until now.

Once Ginny finished explaining, Hermione of course berated her for her failing nutrition. After detailing the dangers of scurvy and lack-of-fiber diets she began listing all the cookbooks that were targeted towards healthy meals for One. Ginny was a little annoyed to find that most “Cooking for One” cookbooks assumed a sad lonlyness in their readers.

“So what are you giving us in exchange for feeding you, and not telling Mum?” Ron asked over Hermione’s recitation. He was grinning and knew that Ginny would not want this ‘failing’ mentioned to her mother.

“I told you Ronnikins, the amazing pleasure of my company. What would you do with your humdrum self if I wasn’t here to entertain and ply you with elevated conversation? God knows Hermione needs some intellectual conversation,” Ginny responded over-coolly.

“Hey!” Harry protested, “We’re feeding you. You should be nice to us.”

“I vote Ginny deals with the next decapitated animal Old man Dodderidge gives us,” said Ron. Ginny made a face as Harry and Hermione agreed.

Later as they tidied the dishes, Harry tossed her an apple so she “didn’t get scurvy.”

After that it became practically routine, a pattern very close to her summer days. Four nights a week she had dinner at Stinchcombe. Ron and Hermione had date-night dinners usually once a week and on those evenings, Harry and Ginny continued their methodical exploration and rating of take-aways across various London neighborhoods in Ginny’s flat. After a chance encounter, Demelza and Warrington, officially a couple now, sometimes joined Harry and Ginny for dinner on these rambling excursions. Warrington and Harry had grown an odd sort of friendship. To Ginny and Demelza this friendship seemed to comprise of mostly wry looks, grumpiness at young men who talked to the two redheads, and odd grunts.

When Hermione asked what they would do when they finished with the neighborhoods of London, Harry and Ginny immediately responded that they would simply start Apparating to various neighborhoods across England to start their sampling. The prospect that this could take years did not bother Ginny and made her oddly satisfied.

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It was one such evening when Harry called her on his second edition Blazeburn mobile to inform her that Neville would be joining them for dinner and that it would be a semi working dinner. Harry called her on his latest purchase, the latest Blazeburn mobile. The the second generation of
these mobiles had only just come out and Demelza, as director of R&D had made a tidy profit. Ginny’s remaining stock had of course jumped, and many others who had invested in the company (Ron & George most certainly and also Harry ) also benefited. Ginny too had purchased the new phone and also received one free from the company. While Ginny’s involvement with Blazeburn was minimal at best these days, the company knew good, free, advertising when they saw it. Popular (and good looking) Harpies player Ginny Weasley walking around with Blazeburn products was the best sort of branding! Ginny gave her free phone to her mother and bought another one with her new semi-wealth for her father.

Ginny arrived at Stinchcombe after the boys (Ron and Hermione were out). Though sweaty and muddy, she first washed her hands and directly went to set the table, assemble the braised endive and beet salad, and charm the bok choy to rip itself into shreds before she begged off for a shower upstairs. She quirked back a questioning look at Neville’s surprised eyebrow raise.

The conversation didn’t immediately jump into work topics. Over the pork tsukune ramen (Harry was a good cook!), the boys inquired about Ginny’s upcoming match and Ginny inquired Neville about the various Aurors and their social lives.

“Its gossip,” Harry said reaching for his salad plate.

“No its not,” Ginny defended, stabbing emphatically with her chopsticks, “I’m inquiring that’s all. Besides knowledge is important, even if it is gossipy. You’re just sore because you’re socially oblivious and usually the last to know!”

“I am not!” Harry said. Ginny rolled her eyes disbelieved and looked at Neville as if to confirm.

“Well….you’re just not as ‘in the know’ as Ginny…” Neville attempted to defend loyally. Ginny laughed and Harry raised his hands in surrender.

When dinner ended, Ginny offered to attend to clean up as the men set to laying out their office notes across the coffee table in the living room. Ginny set the cutting board to chop pears as she jabbed her wand at the dishes. Kreacher had come in discreetly during the end of their dinner to start clearing the table and to package the leftovers for Harry’s lunch the next day. Harry had not mentioned the “working dinner” with Neville being confidential.

As Kreacher shut down the kitchen for the evening (he was very particular), Ginny floated a plate of pear slices dressed in light honey and cinnamon-spice, two glasses of port and a glass of mead, and a smaller plate of sliced pairs with out dressing into the living.

The men were seated on the floor looking over the papers on the coffee table. The glass of mead and plate of undressed pairs landed gently next to Harry’s elbow on the cofee table and he briefly glanced up at Ginny, giving her a small quirk of the lips. The larger dessert plate neatly landed in the center of the table clearing some papers and the Neville gently snatched one of the glasses of port out of the air. Picking up one of the small silver dessert spoons Neville popped a slice of pear in his mouth and then glanced questioningly at Harry’s smaller plate.

“He doesn’t like raw cinnamon,” Ginny explained and tucked herself into one of the armchairs, the other glass of port in her hand.

“It’s a texture thing,” Harry explained distractedly, “Is this the last of the Veelan Metheglin?”

“We’ll have to go back to that shop in Presteigne to get more. I’m away this week for a match but we can make a weekend of it next week! I have a hankering for that pub’s pilchard pie” Neither Harry nor Ginny noticed Neville’s surprised blink and dazed stare.

Neville had been increasingly surprised at how well Ginny flowed in harmony with the kitchen
and other spaces at Stinchcombe. He knew she was used to the kitchen space and a house regular, but he had no idea how in tandem she and Harry were in the kitchen and house in general. More surprising (but also, in many ways, not at all) was the private smiles and looks the two shared over random comments or the way they anticipated each other's moves and needs. Neville hadn’t commented on the way Ginny had slipped two drops of Mr. Milthorpe's Muscle Recovery potion into Harry’s glass of water or the half-surprised and half-grateful smile Harry had flashed her. Since when did Harry openly share his slight injuries or, in this case, sound thrashing on the gym sparring mat? And for that matter, since when did Harry let anyone so casually take care of him? Ginny hadn’t asked and Harry certainly hadn’t anticipated the drops of potion. Was Neville going crazy or had Ginny charmed all the watercress from Harry’s bowl of Ramen to fly into hers? Harry wasn’t fond of watercress but he had never been a picky eater. But Ginny clearly cared enough to go the extra mile. Hadn’t she also added an extra strip of Pork when Harry had gone to answer the floo call?

Neville wondered if this was normal behavior between the two and if so, how Molly Weasley had not caught it and thrown a parade. The dessert exchange was even more evidence. Ginny certainly wouldn’t think so, but Neville thought it was adorably sweet that Ginny made Harry an entirely separate plate simply because he disliked the texture of cinnamon granules on this tongue. Also since when did Harry and Ginny have time in their lives to go visit picturesque, historic, Welsh towns to simply…stock their wine cellar, and hang out at historic pubs? They were both impossibly busy people but had certainly made the time, and were planning to do so again!

Surely Ron and Hermione must have noticed how…unconsciously involved these two were. Or perhaps, like Neville now, they too had observed and then been too nervous to comment, afraid that the obvious affection, the obvious compatibility, and the obvious implicit tenderness would suddenly stop if anyone made any sort of implicating observation.

Ginny had once said she would always love Harry but that there were many burdens, complications, and commitments to herself that cluttered that path. Perhaps that had changed? She had certainly achieved all that she had once thought was beyond her reach. She had hit many of her goals and had not, as she once feared, limited herself by "orbiting around Harry." No, now it looked like despite all the commitments, achievements, and busy personal schedule, Ginny was making time to be with Harry—whether she realized it or not. Harry too had mellowed, grown more comfortable in his status and personality, and had grown to develop an easy friend group. There was also far less guilt these days in his life when he took time for himself.

“But this Dodge thing is still bugging me,” Harry said breaking into Neville’s romantic musings. Neville was saved from any awkward mumbling and confusion by Ginny asking,

“Why he was kidnapped you mean? You don’t think it was because he’s a respected wizarding elder?”

“Half this town is respected wizarding elders, and almost all of them are just as pro-muggle and muggleborn as Dodge. They’re also a hell of a lot easier to kidnap so why Dodge?” Harry said waving in the general direction of his front door, presumably to mean the south lying township of Godric’s Hollow.

Ginny and Neville exchanged a small smile. Would anyone really dare to kidnap the kind elderly neighbors of Godric’s Hollow when, of all people, the three most responsible for defeating Voldemort lived down the way on the small hill overlooking the town? Harry, knowing exactly what the two were thinking, frowned.

“None of the things the kidnappers asked about or exposed to Dodge have anything to do with Muggleborns, okay sure the magical bomb lab in the flat but…it wasn’t like they were asking Dodge to make them anything!” Harry continued.
“What did they ask him?” Ginny asked. Ginny, unlike Neville did not know the full details of the Dodge kidnapping case. She also had not poured over the debriefing reports to know by heart all the questions that Dodge had answered. Ginny was nestled on the armchair like a cat with, what Neville was absolutely certain, was a particularly ugly blanket Harry had bought out of kindness from an elderly witch in Rio.

“They asked him mostly questions about his connections, his contacts, gifts he received from Dumbledore’s Will, secret hiding places in the magical community, his contacts to Harry, the usual,” Neville told Ginny.

There was a brief silence as Ginny contemplated. Kreacher came in to gather the new empty dessert plates and Harry gently thanked him and told him to get some sleep.

“Dumbledore’s Will? Explicitly, they asked about things Dumbledore may have willed him,” Ginny asked.

“Yes and its that bit that’s driving Harry crazy,” Neville said, a little impressed that Ginny had narrowed in on that so quickly. Harry was frowning at the papers spread over the coffee table.

“So you think Dodge’s kidnapping doesn’t actually fit with the Falmouth Attacks. You think it has to do with Dumbledore and his Will and not pureblood-muggleborn terrorism and politics,” Ginny said succinctly summarizing the view Harry had been unsuccessfully trying to get the political analysts at the Auror Office to investigate. “What does Hermione think?”

Harry sighed, “She is highly rational and analytical but only when she herself is convinced of applying her brain in that manner. She’s not convinced of my theory- she thinks I’m grasping and that I don’t have enough rational evidence to think this has to do with Dumbledore. I mean, I have a copy of his Will. Except for what he left me, Ron, and Hermione almost everything else he left to Hogwarts and Alberforth. There is nothing there. But why would they ask about Dumbledore?”

“Okay so lets say you’re right, the Dodge kidnapping as nothing to do with the Falmouth stuff,” Ginny said analytically, “then you’d say that they kidnapped Dodge because they…what, were interested in something in Dumbledore’s Will?”

Neville nodded. Harry shrugged in agreement.

“So from the perspective of the kidnappers, Dodge was someone who Dumbledore would have either trusted enough to pass on items of value to,” Ginny said.

Neville frowned, and looked at Harry who was also frowning with the same expression. No one at the Auror department had given any weight to the questions about Dumbledore the kidnappers had asked Dodge. No one had attempted to analyze the incident as divorced from the Falmouth attacks. Neville and Harry were meeting this evening in an attempt to analyze in this manner so it was the first time that they had problematized the perspective of the kidnappers in regard to these questions.

“That’s not right,” Neville said slowly, “I didn’t know Dumbledore that well but even I know that Dodge was not who Dumbledore would have bequeathed trusted stuff to.”

“Who says it has to be a valuable item, it could have been something transient right? Maybe Dodge was around when Dumbledore did something impressive? So they simply want notes or something?” Ginny asked.

“Okay even if it wasn’t a valuable something, but a memory or record… I don’t think Dodge is the person who would be in possession of it. The kidnappers were working off super flawed
information if the Dumbledore’s something is what they were after,” Neville responded.

“If I were the kidnappers…” Harry started. Ginny let out an odd sort of repressed giggle but Harry continued, “If I were them, and I was after something that I knew Dumbledore would have had or known about, I would want to interrogate those close to Dumbledore. I can’t get to Harry Potter so I take…Dodge? Assuming they don’t know where or who Alberforth is?”

Neville added, “Arthur Weasley,” at Ginny’s questioning look he said, “People Dumbledore trusted, who were close to him.”

“Who are also still alive,” Harry muttered bleakly.

“I don’t think Dad’s that high up on the list,” Ginny said. “Definitely above Dodge though which makes the kidnappers either misinformed or stupid, but Dad’s not that high. I think it’s…well Dumbledore had a year to plan his death. If he had to get rid of important stuff, even say accounts of something people close to him witnessed, he had a year and we have to think who was most trusted then. Its not like Dumbledore then knew who all was going to die…”

There was a pause and then suddenly both Harry and Ginny’s heads’ snapped up and staring at each other they said, “Snape!”

“That’s who was definitely, no- always first on the list of trusted people. Snape, me, McGongall, Moody, Kingsley and your Dad…I don’t see Dodge making the top five here, maybe top ten.”

“Oh. Goody,” Neville sighed. “So if we continue this conjecture, the kidnappers are either misinformed enough to think Dodge was in Dumbledore’s inner circle. Or he’s simply the only guy they could get too. The minister, Harry Potter, Arthur Weasley, and the Headmistress are all…a little ambitious targets. And the abduction when it happened was not a particularly sophisticated operation. Dodge is the only one of that set who doesn't have any secret detail on him at all.”

“You guys haven’t thought that maybe they wanted Dodge for his own political powers? He is special advisor to the Wizengamot, maybe they wanted to pressure him on that front…”Ginny said.

“He was, I mean he still is. But the last case he really advised on, and wrote a dissenting opinion on was Art Crimes-related and ages ago! I mean its accepted he wrote the dissenting opinion on behalf of Dumbledore but, its hardly the stuff of kidnapping and terror.” Harry said.

“What was the opinion?” Ginny asked interested.

“Something about four muggleborns getting sent to a low security prison for theft and robbery of the Museum of Ancient Wizarding Art & Artifacts in 1946. Dodge’s opinion, also considered Dumbledore’s, is that the four muggleborns were not responsible. They confessed, even under veritaserum, so the opinion actually goes on to criticize court procedure about how one can be lying under vertiaserum if they believe it’s the truth.” responded Neville idly.

“What?” Ginny suddenly screeched.

Both men looked at her in utter surprise and confusion. Ginny stared at their bewildered faces and then demanded, “the last case Dodge was involved with was the MAWAA codex larceny?”

“The what?” Both Harry and Neville asked blankly.
“In 1946 the Museum had one of its most puzzling and, to date, still confusing thefts ever. The museum did not detect any changes, alterations, or time lapses to the protection charms but a manuscript of high value from the 9th century was stolen and never seen again. Harry! That case has to be about the Princess Codex! Its too coincidental! There can’t have been two mystifying and impressive thefts in 1946, both dealing with stolen manuscripts!” Ginny was all but shouting at this point, her voice getting louder with each sentence.

Neville turned to look at Harry. Harry was frozen and staring straight back at Ginny, looking… afraid?

“Wait…someone explain to me what…” Neville started but Ginny rushed in,

“Before their deaths, both Dumbledore and Snape inquired about a 9th century illuminated codex called more commonly as the Princess Codex. They inquired about this with a prominent art dealer. The Codex was stolen from a museum sometime in 1946 and its still a mystery how it was stolen. The Codex is one of the more famous pieces of Wizarding history as its written by the wife of Slytherin! No one really knows what the Codex says as its never been translated but a piece of it was woven into the Sorting Hat!”

“Why did Snape and Dumbledore inquire about this codex during the War? How was it important to the war effort? And where is this dealer now?” Neville asked.

“In St. Mungo’s,” Harry said with flat anger, “His name’s Nigel Latimer. Someone, most likely a bloke named Contini, broke into his flat and interrogated him roughly. His memory has been tampered. But I dunno if that’s all Contini’s doing.”

“I think, based on what you just told me about Dodge’s dissent. I think Dumbledore and Snape visited Latimer because they knew or maybe suspected that Tom Riddle stole the manuscript. A piece of Slytherin history or somewhat Slytherin history like that? It would have been tempting for him. Maybe they were trying to trace where it could be in case it was a Horcrux…”Ginny trailed off.

“Thank god it wasn’t,” Harry said hollowly.

Neville let out a deep sigh and tried to process, “Okay, so there is a historical manuscript out there. Likely, potentially stolen by Tom Riddle. Riddle probably implanted memories into muggleborns to confess? Right. So Dodge rules on the case, heavily influenced by Dumbledore, and what? Over 60 years later he is being kidnapped for…to what end? For details on this codex thing? Is this Contini bloke looking for the codex? His memory spells on Latimer don’t get him what he wants and so now he goes after the next person connected to this thing?”

“No, we’re missing something else,” Harry muttered staring past Ginny.

“I’m pretty sure Contini has the manuscript!” Ginny burst in agitated, “He said ‘I’m in possession of’ and he wanted whatever was in Snape’s vault, he was excited about the possibility that there was something there and he’s gone missing!”

“Hang on what the—“ Neville jut in alarmed but stopped when he noticed the heavy silent communication that was occurring between Harry and Ginny. After a few shrugs, expressive eye movements, and a particularly defeatist sigh, Harry explained to Neville, Ginny’s run in with the shady art dealer Contini, and his suspicions on the whole situation.

“Why do you think Contini has the manuscript Ginny?” Neville asked after he processed everything. Harry had gone to the kitchen to grab some more mead for himself and port for Ginny. Neville had begged off on another round of drinks as he felt too muddled by the new information that he had just been landed with.
“Nev, I spent almost a year researching this manuscript in my spare time. There are so many
rumors associated with this thing. Its not a dark object in itself but people think it holds the secrets
to Slytherin’s Fen and some of the more zealous people think it holds the secrets to something
worse and more powerful than the Chamber of Secrets. Both Snape and Dumbledore were
searching for it. Harry and I thought it was probably because Voldemort might have wanted to
make into a Horcrux. But now with this information about the case…Riddle probably already had
it and lost it? And maybe Snape and Dumbledore were trying to find what he did with it, or where
it ended up if he lost it. Maybe he did something to it to make it evil. The rumors Harry heard in
Paris confirm that Contini is in possession of something Dark. The manuscript itself from all the
research evidence before it was stolen was not a dark object so perhaps Riddle made it Dark. I’ve
replayed my interaction with Contini a thousand times in my head and I’m pretty sure he has it,
and is afraid of it or afraid of his new associates using it in some way,” Ginny said perversely
excited.

“Okay say Riddle did something vile to the codex making it a Dark object. Would the muggle
serbian Mafia really know how to use it?” Neville asked puzzled.

“I think, in regard to Contini at least we need to re-investigate the possibility the Zemun is no
longer so muggle,” Harry said walking back into the kitchen. “I mean, we did find Dodge in
Croatia. Its not that far from regions where the Zemun is strong. They are primarily Serbian but
they have strongholds outside the country.”

“Merlin’s Fucksticks,” Neville whisperered, “This is now way more complicated than I ever
wanted it to be. Damn. No offense Harry, but I really didn’t want your prickling hunch about the
oddities of Dodge’s kidnapping to result in anything.”

“Me too,” said Harry with a tired smile, “But all of this Dodge information is too coincidental. If
we are right, someone is looking for the Codex that Contini has. Maybe even two someone’s since
Contini has dissapeared and someone is still looking for it and kidnapped Dodge in attempt to get
more information.”

“Damn,” Neville muttered, “I guess I’m going back to Croatia in the near future.” Neville had
spent two months in Croatia overseeing the evidence and follow up teams in Croatia after Dodge's
kidnapping. Since the case had been so muggle-involved in nature, Neville and his team had spent
two months in crowded hostels posing as tourists as they scoped out the country.

“Hey, at least you can use more magic this time. I want to come too, but if we can't convince
Robbards we'll have to do it in our off time.” Harry added.

“Ginny, is Patty still on your security detial?” Neville asked. At Ginny’s nod he looked over at
Harry who exchanged a look with him and looked to Ginny and said, “This whole business
doesn’t affect you directly but Contini was able to contact you. If someone has kidnapped him…
Well, better be safe than sorry. Your flat is safe as it can be but it’s the lack of accountability there.
There is safety in numbers, especially wen you’re getting home at all odd hours.”

“You could move back into the Burrow?” Neville suggested but did not proceed further at the
look Ginny gave him.

“Or…you could just move in here,” Harry said. Ginny looked up startled and did not respond.

My friends are idiots Neville thought savagely, the gravitas of the previous conversation set aside
temporarily as he remembered his earlier musings.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

I AM SO SORRY FOR THE DELAY IN POSTING. I was waiting to get this edited but I realized that was simply delaying the posting process. So as of right now this is MINIMALLY edited so I apologize for a few places where it may change in tense and other small mistakes! I hope to re-edit and update within the next four days and get this up to shape! apologies!!

ALSO ALSO ALSO my dear readers I know it looks like more drama but I promise our couple with get together within the next chapter and a half. It was actually supposed to be this chapter but it was FAAAAAR too long and so I had to split it into two chapters!

Ginny did not move in.

It was roughly five weeks after Harry’s haphazard proposal and Ginny’s residence, the place she slept and received mail was still her flat.

Harry tried not to take it personally.

She had simply hummed and nodded contemplatively when he had first offered that night after dinner. She had slept over in the guest bedroom that particular night. But afterward they had both continued on with their lives and Ginny had returned to her flat and the usual operations of Quidditch, away games, and dinner more often than not at Stinchcombe. At first Harry had assumed she forgot or didn’t think he was serious. He had mentioned the security issues and the offer to move in two more times in the weeks after. Harry had even considered the possibility that Ginny did not want to live in the same house as her brother. Harry never really understood the whole sibling thing but perhaps sharing a house with one’s sibling was uncool.

But that, unexpectedly, became a moot point when Ron and Hermione moved out two weeks ago.

Hermione had finished both her degrees in Law and her ten-month trainee period. During that time, Ron had taken up his sister’s advice and had an open dialogue with George about the management and future of WWW under the mediatory auspices of the Weasley patriarch. The meeting had resulted in a massive restructuring of the small company and the opening of a formal defense subsidiary entirely under Ron’s control. The defense subsidiary had quickly gained not one, but three Ministry contracts supplying equipment and magical armaments for the Magical Law Enforcement, Hit Wizards, and the Aurors. Over the past half year, Ron had amassed a small (if not entirely liquid) fortune. Comfortable now in his financial state, Ron had proposed to Hermione, a move that everyone felt was long overdue.

Harry was rather impressed with Ron’s proposal. He felt vaguely disloyal about how impressed he was with Ron’s sheer sauviness and romantic planning. Harry certainly did not feel he could or would ever live up to that level of romanticism and sleek skill. Ron had whisked Hermione away to Dublin for a weekend jaunt and then convinced her to join him in breaching into the Trinity College library at midnight. Upon walking into the gorgeous and ancient hall of books, Hermione had discovered herself alone in a library illuminated by a thousand floating candles and one
floating book. (Ron had borrowed Harry’s cloak to disappear under) After a mild chase around the library, the book allowed itself to be caught, directed Hermione back to the center of the Hall, and finally opened to the last page where within a hollow lay a ring.

The newly engaged couple was met by the closest family and friends in Dublin the next morning for breakfast. Hermione was still reeling and speechless but Ron wasted no time in sharing amusing renditions of “how angry and sanctimonious” Hermione had been during ‘break-in’ part of the evening.

Ginny later remarked that Ron getting Hermione to do things she secretly enjoys but would be unlikely to indulge in on her own was so totally them. Though a few days later when Lavendar and Parvati had gushed at the perfect proposal, Harry noticed that Ginny’s smile had become a tad brittle. She had responded by stating that the proposal was perfect for Ron and Hermione but she didn’t think it would have fit her as well. Harry, privately, couldn’t help but agree. Somehow he didn’t see Ginny fawning so lovingly over some ancient library.

Roughly a week after the proposal Ron had suggested that he and Hermione start looking at houses together. After much fighting and disappointment, Ron had surprised his fiance even further by simply buying a half falling down Victorian library and its surrounding gardens. The library stood well outside the township of Godric’s Hollow, a good sixty kilometers from Stinchcombe in the opposite direction. Despite the distance, the semi-ruined structure had become Hermione’s favorite place to wonder to and she spoke often of some vague, future, restoration effort. Ron Weasley, realizing that he and Hermione would never agree on any of the already built houses they saw, and also realizing his future wife craved a library, saw the purchase of this semi-ruined structure as the most practical solution. Hermione was beyond elated and immediately set to work contracting and consulting with magical architects to restore and build a working house into the structure. Though the entire grand, intricate, and cleverly designed plans were not yet complete, the bare bones of a master suite and kitchen had been constructed two weeks ago. Ron and Hermione, Harry’s constant companions since he was eleven had officially moved out.

Harry wasn’t lonely per say. Ginny or Neville were around more often than not and Ron and Hermione were practically annoying with how concerned they were about him. Additionally, Harry now, unlike his school days or the year or two after the War, had an active and bubbling social life and spent much of his free weekends or nights meeting up with friends. It wasn’t like he was coming home from the office puttering around his grand country home, and constantly having dinner alone by himself!

And yet.

And yet there was something about the loss of two people who lived and slept in the building. The lived in nature of the house diminished with just Harry there. The detrius of human occupancy had reduced substantially. The notes to each other hastily scribbled left in the kitchen or even the mundane tasks of shared cleaning duties. Harry didn’t blame Ron and Hermione of course. While Harry would have had no qualms about them living, getting married, and having children in his house for the years to come, he realized that they probably did not want to do that. Besides, they were enjoying the bubbling giddiness of starting a new home together. (And in Ron’s words, “the ability to have sex and be starkers anywhere!” Admittedly, having even one roommate, however close, did prevent this particular lifestyle.)

Harry had briefly thought that now her brother was gone, Ginny would finally take up his offer and move in. He hadn’t formally re-stated his offer but he had heavily emphasized his many free rooms. He even hinted that Ginny practically lived at Stinchcombe anyway and that apparating home everynight seemed pointless.

But Ginny hadn’t responded.
At this point he couldn’t help but feel hurt. What reason was there for her to continue to refuse? He knew it couldn’t be about her independence or freedom. It wasn’t like he was asking her to move into some regulated dormitory or her parents house. They were both busy enough that outside of the dinners they had together anyway they would likely not really see each other. Sure there would be the incidental meeting at breakfast and the random other meetings that two busy roommates would have. But what could possibly be so horrible that Ginny stubbornly, politely and vaguely but still stubbornly refused to even consider moving in?

Sure, she had spent a great deal of money on her own flat and it was rather nice. But Harry was pretty sure that if he did a detailed break down, Ginny spent a greater amount of time at Stinchcombe anyway. Most of their friends hung out at Stinchcombe too. Admittedly there was a small section of Ginny’s friends that Harry did not know particularly well and they could, unbeknownst to him, be having great fun in Ginny’s flat but he wasn’t an unwelcoming person! They could hang out at Stinchcombe too!

Harry told himself that feeling hurt was ridiculous. Ginny’s silent, informal, and never-officially-stated, refusal to move into Stinchcombe probably had nothing to do with Harry. By now Harry had admitted to himself that ‘safety’ was only a middling reason for him to be annoyed. He couldn’t even blame Ginny for not taking the situation seriously. He know, and he knew she knew that if it were a truly serious safety matter, he would be far more insistent and order her to move. He would not be worrying about coming off too eager or needy. Hell, she probably even knew that if it was truly an exigent situation he would get a court order to move her to the Burrow if he had to. No, he could admit he wanted Ginny to be his roommate and his feelings of hurt were slowly percolating into anger.

Two weeks later found Harry was furiously scrubbing dishes in Ginny’s flat. By hand. The muggle way.

He was angry and irritated and knew he was in a foul mood. He had hoped to work out his anger and frustration by attempting to thoroughly clobber his batch mate Agustino on the training room floor. The fact that the match had come to a draw had only infuriated Harry further.

Harry’s entire week had been annoyingly frustrating. It had started when Robbards had refused to let him join Neville and Sharon in Serbia to secretly track and investigate the potentially magically leanings of The Zemun. While Robbards and Kingsley, who was still more Auror-Minister than Minister-Politician, were equally alarmed and concerned about the developments in the Dodge kidnapping, both agreed that Harry’s particular skillsets (read : celebrity) would be better used for more official channels.

Therefore, Harry had spent the first half of the week taking daily portkey’s back and forth to Croatia and Serbia alongside a cohort of political attaches (undercover aurors working through diplomatic channels) and wizengamot consultants. Harry was a little too famous to have worked explicitly with the undercover aurors who were present at political meetings and in governmental offices to comb for information. Percy Weasley had, on orders from Kingsley, initiated talks with the governments of Croatia and Serbia to discuss the problem of “anti-muggle terrorists.”

Everyone knew the English were basically saying some variation of “We think our recent acts of terrorism might be sponsored by or have origins in your country.” But the official line, obfuscated by the dense official language of Percy Weasley, read more along the lines of “The English, having recent experience in such matters, would like to lend tactical and logistical expertise and support.”

Harry was stuck most days in boring governmental meeting rooms debating with various foreign officials on pointless stop-gap measures. The Croatian government was weak and lapped at the potential financial aid from the UK, but the Serbian government was mostly corrupt and resented
the random intervention. Percy’s team however was reluctant to give financial aid for security
with out serious stipulations, a fact that irritated both governments. Harry, who was of the opinion
that dealing with the official faction of the Zemun that dominated the Serbian government
legitimized their mob rule, was forced to grin and make nice. He understood the showy political
talks would distract from the covert measures that Sharon and Neville were engaged in. He also
understood the precarious and problematic political situation Kingsley had to negotiate. Unlike
allied, friendly countries, Croatia and Serbia were not going to simply start a joint-Auror task force
to investigate into their own country. Especially considering that the Serbian government was
mostly controlled by less than legal factions. In addition to the political quagmire, for safety
reasons the ministry delegation and, were not spending overnights in the aforementioned countries.
Instead the entire delegation was Portkeying back and forth every morning and afternoon causing
extensive early mornings, late nights, and overall travel fatigue.

Thinking about his week and the ministry delegation only made Harry more cranky and he started
scrubbing Ginny’s wok harder. If he was honest with himself, it wasn’t just this past week that
was feeding his irritation. His frustration and irascible temper had been percolating since the night
Neville came to dinner. He knew distantly, that he was now angry at Ginny. Not just hurt and
annoyed but actually angry.

He was done being frustrated by her actions and her subtle never-vocalized reasons and was now
full on angry. He didn’t think she was trying to be polite anymore, he thought she was being
smug. She hadn’t exactly said no. She also, hadn’t exactly said yes and Harry was sick of it.

He wanted her to say whatever it was, whatever reason she had for disliking him so much, for
disliking the idea of moving in with him, to his face. Her most recent brush off had been
something about how inconvenient it was for her schedule and logistics. It wasn’t even a viable
excuse! Its like she wasn’t even trying! They were magical, and the house was large enough that
late night comings and goings would not disturb anyone.

Ginny, despite whatever history they had and potential awkwardness, was his friend. Hadn’t they
become very good mates over the past year? They had gone on mini-holiday together to
Presteigne, St. Ives, and Somerset! In some ways Harry felt that Ginny was just as much his best
friend as Ron and Hermione were. Perhaps at certain junctures even more because she just got
him in ways they didn’t. This thought unleashed a new wave of anger and rage in Harry. Anger
that Ginny Weasley wouldn’t be straight with him. Harry wasn’t some whiny child, he was a laid
back man, he could take it. He didn’t need to be coddled!

Harry heard the whoosh of the Floo as Ginny, it could only be Ginny, arrived back in her flat. It
was well past 6pm so she must have gone out with friends after practice. He heard none of the tell-
tale noises of locking up the Floo after she came in or the procedural code-word check-in she
was supposed to do with the Auror who guarded outside her front door. The careless disregard to
security protocol made Harry even angrier.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Harry said harshly turning from the sink, soap spuds
still on his hands.

Ginny gave a startled yelp and stared at him wide-eyed as she asked, “Harry! What? What are you
doing here?”

“You’re supposed to lock your Floo! And check in with Gary at the door. And where the hell is
your wand?!” Harry yelled.

Ginny blinked completely taken aback. Her lack of greater response was like tinder to Harry’s
worked up rage.
“You haven’t even checked if I am who I say I am. For Merlin’s sake, Gin, be slower,” Harry snapped.

Ginny flushed scarlet and her eyes narrowed, “Excuse you? What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Oh I dunno, for someone so determined not to move into Stinchcombe you’re doing a stellar job of being unsafe as possible. You didn’t even notice you had an intruder!”

“You’re one of the only people who can get in here with the wards up!” Ginny responded, her voice getting higher as she continued, “How was I supposed to know you’re paranoid enough to break into my flat?!”

“I didn’t break in! You’re lucky I did though, your kitchen is a mess!” Harry flung back. He saw Ginny flush darker red and he was vindictively glad that he was finally prompting a reaction. He hadn’t felt this petty and good about yelling in years and never with Gin. He was gaining some sort of odd schaudenfreudian pleasure at his own internal struggle and horror at his anger.

“Excuse you? My kitchen’s a mess? Oh I’m sorry, I’m not Harry sodding Potter who has not one, but two house-elves to pick up after me! Also what the hell did you do to my kitchen?!?!”

Somewhere distantly in the back of his mind, Harry could acknowledge that Ginny’s flat was disturbingly clean and that his dishwashing and re-washing had actually made more of a mess than anything else. But he was too fueled to stop and consider. Instead Harry rolled his eyes and pushed on,

“Oh please you could hire a house-elf and pay them just as well if you wanted. Don’t play that card! You might as well since you can’t be bothered to come home at an appropriate hour or take care of your place!”

Ginny’s eyes widened, “How dare you judge me? Who the hell are you? My mother? Your place would be ten times the mess if it weren’t for me and the elves! Who do you think restocks your bathroom cabinets and the apothecary credenza? Don’t you dare treat me like some silly girl Harry Potter. Don’t you dare make me Nora to your Torvald!”

Harry wasn’t quite sure who Nora or Torvald were but he knew that she didn’t get it and whatever this was, what she was yelling about wasn’t the answer he was looking for. Gin took a breath and her eyes darkened and a new sort of realization came into her face. It wasn’t simply reactive hurt or flushed surprise. It was darker now, more profound and less loud but far more terrifying.

Before he could respond she coolly asked him to “actually clean, if he is done demolishing her kitchen.”

Her cool condescension irritated him further and he snarked back some non-sequitor about her cold manner, relating it to her obsessively clean flat and her supposed lack of empathy. She snarked back by prophesizing a fumbling and pathetic groomsmen speech at Ron’s wedding and he retaliated by pointing out some flaw in her.

The fight descended to levels of grit and cruelty Harry thought he and Gin incapable of. They pushed every wound, beat every bruise. Harry pressed in about her lack of clear life plan and ‘indeterminate nature.’ She brought up his fears and inabilities to quickly make friends and predicted a bleak future of crippling paranoia. Somehow Harry pushed onward and painted her graduate studies and attempts to define herself in the U.S. as selfish and unfeeling, and cited her infrequent visits to her various brothers (his claim of anger fueled opinion not truth), as further
evidence of her selfish nature.

Later he was most surprised and a little in awe of the depths Ginny was able to sculpt with her cool, cutting remarks. Later he realized that much of what he flung was patently unfair and impossibly cruel. He is willing to admit that many of his comments intentionally picked at scars he knew lay deep within Ginny. He knew she was obsessive about cleaning because they were tied in some vague distant way to remarks about being 'dirty and poor' from when she was in primary school. He knew she was very particular to have distinct relationships with each of her brothers and the fact she was the least close to Ron was something she tried very hard to overcome. Ginny and each of her brothers, even Percy, had inside jokes and references. Ginny and Ron were much closer now as adults than they had ever been. But Harry knew that Ginny, more than Ron, still somewhat felt the absence of the inside jokes and references. Sometimes, in his more sane moments, Harry felt guilty about this. She had never verbalized it and obviously didn't blame him, but Harry felt that if it weren't for his total 'monopoly' of Ron, Ginny may have had that relationship with her brother.

But all of that was much, much later.

Harry came home and directly went to take a few long pulls from a bottle of Firewhiskey before flinging it into the fireplace. The next morning, in bed with his shoes still on, he couldn't remember how exactly the fight ended. He had been too enraged but he remembered a ringing silence and heavy breathing. He also remembered thinking hysterically, that ringing silence and heavy breathing was the perfect soundtrack to all the pain he ever felt with Ginny. In bed, with a concerned Winky staring at him but a little too afraid to approach him, Harry felt like he spent the previous evening eating pieces of glass. He was flushed with shame and self-hate and also an odd sad awkwardness as he realized all that he said to Ginny.

He and Ginny had never fought before. Never like this and he is not entirely sure what to do now. How to fix it. Could it be fixed?
The moment the whoosh of the floo signaled Harry’s departure, Ginny collapsed onto the floor and started to cry. She cried hearty, wrenching, sobs, ugly crying of pure pain. She was no longer angry but full of self loathing and fear and ache.

She had never fought with any of her friends like this. EVER. More specifically, she had never fought with Harry like this, and that thought hurt like a ripe bruise all over her body.

Her heart had lurched when Harry had offered for her to move into Stinchcombe, lurched and then filled with dread.

She knew she had to refuse.

The past few months had been absolutely amazing. She had never felt so complete, so content, so perfectly on. It wasn’t just that she was hitting her stride in her own personal development or her career goals. It wasn’t even that she was happily able to manage her time to see her friends and family regularly. And It wasn’t even that the economy was stabilizing again, this time perhaps for a the long haul.

No, once she got completely and truly honest with herself she knew it was that she and Harry were so perfectly clicking. They had both grown up tremendously over the past few years. Their reactions to each other, their demands of each other were so much better suited, and far less stifling or damaging.

Harry commented that his friendship with Ginny now, was far more relaxing than it had ever been when they were younger. He admitted to having felt a vague sort of pressure and guilt at being happy whenever he was with her before. Ginny should have been offended but she agreed and understood. She no longer felt the overwhelming, stifling emotion, the pressure to be his ray of happiness, or to prove herself in his presence. She of course still wanted to take care of him and make him happy but it was a much more settled and lived-in feeling now, without the heavy air of tragedy that used to hang.

Ginny also lost the low percolating need and fear in her belly that she intangibly used to associate with Harry. That old fear that she would get ‘swept up’ in Harry Potter and lose the dreams, desires, and ambitions that made up Ginny Weasley. Admittedly she had lost that fear a while ago, but now had finally felt comfortable enough to confide about it to Harry! Ginny knew that the old Harry would have taken her confession as a personal burden, something he would have felt personally responsible for eradicating. She had hinted about it when they broke up, and she knew he had taken it like a shot to the heart. But the adult Harry, the Harry who had grown and matured and re-learned the mind and temperament of Ginny had laughed and understood.

“If we hadn’t broken up…I can’t see an outcome where you would have…done everything you have accomplished so far. I think you would have felt guilty to try. I think everyone would have pressured you- to just take care of me. I think I might have…too. ” Harry had stated sheepishly
when she had confessed.

“Maybe. Hermione disagrees with me, she thinks I could have done it all even if we were dating,” Ginny had countered mostly for forms sake, and also because she knew many people who loved Harry still somewhat viewed her as in the wrong about that long ago break-up. (Her own brother included)

“Hermione and Ron are different. We wouldn’t have ended up like them.” Harry had simply stated, ending the conversation.

Harry and Ginny had a repertoire of easy, deep, abiding, friendship now. A friendship that encompassed everything from light banter and shared jokes, to long probing conversations on views, ideologies, fears, opinions and reflections on shared and independent experiences. This openness, this easy confidence, and this mutually respectful communion was so much happier, so much healthier than what they had ever had before.

For Ginny, her relationship with Harry had easily become the deepest and closest she had ever experienced. For all that she felt Neville, Demelza, and Luna were her best and closest friends, the depth of intimacy she shared with Harry was now surpassing even that. She was completely unabashed in how much of her weird she let Harry see. She distinctly remembered never sharing her mean thoughts, her perverse thoughts, her oddly grossly weird thoughts, and the true depth of some of her cattiness with him before. She had worried that a man so good, so kind and in her musings, so pure, would have recoiled in distaste. Maybe the younger Harry would have. But now Ginny was awash with pleasure to learn that Harry understood and had his own mean, perverse, or foolish thoughts, and even oddly grossly, weird thoughts! She absolutely loved that Harry appreciated her dry wit and occasional cattiness and could repartee just as well.

Love.

She had always loved Harry and had long ago resigned herself to the fact that it would be some background feeling she would always have. When she was younger her love for Harry was overwhelming and never felt quite entirely hers. Her love for Harry was something larger than herself and some divine act she shared in with the rest of the world that loved him. She often found herself gasping attempting to stay afloat in the waves and that had scared her.

And while that love had never quite gone away, her feelings for Harry were so much more lived-in now. She now loved Harry like how she would best friend. She now loved Harry like how she would a pen-pal. She now loved Harry with that same familiar sunken-in feeling that one loved a family member. She now loved Harry like how she would a team mate. Ginny’s love for Harry now was all of those things combined and so much more.

But the more wasn’t the intimidating crashing waves that where threatening to sweep her under. No, the more was now comfortable, familiar, essential. Loving Harry, knowing Harry, and caring for Harry had become auto-somatic, an extension of her body’s natural functionality. Most of the time, this was an extension of her normal life. Wondering if he had eaten breakfast, somehow inadvertently memorizing his schedule to know when to brew muscle recovery potions, knowing where he always forgot his spare glasses, anticipating his particular aversion to knobby socks and small spaces, internalizing his favorite foods, or knowing (somehow) implicitly when he was in a bad mood. All those things just happened. Most of the time the rhythms of love played out smoothly, without interruption, indistinguishable from any examined thoughts. These worries, thoughts, considerations, and Harry-intwined musings only really, truly, distinguished themselves during serious stabs of lust. Then, the entirely natural function of Ginny’s mind and body loving Harry would shudder and jump. It didn’t stop entirely in its job- just had a bit of a nervous jump and tick- moments where the fact that she was in Love with Harry Potter came to the forefront. The realization crystallized.
The funny thing was, it was one of these moments that had really made Ginny realize, on a more conscious level, that she was completely, utterly, and irrevocably in love with Harry.

Harry had gotten sick for the first time in possibly years after their little weekend jaunt to Somerset a few months back. Molly predicted that it was his body's magic finally giving in to a childhood and adolescence's worth of defensiveness. An entire two decades of fevers, colds, coughs, and childhood illnesses unleashing themselves in one particularly virulent fever. Ginny’s seamless transition and assumptions in nursing him were yet another example of how innate loving Harry had become to her. Ron and Hermione were still residents of Stinchcombe at the time. Harry had two incredibly attentive House-elves. Harry himself was a full grown adult and a fever was nothing to worry about. And yet, Ginny had unconsciously and automatically posted her plans that week to rush home after practice to cook, clean, and nurse Harry.

His bout of sickness had also spurred Ginny to restock every medicine cabinet in the house, install basic muggle medicines in every bathroom, and re-organize and replenish the home apothecary in the scullery. She had started her who little rounds and cleaning and organizational procedures for the house. Procedures that continued on once a month, unregistered, and unexamined even after Harry had recovered.

She hadn’t questioned when her energy had driven her to give Stinchcombe a thorough fall cleaning. It technically wasn’t her house and Harry had not asked but it somehow seemed like it was her responsibility- or so she felt. She seeded a few planters full of medicinal herbs in the garden. Ginny and Kreacher had methodically scrubbed and cleaned every bathroom, dusted and rotated all the rugs, polished every table, and beat every carpet. Harry had fallen ill during a series of away-matches and Ginny had used her one day off during that period to sort, clean, and darn all of Harry’s clothes. Ginny hadn’t questioned then how she knew which pieces of clothing were sentimental and which she could bin. (She'd double checked with Harry before she truly binned them but he hadn't cared) She had gone to Shell Cottage at 6 am that morning to pick and dry lavender to hang in every closet at Stinchcombe. Then, with flowers on her mind she had checked and then recast the ever-blooming lily spells on Harry’s parent's tombs and the oft forgotten grave of Snape. Then, she had done the grocery shopping for the next week to pre-emptively cook a few nourishing meals. A week later, Ginny went full Molly Weasley and had brought into Harry’s house all the small domestic enchantments that had protected and made the Burrow home.

It was when she was spelling the bar of soap by the scullery sink to never get grimey, that Harry had walked in showered, clean, and stubbly but finally fever-free. The sight of the tousled hair and healthy restored color in his skin as he looked around in awe at the insanely organized and super clean little room had caused sparks of shock to cascade through Ginny’s body. Harry was attractive and Ginny understood this on an intellectual level and as a woman who wasn’t dead. But in that moment Ginny had looked at him and felt home and perfection and the wildest stab of lust all at once. As Harry looked around and explored in awe, Ginny had come to the dawning realization that she was in love. Love with the capital L –in Love with Harry Potter. The warm feelings of home and perfection that she felt made her realize that she was in Love in the way her father was with her mother. The way Fleur was with Bill. John Lancaster and Katherine. The serious, intense, unfrilly, totally married and attached way. She had fallen in love with Harry and had been in love for some time.

Harry had broken her out of her reverie by asking some inane question about the washing and she had responded automatically and even that had startled her back onto her 'In Love' realization. When Harry had thanked her she had had to bite her tongue to stop herself from blurting out “I love you.”

It only got worse after that.
A few days later over brunch, Demelza, who had recently moved in with Warrington in his parents old estate in Cornwall, was sharing the domestic upkeep struggles and adventures they were experiencing. Ginny had found herself nodding and responding with stories of her own. Stories of Ginny and Harry clearing and re-structuring the dining room or restoring one of the fireplaces.

“You know Cas keeps joking that being the Mistress of Nympara is ‘back breaking’ work,” Demelza had commented rolling her eyes. (Nympara was the name of the Warrington estate, and Ginny had heard the stupidly affectionate and vaguely sexual joke Warrington made a few times before.)

Ginny had been about to respond affirmatively and knowingly when Neville had interjected saying that Demelza could give the future Mistress of Stinchcombe a few pointers.

Ginny had felt like she had suddenly run into a wall. Hard.

Oh. Right.

She wasn’t the Mistress of Stinchcombe- however much she may have indavertantly and seamlessly taken on that position. Harry viewed her as his friend not paramour- and certainly not future spouse.

Oh.

Ginny’s mimosa became sour in her mouth. Harry’s spouse. It had startled her how much the idea of some nameless faceless figure marrying Harry hurt. All the effort, care, and work, she had poured into that house...it had been for Harry in reality. That same faceless nameless stranger, who Harry actually loved, could easily come in and have the rights to erase all of Ginny's love...

A few days later Neville had come over for dinner and though the dinner had been mostly shop-talk Ginny hadn’t been able to stop herself from the loving domestic rituals she had around Harry. Harry was hopelessly oblivious but Ginny had caught Neville’s puzzled assessing looks.

So when Harry had offered for Ginny to move into Stinchcombe for safety reasons. Ginny had nearly cried. She didn’t want to move into Stinchcombe because some nutter was out there who potentially knew her face. She wanted to move into Stinchcombe because Harry wanted her. What was worse, she knew that if she took Harry up on his offer she would not be able to prevent herself from settling in to this worn, comfortable, domestic love. It would only hurt more when she eventually had to move out.

In her own space, in control of her own house, she could deal with the fact that she was in love with Harry Potter. The fact that he had moved on and clearly viewed her as a friend was fine. Perfectly fine. She loved him enough that his happiness and his comfort was worth it. She wanted to love and cherish him and protect him forever. While the idea of him with someone else hurt, her desire for his happiness (even if it was with some faceless stranger) outweighed the hurt. If she moved into to Stinchcombe, it would be hard to ignore the pathetically platonic married-ness of their relationship. Harry and Ginny would probably continue their domestic closeness. Ginny would for all intents and purposes, be like Demelza reigning over as the lady of the house but it would hurt all the more because...she wouldn’t be Harry’s. She might even prevent Harry from real happiness with someone he loved because they would resent her presence!

No, she couldn’t move into Stinchcombe and refusing Harry outright was getting harder and harder. She couldn’t tell him why, but she had to stay strong.

Ginny didn’t think, “I love you. I am crazy for you but you don’t love me, so living with you as your platonic life partner will drive me mad,” was the best option.
And so, Ginny had stalled and Harry had noticed. Harry knew her so completely now that lying to him, redirecting the conversation, or any of her other tactics were pointless, he saw through her. Admittedly he had always been able to tell when she was lying. And he had yelled at her.

Her! Ginny had never seen him so angry. Well, she had never seen him so angry in a situation where mass injustice was not occurring. She knew him well enough to know that all of his sudden temper and anger weren’t entirely her fault but the barbs he had thrown were clearly a long time coming. He was probably angry and frustrated that she was deflecting and something had made the pot boil over tonight. Ginny forced herself to go through the argument and relive every harsh thing he had said to her and winced at all the hurtful things she had said to him.

Wiping her tears she sighed.

Weren’t they the pair? They both knew each others’ underbelly well enough now that they knew how best to hurt. She regretted everything she said, she had said it in anger knowing it would cause the most pain but now wanted nothing more than to run to Harry and assure him that everything she said was untrue. She knew, she knew Harry, and once his anger burned away she knew he would gnaw at her words. His words would gnaw at her too. He had made her feel lost, eleven-years old, and pathetic again tonight and she hated that feeling. She didn’t think he really still saw her as that pathetic lost girl anymore but it burned to hear a man who she respected and loved the most to her in such dismissive ways.

Ginny picked herself off the floor and proceeded to clean her kitchen, using her frustrated and heartbroken energy in scouring pots and pans and reorganizing her fridge. She would go to her mother’s tonight. Her flat still had the faint whiffs of Harry-smell. Then, she would write and try to clear her mind and hopefully pen a letter to Harry.

Hopefully.

Harry and Ginny did not speak or see each other for three days. This, considering Ginny was not away for a match and Harry was not away for a mission, was extremely rare. While the two were by no means joined at the hip, they usually corresponded via mobile even if they didn’t have a chance to interact.

Ginny spent the three days in an almost catatonic funk. Her work-life, i.e. the daily practice sessions for the Harpies, she tackled mechanically. Her usual sunny demeanor and chatty persona were gone. She cancelled an evening of drinking with George and Lee yesterday for no reason and instead went straight home to sleep without supper. Her usually voracious appetite was gone.

Ginny checked her mobile for the eight millionth time hoping to see some message from Harry but instead stared blankly at the plethora of missed calls from Ron and Neville and Hermione. They were all at Kos House (the name of Hermione and Ron’s in-progress victorian house-cum-library, named after the famous ancient greek library) this evening and getting paid in food and beer for assisting in painting the walls of the newly constructed full kitchen. She was supposed to be there. Presumably her brother and friends were wondering where she was, but Harry hadn’t called and they hadn’t made up so she couldn’t stomach going or seeing him again.

She looked down at the sheets of parchment scattered down around her. Thus far she had wasted a good seventeen sheets of parchment attempting to write Harry a letter apologizing and trying to say something but failed. She succumed to a few more crying jags and ruined a few more sheets of parchment and hated herself a bit more. She hated being one of those women who burst out crying all the time but she couldn’t seem to stop herself. She also hated herself for hating herself
for crying. She felt impotent. Writing had always been her solace, a way to sort out her emotions and her refuge. But now she couldn’t get out a simple letter apologizing and explaining to Harry.

Technically, she had one letter. But a letter reiterating ‘I love you’ and the reasons why was not something Harry needed. She had attempted to clear her thoughts and get out the feelings but ended up with a long letter detailing all that she loved about Harry. The letter started with all the normal reasons, the obvious reasons. His bravery, his commanding personality, his strength, and his sarcasm. But then she pressed on to the other facets, the things she really really loved. His smile, his laugh, his frown, and especially his soft half-tucked smile that only came out when he was really content. She loved his unshakable sense of duty and honor, his curiosity, and his willingness to listen. Patience, Ginny had come to realize was a rare and beautiful thing and it always astonished her how patient and willing to Harry really was. And then, there was his kindness. Merlin, Harry’s kindness and even more than that, selflessness often left her gasping in awe. She was proud, so proud of how he radiated such kindness and altruism despite all his obstacles. She sometimes wondered if he could stand her, a creature nowhere near as remarkably selfless as him. Then this supposed letter had taken a turn for the depressing and then had been blotted out mostly by tears.

She desperately wanted to see Harry again, Harry looking normal and not angry but dreaded it at the same time. Well, she thought wryly, she better make up her mind soon. They were all to go to the Burrow for dinner tomorrow evening. Charlie was coming home for a few days with a friend and one only missed a Burrow dinner on pain of death.

Dinner was a nightmare.

The moment Ginny floo’d into the Burrow her mother exclaimed how terrible she looked…and then directed her to assist Harry outside.

Harry was outside conjuring chairs to add to the two long wooden tables. Ginny approached colt-like and skittish. Harry must have felt her presence because he paused and tensed even though his body was turned away from her.

“Hi,” Ginny said lamely.

“Hi,” Harry responded, and turned to look at her looking absolutely miserable.

“I’m sorry,” Ginny blurted. The misery on his face hurt her too much to look at. It was so obvious he had been gnawing at the things she said. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it. Any of it. I didn’t mean it, honest! I said it because I was angry and I-”

“I’m sorry! Jeez why are you sorry? I broke into your house and started ranting at you. I should be the one whose sorry!” Harry cut in looking wild and startled.


Harry suddenly pulled her into a crushing hug and said, “Me too. Me too.”

Ginny stepped back and he looked down and said, “I’m sorry I got so mad. I was angry with you. Why wouldn’t you give me a straight answer?”

He didn’t need to explain, she knew exactly what about he was asking. She stared at him trying to swallow past the lump in her throat. She had spent the past two days trying to figure out how she was going to tell him. How she was going to tell him it wasn’t fair to him. That it was better to love him but not move in with him.
She opened her mouth to speak unsure exactly what was going to come out when she got side-tackled by Charlie into a hug.

After the usual rough-housing and hugs, the family and extended guests sat down for dinner and Charlie introduced the party to his friend. His friend turned out needed no introduction because his friend was *Aiden Lynch*.

On the one hand, the fact that Charlie’s friend was a famous and popular Quidditch star meant he wasn’t fazed by the celebrity at the dinner table. Newcomers were often left in a startled reverence when confronted with a casual dinner table that hosted not only Harry Potter, but Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, both Secretaries Weasley, and famous and sexy Quidditch Star Ginny Weasley.

On the other hand, it meant that as one comfortable with celebrity, Aiden casually sat himself down in between Harry and Ginny and dove enthusiastically into conversation with Ginny about Quidditch.

Ginny had only played against Aiden once and Aiden had been suitably impressed. Now sitting next to Ginny who was not covered in Quidditch gear but a rather becoming sweater dress, he Aiden was very much pleased with the small beauty next to him. He wasn’t overly forward or ridiculously eager, he was after all a guest of her brothers’, but he was definitely politely interested and electrified by the conversation with the funny quidditch loving girl. Aiden even liked Harry, whom he had only heard of by reputation and was pleasantly surprised to find that the bloke was decently funny as well.

Harry and Ginny, sitting on opposite sides of Aiden and engaged in conversation with him and others at the table, did not have a chance to speak the rest of the dinner.

Charlie sat across the table and was delighted his new friend was getting on so well with his family. Charlie had arrived home this morning and had a couple hours of his parents to himself before the rest of the family descended. Outside of the usual catching up Charlie had caught on to his mother’s worried comments about Ginny. Apparently Ginny had randomly turned up at the Burrow two nights ago and asked if she could have some dinner and spend the night. According to Molly, Ginny hadn’t answered any other questions but it was obvious the girl had been crying. Molly had been distracted and worried, she suspected of heartache and boytrouble. Charlie had voiced that he was surprised Ginny kept dating men who were so far below her and his parents had shared a private look. They didn’t share with Charlie but he assumed that Ginny had recently come through some sort of romantic disappointment.

As Charlie looked across the table and saw the lively conversation Aiden and Ginny were sharing he smiled. It looked like they were getting on. Aiden was a good sort of bloke and was not the type to be threatened by a girl being better than him on a broom. Charlie remembered Ginny complaining that her last boyfriend had gotten petulant when she showed him up. Ginny clearly needed to date someone more on her level. Perhaps Aiden was the perfect solution to the recent heartache his mother had worried about. Smiling Charlie turned to chat with Bill and didn’t notice the small winces of pained distress Ginny and Harry were exhibiting.

Later, after Aiden left and the Weasley parents went to bed, the Weasley siblings and Harry were sprawled out on the sofas, drinks in hand, and chatting softly. Well technically, it was just the boys and Ginny. Hermione had gone to bed and Fleur too had departed warning Bill that they were parents and responsible now. It was thunderstorming outside so the party had moved inside. Ginny felt like she was on pins and needles. She needed this night to end and she wanted to talk to Harry privately.

Ginny’s brothers were indulging in the usual one-upmanship of whose job was was harder, more...
badass, or more skill requiring. When they were younger this mostly involved watching Bill and Charlie boast and drink loudly, but now all the brothers had some considerable weight in the various boasting categories. Harry was on the sofa on the far corner, watching amusedly. Ginny had long ago stopped paying attention to what people were saying, and was simply waiting until Harry left to catch him on his way out.

The conversation had turned to relationships and women at Bill’s departure from the group. Bill had made moves to leave, resulting in much jeering. (He had pulled his usual trump card that he had a veela waiting for him.) Upon his departure, the boys turned to tease Ron about finally making an honest woman out of Hermione and then the group turned to pester Percy about his supposed single status. Ginny knew that Percy had actually been through a series of girlfriends a few years back but was now rather serious with a witch named Audrey and that he was keeping it very quiet.

Ginny was startled back into the conversation at her name. Percy, traitor that he was, deflected attention by giving Ginny to the wolves.

“I’m sure our dear Ginny has a far more fascinating romantic life than anything I could achieve!” Percy said.

As far as deflection tactics went, it was a good one. Ginny’s brothers rarely probed into her love life and the teasing was usually a minimum. Ginny was pretty certain this was because her brothers didn’t want to think of her in that way. Also teasing Ginny about her love life often led into the problematic juncture of inadvertently teasing her about men the brothers actually liked and respected. (Dean and Harry)

“You seemed to have made a conquest of Aiden!” Charlie said enthusiastically.

Next to her, Ginny felt Ron stiffen. Percy looked uncertain and George looked away. Her brothers also rarely discussed or teased Ginny about boys in front of Harry. Harry had once admitted that the Weasley boys didn’t tease Harry about Ariadne in front of Ginny either. Harry and Ginny had speculated that her brothers were mostly confused as to what the proper etiquette really was and had laughed. They were not laughing now.

Misreading Ginny’s lack of response Charlie continued, “He’s a good bloke Ginny. Hasn’t let the celebrity stuff get to his head and was right decent about coming straight out and telling me he was interested.”

Harry was staring at Ginny and Ginny was staring back, looking beseeching.

Of all her brothers, Charlie was the least in touch with the meandering and convoluted love-story of Ginny. He wasn’t around much. He was also the brother that knew Harry the least. He liked him and respected him but to Charlie, Harry was still sort of “Little Ron’s friend,” or “the boy-who-lived.” Charlie hadn’t gone to school with Harry, or really worked with Harry. Sure Charlie was involved in the war and the reconstruction but not exactly with Harry. Charlie had a great relationship with Neville, but didn’t know Harry as well. Bill too hadn’t gone to school with Harry but had hosted Harry for a few months during the War and saw brief bits of Harry and Ginny’s relationship. Also Bill now lived in England and interacted with Harry in a professional manner. Ginny was fairly certain that to Charlie, Harry and Ginny’s former relationship was some whimsical adolescent kissing. Not anything real enough to be remembered and avoided in conversation the way the rest of her brothers did.

“I love you,” Ginny thought desperately, still staring at Harry silently hoping but also fearing he could read her mind. Fiercely fervent she thought at Harry, “I love you and I don’t give a damn about Aiden Lynch or anyone else in this world, only you.”
Charlie was asking her something.

“What?” Ginny asked startled.

“I said, why not give it a go? Mum said you floo’d in all mopey and broken hearted two days ago so at least it’ll take your mind off it!”

“I…I can’t.” Ginny said choking back the emotions that threatened to release in a torrent of tears. Charlie’s face clearly asked why not.

“I…I can’t. I’m…I’m love…someone else,” Ginny blurted. Next to her she felt Ron expel another sharp breath.

“It’s just a date Ginny! It could take your mind off that bloke!” Charlie cried looking around at his brothers a little startled and incredulous at their silence and awkward avoided gazes.

“It doesn’t matter!” Ginny cried suddenly hysterical. “It doesn’t matter that it breaks my heart or if I…or if he never… I love him. He’s…he’s-he’s my everything! That’s all that matters!”

She was standing, when had she stood up? Her fists were clenched and there were tears in her eyes and she couldn’t see anyone but Harry sitting on the sofa staring at her looking shocked. Why was she yelling? Sudden intense shame and humiliating embarrassment came crashing into her awareness and she whipped her head away from Harry’s gaze.

“I…I have to go,” she muttered and grabbing her wand she tore out the back door into the storm. She was barefoot, her shoes were tucked under the coffee table back in the living room but it didn’t matter. She ran, her feet squelching and barely feeling the sodden grass until she reached the far side of the paddock, past the wards and apparated away.

With a Crack, Ginny appeared drenching and sobbing in the Stinchcombe solarium. Startled she gulped in a sob and looked around surprised at where she ended up. She had not been thinking clearly when she apparated, certainly not on a direction or location. It was a miracle she hadn’t splinched herself.

What the hell had she just done? What had just happened? Oh God! She covered her face in her hands and tried to wipe away her tears. She was dripping water all over the tile floor with her rain sodden clothes.

Crack

Ginny looked up and gasped there was Harry looking anxious and lost.

He stuffed his wand in his back pocket and then fussily, as if he wasn’t sure what to do with them, tucked his hands in his pockets. He had that earnest lost boy look again but also concern in his eyes as he walked up to Ginny. Ginny bit her lip and looked away.

“Did you mean it?” Harry asked in a strained voice.

Ginny’s head snapped up to look at him and her eyes went round, “What?”

“Did you mean it? ‘You don’t give a damn about Aiden Lynch or anyone else, you Lo-”

“Yes,” Ginny whispered cutting him off. She looked away and her cheeks flamed but she continued fiercely in the same whisper, “Yes. I love you. I don’t care. I don’t care that you don’t
love me, I won't bother you—“

She couldn’t finish because Harry’s lips were on hers and he was kissing her, kissing her hard and bruising. His hands were gripping her shoulders and he had pulled her flush against him, off her feet.

“Good God Gin-“ he said half broken off, trying to kiss her and talk but Ginny stopped him by seizing his lips with hers again and clutching at his head. She was still crying and gasping and shaking but she was kissing him! And he was kissing her! Harry was in her arms again and that was all that mattered.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Uniones and After.
Apologies for the delay. I am still traveling around the world with not a continuous desk and/or access to internet. However I felt bad that I've had bits of this sitting on my laptop so finally uploaded!

Harry had her literally off her feet in the solarium. He kissed her hard and without finesse. She responded in kind and it was the inadvertant clack of teeth, the slickness of their rain soaked skin, and their wondering hands attempting to make some purchase. They lost themselves in the violence and intensity of their kisses. Harry did not have the best hold on Ginny when he picked her up and in an attempt to grab a better hold attempted to set her down again. Ginny, still sobbing and unable to stop despite the bruising kisses, lost her footing and crashed into Harry.

They ended up a tangle of limps on the ceramic tile floor. The fall at least, shocked Ginny out of her ugly sobbing gasps. Laying on the cold hard floor next to Harry she stared into his beautiful emerald eyes unable to look away.

He was staring at her too, looking very solemn. Very slowly he reached out to wipe a few wet strands away from her face.

“You meant it?” he whispered. It came out a tender question, a hopeful affirmation.

“With all my heart,” she responded fiercely grasping his hand on her face and kissing it. “I’m yours.” She usually hated that phrase, she disliked all that it implied and the lack of self-maintained personhood in it. She ranted about its usage in love songs to Harry often enough for him to understand what it meant for her to use it now. Then, to emphasize her point Ginny looked him dead in the eye and added, “I love you.”

“Promise.” It wasn’t a question so much as it was a desperate demand of man drowning in want, drowning in love. Her entire body flamed the intensity in his voice and eyes.

“Always.”

And then Harry was on her again, on top of her, all over her. She knew nothing more than she needed to touch him, she needed his lips on her skin and his hands on her body. She was clutching his collar and pulling it apart and biting at his jaw and collar. Harry was attempting to find some start or end to her dress to get it off her body.

Their wet clothes made movement difficult and Ginny’s hair was getting more and more tangled. Her elbow scraped the floor and Harry’s knees became tangled and slipped in the too-stretched out skirt of her sodden angora sweater dress. She managed to get his shirt off but had torn off two buttons. Her stockings were full of runs. They stared at each other panting with hunger on their faces. And then Harry in once smooth motion rolled onto his feet, pulled her off the floor by her waist and then apparated them both to the bed in his bedroom.

After a few moments of dazed disorientation, they both attacked each others clothes and bodies with a frenetic fervor. The sex was loud, messy, and punishing. They both seemed unable to go
slowly or gently and were determined to cling to each others bodies as tightly as possible. They had never had sex like this before and the energy and demands they silently asked of each other was also a testament to their new found openness. They muttered requests, curses, and directions to each other unashamed and unrepentant. Ginny clawed at Harry’s shoulders and back and bit into her kisses. Harry, gripped Ginny’s hips, her breasts, her shoulders, leaving bruises and blush red lovebites. They had slammed up against one of the ornate posts of Harry’s massive canopy-less four poster twice.

Now the drama had vanished. They were both sated and vaguely stickey from the previous hour of frantic tears and desperate, violent sex. But as they lay on the bed staring and smiling goofily at each other; they were utterly unencombered by the humid sweat, their un-glamorized sticky post coital bodies, and the vague discomfort of the completely ruined sheets and drying semi-wet snarled hair.

Ginny could not remember ever being more at peace with herself and her body.

Their clothes were strewn all over the house. Distantly Ginny hoped Kreacher or Winky wouldn’t feel the need to start cleaning them. Ginny had no intention of moving. She was laying on her side, one leg tangled amid Harry’s and the other gracelessly thrown over his hips and she was smiling at Harry. Beaming, really. Harry was staring back at her with that soft private smile she had grown to love and the arm that wasn’t pinned under her was stroking small circles on the underside of her breast.

“I love you,” she whispered again, reveling in the way that Harry’s eyes lit up, the way his smile became softer every time she said it. She brushed back his floppy forelock and traced the stubble on his jaw with her finger.

Harry hadn’t exactly said the words back but Ginny didn’t care. He didn’t need to, she knew. Harry, Ginny was pretty sure, had never said those words. To anyone. even Ron or Hermione or even Sirius. He was no longer the emotionally stunted and awkward boy of his youth, filled with hesitance and an inability to properly articulate the depth of his heart, but he was still introverted and a man of few words when it came to his deepest emotions. Confident now that her love wouldn’t pain him, Ginny was determined to pepper as many ‘I love you’ as possible in her speech. She doubted Harry had heard such words of love until his teenage years and was determined to fill that debt single-handedly.

“I love you,” she said again grinning. Harry grinned back and pulled her on to his chest and rolled onto his back.

“Off! you’re a lot heavier than I remember,” Harry said grinning, but wrapping his arms around her nonetheless. Ginny tossed her hair and stuck her tongue out at him and then nuzzled into the hollow of his jaw, nipping at his jaw when he made more mock protestations.

After a few moments, “Gin?”

“mmmph?""Live at Stinchcombe.” It wasn’t a question. It wasn’t an offer either, not really. It was a simple declarative statement.

Ginny, still on top of Harry, snuggled a little closer and clutched him tighter, “…do I get to pick the bedroom?”

Harry snorted and Ginny reared up to look down at him smugly.
“Because I’m really going to have to insist on a suite with an ensuite bath you know” (The master suite was the only suite fitting that particular description)

“Cheek! Ginevra, what am I going to do with you?”

Ginny wiggled her body on top of his and gave him a truly salacious smile.
Harry, giving her a pointed look, smacked her bum lightly. They grinned at each other utterly content. Ginny got up and sat straddling Harry. She looked around the room critically, completely at ease in her naked state.

“I’ve never been in here,” she said softly.

“An assiduously cultivated effort on both our parts I imagine?”

Ginny looked at him with a wry smile but went back to her critically assessment of the room. Then, as if struck by a thought she turned back to Harry and asked seriously, “Harry? How did you hear me…?” she left the question hanging, he understood what she was referring to.

“I’m not entirely sure. I think you accidentally performed legillimancy.”
At Ginny’s surprised expression, Harry continued, “I was afraid you were charmed by Aiden and I was thinking about you and in my head, I was hoping you would tell me you loved me, desperately willing you to talk to me. Because I didn’t want to listen to Charlie go on about Aiden.”

“And I was! I was concentrating entirely on you and thinking very hard about wanting to tell you I love you, except I was also afraid to tell you but I was thinking it desperately and also trying to block out Charlie!”

“Honestly, at first I thought I was going mad. I suddenly heard your voice in my head and I thought- oh no! I’m hearing voices again. It didn’t realize I had heard your thoughts until you went off on Charlie. It took me a moment to realize what you were saying and…and then you took off!”

“I was embarrassed!”

“To be fair, what you said out loud didn’t really make sense unless you connected it with what you thought”

“You’re my best friend. Did you know that? I thought for so long that you weren’t but you are. More than Luna or Neville or Demelza. I think you know me better than my own parents or even myself sometimes!” Ginny suddenly burst out in an almost mournful tone oddly desperate Harry know this. Harry did and understood that she also meant that she let him know and see more of her than she let anyone else.

“I know,” Harry said quietly, “You’re my best friend too. More than Ron! Or Hermione. You see more of me than anyone else too.”
It was true she realized, she got to see his every reaction, his every opinion, his every emotion, his every shade.

“That wasn’t always…” she ventured, just to be sure.

“No, it wasn’t. I don’t know why. Well I know why at first but I think also…for a very long time I think I put you on a pedestal.”

“You put me on a pedestal?” Ginny asked incredulous.
It was ironically funny, she had never put Harry on a pedestal, not in the way most others did. But
she had put Harry in this category of goodness of perfection and unrealistic hope, a level of integrity to be aspired to.

“You were one of the few, good, happy things in my life at the time,” Harry said and then blushed and looked away adding, “that wasn’t also a…responsibility in some way and I…you were an escape.”

They had had parts of this conversation before, the contours of this conversation. She had admitted she used to feel pressured to be a certain way with him before to make him happy.

“You were one of the few good things in my life at the time and…I had somehow convinced myself that I didn’t get to keep ‘good things’ that good things were in too much danger with me and…well,” he shrugged from his reclined position unable to articulate further. Ginny met his eyes and she understood and moved her gaze to the scar on his chest and traced it with her hands.

“I still thought of you that way after the war ended,” Harry confessed. Ginny continued to idly trace his scar. “I don’t anymore- obviously. Er- not that I think you’re a bad thing…uh, no I mean,” (Ginny giggled) “I just…you’re not separate from all the unfun parts of my life anymore, not just for the good parts or when we’re being nice. You know what I’m trying to say!”

Ginny who had had a teasing smile stopped baiting him and sighed, “I know,” she leaned over and kissed him tenderly on each cheek and then on the forehead.

“Look how far we’ve come.”

Ginny’s stomach growled breaking the tenderness of the moment. Harry laughed, “Ah yes, I can’t believe I didn’t pay more attention to the rules of Feeding your Weasley. Get dressed, I’m sure there is something in the kitchen.”

Ginny rolled her eyes and hopped off the bed. She looked around the room again and stretched, Harry rolling off the bed next to her squeezed her bum as he made his way to throw on a dressing gown.

“You know, we’re going to need at proper vanity and full length mirror in here. Honestly Harry this room is so boy,” Ginny said casually, tugging on Harry’s recently discarded shirt from the floor and searching for her underwear.

Harry was already half out the door but she was pretty sure she heard faintly, “Of course, my love…”

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Ginny cooked liberally loaded grilled cheese sandwiches on the stove while still enveloped by Harry from behind. The food took longer than usual to make (even with magic) as she was easily distracted by Harry kissing down her neck or his arms clinging around her body. As some odd four armed creature they attempted to slice cheese and maneuver and quickly descended into more giggles and kissing.

They ate on the sofa while still attempting to keep as much of their bodies as possible still touching. Ginny clad only in a haphazardly buttoned shirt of Harry’s and her pants with still messy snarling wondered at the sight she must be, now with buttered greasy fingers. Hunger satiated, they continued to to cuddle and kiss uncaring of their buttery fingers. Very soon this led to a bout of sex on the sofa which turned out to require some decent logistical maneuvering and many laughter filled pauses.

Twenty minutes later amid once again discarded clothing, “Alright, I suppose I can see why Ron
and Hermione may not miss having a roommate,” Harry conceded. He yawned and gently slid off the sofa in a slow stretch and dropped his head to the side onto his new lovers sprawled legs.

Ginny, her face still mushed into a sofa cushion, “…I’m still hungry.”

“Did you know, your leg hair is almost blonde!? not red!”

Ginny was pretty sure she felt the brittle tiny hairs on her leg actually being stroked with a single finger and truly inspected.

“In all my sexual fantasies, not only was I always well shaved despite it being bloody winter but the hero was usually polite enough not to mention it.”

“Really? I always imagined food was pretty large cornerstone of most of your fantasies…”

Ginny’s attempt to smack Harry resulted with her tumbling onto the floor of the living room right onto Harry’s extended legs.

“Well, that was convienent,” Harry said surprised and learned down to attempt to kiss her again but Ginny stopped him with, “…Do you think Kreacher could do us a good fry up? Wait, if we ask him… do we have to put clothes on?”

To say that Ginny and Harry had an easy transition into their adult coupledom was an optimistic understatement. They were happy, very happy. But sheer happiness and sex did not result in a balanced peace. The first few weeks after Ginny officially moved into Stinchcombe were spent in a blaze of sex-filled glory, cuddling, and wondering conversations amid tangled sheets. While great, this meant both Ginny and Harry were sleeping far less than usual. Also unanticipated was the completely asynchronous schedules the two had for their jobs.

Ginny usually woke around 4am and after a quick breakfast rushed off to practice. If not engaged in a match, her training day usually ended around 3pm and she returned home for a warm shower and early-afternoon nap. Harry meanwhile was used to rising around 8 and enjoyed leisurely mornings with casual breakfasts, reading the Post and the Prophet and chatting with the elves. As an incredibly light sleeper, Ginny’s pre-dawn stumble out of bed and morning routine, roused Harry as well. Harry usually arrived home from the office around 5 or 6pm. With the addition of Ginny to the household officially, he began to come home earlier in excitement, usually waking Ginny for her early-afternoon nap.

At first neither party minded the lack of sleep, the changes in their routines, or (for Harry) the complete lack of attention to detail. After a few weeks the stresses in their scheduled eventually led to the couple’s first spat.

It started out innocuously enough. Harry made an affronted sort of noise one morning as Ginny tumbled out of bed.

"What?” Ginny asked grumpily. (It was 4 am in the morning, there were some sacrifices she made for Quidditch, it didn't mean she was happy about them)

Another mild but affronted noise.

"What?"

"You could jostle the bed less” Harry mumbled from under the covers. Ginny made an
incredulous face and marched on toward the bathroom.

Later that evening the passive aggressive remarks continued and Ginny's temper rose. Almost as if outside of herself she told Harry off, annoyed at his little huffs and passive comments. Harry annoyed that Ginny couldn't take a hint responded in kind. They were by no means screaming but definitely airing their grievances in the most impolite manner possible. All the while they continued to clean up the dinner-things, working in tandem. Ginny even was in the process of almost unconsciously mixing a Pepper-Up potion on the kitchen counter for Harry who was sporting dark circles under his eyes.

Finally after a few rounds of jabbing, Ginny sighed and blurted, "I'm driving you mad aren't I?"

"NO Gin, you aren't driving me mad, I would just like some bloody SLEEP. I missed half the shots on my damn PT rotation today because I couldn't fucking keep my eyes open," Harry bit out forcefully with his back to Ginny as he sorted the fridge.

Ginny said nothing, simply continued to stir her potion 12 strokes clockwise while gazing at Harry.

"What?" Harry asked a bit harshly turning around from the fridge surprised with the lack of response. His expression became mildly sheepish when he realized Ginny was gazing at him with a soft resigned expression.

"I've missed every one of my handoff passes. It downright embarrassing- I fell asleep on the broom yesterday!" Ginny replied looking chagrined.

Harry sighed and looked down at his girlfriend still feeling uncertain and the vestiges of annoyance and anger.

"I'll cast a silencing charm when I get up in the mornings"

"...I won't wake you the moment I come home. I reckon I shouldn't run out of the office anyway."

"We should try and go to bed at reasonable hours"

"Are you...suggesting what I think you're suggesting?"

Ginny stared at Harry. "I'm suggesting less..."

"Television?" "Sex?!"

The couple stared at each other. Ginny incredulous, "Why would you think I would suggest less shagging??!?"

"I dunno, I know Ron and Hermione had a schedule during her exams"

Ginny made a face. "I don't know whats more troubling, that you know that or that you didn't find it odd"

"Oh, I didn't say I didn't find it odd!" Harry replied the hint of a grin on his face.

Ginny rolled her eyes.

"God I love you," Harry muttered grinning ruefully as he turned back to the fridge. Ginny's eyes went wide, gulping in air she hiccuped. Harry glanced back at her half-confused and curious. Still full of air and holding back a hiccup Ginny just shook her head and waved him off casually and
turned back to her potion, ignoring the explosions inside of her. It wasn’t as if Ginny didn’t already know. She knew intrinsically but…still, to hear him say it. So casually, so effortlessly. So perfectly. That after a life of never being good at emoting, much less communicating deep feeling, never really hearing such words said to him…That he could so casually, lovingly (after a spat no less!) finally voice his love for her in so matter-of-fact a way! Well. Hermione could eat her picturesque proposal and her love declaring moments. Love, truly, did not get more perfect than this!
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

progression of plot!

Chapter Notes

those seeking more hinny fluff should go read La Mode Fin or Discussions in Proliferation.
Pieces of Harry and Ginny together that I sliced out of the greater work.

Christmas was coming.

For Ginny this meant a winding down of her work life as no matches were played in December. As the first game of the new year was not played until February, practice was only a few hours a day. By mid December Ginny was officially on holiday. ("Time to get fat!" she excitedly told Harry)

Unfortunately this did not mean Ginny had an abundance of free time. Ron and Hermione’s wedding, though scheduled for mid March, somehow demanded a good portion of her holiday. When Ron and Hermione informed the Grangers of their engagement, the Grangers were tremendously excited to throw ‘the perfect’ wedding for their only child. They had after all, missed out on a large portion of her childhood and life. Still feeling vaguely guilty, Hermione and Ron easily agreed to this. But then, Molly Weasley and others pointed out that Ron and Hermione were a tad too famous, and had a few too many social and political obligations to make an entirely muggle wedding simple. (The Minister, two Secretaries, Harry Potter, and a half-giant were among the esteemed guests the couple actually wanted at their wedding. Ron was not only the second most famous Auror in England, but also the son of a Secretary. Mr. Weasley and Kingsley had to avoid inadvertent political snubs. Hermione was on the governors boards of various organizations and also couldn't afford to snub too many either. All in all, inviting all the people required to not cause political fall out would have resulted in a disaster of a muggle wedding.) So instead Ron and Hermione were having a mid-sized muggle wedding enabling Hermione’s parents to show her and her future husband off to their peers and a dignitary filled “still hoping it will be mid-sized” magical wedding.

“She has this positively terrifying color coded chart! Full of dates, to-dos, muggle-magical logistics and organization, color swatches, food notes, and other details for both their weddings!” Ginny complained to Harry one night as they were getting ready for bed. Harry made a vague noise as he continued to peruse his book from the chaise lounge near the fireplace. (It was the master suite in a sizeable home after all)

Ginny flopped dramatically onto her side of the bed. “Hermione is driving me mad! Honestly, two
“Because,” Harry marked his place in his book, hung up his dressing gown and slid under the covers on his side. “The two weddings are a ‘keep the peace’ solution, although I think Ron’s ready to elope at this point.”

Ginny sighed, “Fine. But an engagement party? So close to Christmas? As if there isn’t enough madness?”

“Mrs. Granger, Your mum, and Mr. Granger were insistent. Apparently it’s a ‘tasteful’ way of showing off your kid. Besides, your Mum thinks it will be a good trial run.”

Ginny gave Harry a wry look. “Mum is going to be absolutely revolting once she finds out about us isn’t she?”

“Pretty much, yeah.” Harry answered indulgently.

“Ugh. You’re the best friend. I don’t understand how you’re getting away with doing no work at all!”

“Oh well, I pretended I was absolute shit at everything she tried to have me do.” Harry stated casually, (Ginny gasped in outrage) then added, “And I told her I have loads of prep for the mission I’m leaving on in two days.”

“Do you have loads of prep? Am I keeping you from it?” Ginny asked, worried she was intruding. Every since their spat about schedules, they had tried to be more mindful and aware of the others’ work requirements.

“No. It’s a small exploratory mission to covertly go into Serbia and fine more substantial evidence about our Zemun theory. Nev and I have done most of the work for it already. The rest is pretty standard.” Harry said, matter-of-fact as if he was describing a quidditch play.

“Have…have you done something like this before? Gone undercover?” Ginny asked, trying to imitate Harry’s matter-of-fact casual tone. Harry was leaving for two weeks to do what seemed to her, pretty serious and dangerous work. She wasn’t wracked with worry or anything. She knew Harry’s chosen profession was a dangerous one and she had long ago made her peace with that. He was smart, well trained, and she trusted his partners. Worrying obsessively about it would
help no one. But this was his first assignment after they became a *them* again. Last time this happened…she was sixteen, devastated, and terrified. So she could be forgiven if negotiating this was…new.

“Not exactly like this, each missions is always a little different. This isn’t real undercover, Ron’s the one who has done the deep cover stuff. But I’ve done similar things. For example when Neville and I went to Brazil, the Americans actually tossed us a small side mission because it was politically convenient and we were already there and…hang on, I don’t think I’m actually allowed to tell you about this. Sorry. Um…yet…Er. I mean, um, unless. Well, you’d need spousal privilege really so I could tell you. You know, so you can refuse being required to repeat anything I told you in court....”

oh. *Oh.*

“Oh.” Ginny replied, unable to eloquently address the spousal privledge. What exactly did one say? *Harry, you and I both know we’re getting married so lets pretend we have spousal privledge anyway and carry on?* To give Harry credit, he usually told her most things now except the things he was strictly not allowed to say or bound (magically) to not say. That being said, half the people around the dinner table at the Burrow had high security clearances, so you could usually figure out what was going on if you paid attention anyway. Blithley ignoring the issues hanging in the air, Ginny said, “Well, its good you’ve done something like this with Neville. And you’ll have Sharon…Do you miss Ron?”

“Yes.”

Then, feeling not even a little guilty for offering up her brother, “Why don’t you ask him then? I’m sure he –”

“Gin” Harry interjected gently, “We’ll be fine. I’ll be careful. Besides, Ron can’t just jump back into a mission, he’s keeping up his monthly fitness and assessments but it just doesn’t work like that.”

Ginny met Harry’s eyes and tried to convey all that she was feeling. Contini had spoked her. He blinked as if saying *Yes, I hear you* and reached out to tuck strands of hair behind her ear.

“Come back to me,” Ginny finally whispered, knowing Harry would understand exactly what she meant and why.
“Always,” whispered back Harry. Ginny scooted closer to his body and into his arms, holding him tight. She felt Harry nuzzle his face into her hair.

Slowly they fell asleep in that tight embrace.

Harry’s departure led Ginny to throw herself into all things festive whenever she wasn’t helping Hermione and her mum. She volunteered to assist in Godric’s Hollow’s muggle christmas pageant, involved herself in the village square decoration committee, and even (somewhat begrudgingly) assisted with the magical town council’s yearly protective ward and spells check. Unconsciously she had begun to view Stinchcombe as her home and the town as her community and not just Harry’s. She made inroads with her muggle neighbors and earned herself a place of affection with the wizarding neighbors as well.

She even became friends with Raj, Parvati’s beau, who had also been dragooned into volunteering with the Christmas pageant. Raj had recently moved into a small cottage in town but worked a bit away at the muggle emergency hospital. Raj had studied at Beauxbatons and was a healer. However he had also studied muggle medicine and worked as a sort of undercover magical specialist in a muggle hospital. There had been a serious problem of muggles coming in with magical ailments during the War, especially in France with the Vampire Gangs. Raj had signed up for front-line medical service assisting and detecting muggles with magical maladies in muggle hospitals. After the War, Raj had been transferred to England due to his particular expertise and had run into Parvati who was still doing her Healer training. The two had remembered each other from their time at the Yule Ball and very soon after, started dating.

After some tactical plotting with Raj, Ginny invited him and Parvati over for dinner at Stinchcombe. Raj had asked Parvati to move in with him. She had been reluctant about moving into Godric's Hollow, a town not particularly known for its young and thriving magical community. (The average age of the magical residents of Godric's Hollow was 90) Ginny who, not-so-secretly, wanted to raise the profile of Godrics Hollow to a "more happening and decidedly not old" community, was happy to assist Raj in convincing his girlfriend to move in. After a lovely dinner they all meandered into the village pub where they joined Ron and Hermione (who lived only on the far side of town) for a pint. Later when overseeing a truly abysmal rehearsal by the village children of the Nutcracker, Raj confessed to Ginny that the dinner was a partial success. Parvati was now open to the idea of moving in with Raj after her trainee period.

"Do you have any young attractive friends who might want to move here?" Ginny asked.

"Aren't you seeing Harry?"

"This is the raise the neighborhood profile!" (The conversation halted then because little Eliza
Ginny also threw herself into decorating Stinchcombe.

Harry would be away up until the week of Christmas so Ginny took it upon herself to obtain and decorate a tree. She, Winky, and Kreacher marched out into the local woods in search of the perfect tree. They eventually returned home with not one but, four hearty pine's to place and decorate around the house. Remembering that Harry’s best Christmases had been at Hogwarts, Ginny was determined to make Stinchcombe as lovely and festive as Hogwarts was during Christmas time. Festoons of holly and mistletoe were brought in and wrapped around banisters and framed doorways. Everlasting icicles and crystal snowflakes decorated the boughs and sprigs of effervescent cinnamon and star anise floated around the fireplaces giving the house a lovely smell. Harry and Ginny would be spending Christmas at the Burrow but Ginny felt it was important to also “establish” the season at Stinchcombe.

After a particularly strenuous evening of magic-proofing and setting up the Granger’s residence for the upcoming party, Ginny invited the Grangers, Ron and Hermione, and George over to Stinchcombe for dinner and pudding. (The elves were tripping over themselves to serve a proper Christmas themed meal and Ginny wanted company...and for someone to appreciate the truly decorated house.) It was only after her guests had left that Ginny realized that no one questioned why she was decorating and hosting in Harry’s house. For all that Harry and Ginny had been together for a little over a month now, they had not made any official declaration or statement. But her family and friends had complimented her on her hosting and remarked that she had done a good job on the house.

The day of the village Christmas pageant dawned. After a spirited evening of pining curls, and adjusting lobster and octopus costumes of seven-year olds, Ginny, Raj, Parvati, and Dean who had popped over for the ‘show’ sat back and to enjoy the adorable hot-mess that children’s Christmas pageants tended to be.

Halfway through the hilarious albeit confusing arrangement of the nativity, Parvati, leaned over to whisper, “It would be pretty cute to come here in a decade or so, to watch our kids play Christmas Lobsters! ” and squeezed Ginny’s arm in a small giggle. Ginny knew Parvati didn’t mean much. But in the brief moment, as Parvati squeezed her arm, Ginny saw before her two hazy little boys with mops of black, untidy hair teetering across the stage. In the split-second it took her to gasp softly, the vision vanished and Ginny blinked wondering how her imagination could have run so rampant.

Later after hugs and puddings, a hasty clean up and goodbyes, Ginny bundled herself up and decided to walk back to Stinchcombe. Perhaps it was the muggle parents milling about or maybe just to enjoy how lovely the decorated town looked, but Ginny decided take the longer meandering path that took her past the cemetery. The brief image she had of two small teetering black-haired boys seemed burned into her retinas. Unable to shake off the image Ginny walked over to the Potter headstones. She conjured a new fresh wreath of flowers as she tried to work through the odd feelings her flash-vision conjured in her.
She could admit that the prospect of children and *motherhood* didn’t give her the same apprehension it used to. She hadn’t felt that scrambling panic to fight for herself in while. She already *had* achieved all that she wanted. She had done more than she ever thought possible! And on top of that, she was in the most wonderful, balanced, and fulfilling relationship. With *Harry* no less! She had never been so comfortable and at ease with her life. So children? Marriage? Domesticity? Well… as long as it was with Harry she would be fine. Not only did she now trust in their love and relationship to know that her fears and concerns would be always be heard but… Harry was *wonderful* with babies.

Ginny let out a snort at her silliness as she tried to conjure up again the image of two black haired boys running around Stinchcombe. Frowning slightly she thought what it would be like have a daughter…

*Okay get a grip, you’re going to freeze standing out here.*

Shaking her hair out of her face Ginny started to march back but then was struck by a thought and bounded toward the older sections of the cemetery. Here the crumbling aged headstones were impossible to read but Ginny held out hope for her hunch. Would Aethelthryth’s tomb be in Godrics Hollow? Whispering a quick *Lumos* Ginny prowled around the Peverell stones trying to find some sign. Aethelthryth was after all, Godric’s ward, perhaps she did end up here.

Thirty minutes later Ginny’s fingers had lost all feeling, but she was brushing away the growth around a tiny marker. The stone was so old and that Ginny was afraid of using magic but she finally got the face clear.

She couldn’t quite read all the words but she could make out a carving of a small lamb sleeping indicating an infant. The dates indicated that the babe had died soon after its birth and underneath, the crest of Slytherin. There was no other explanation for the crest of Slytherin to be on a gravestone in Godric's Hollow.

*This was Aethelthryth’s baby, the last one she had in Godric’s Hollow…*

Perhaps it was the recent musings of her own hypothetical children, or having been recently surrounded by bubbling primary schoolers, or even the visit to the Potters grave- but Ginny was suddenly overcome by grief as she traced the faded shallow markings and she burst into tears. Sobbing, she was filled with a seeping sense of loss. Her imagination zoomed into overdrive once again and she imagined the horror and pain she would feel of losing *her* child.

*No!*

She jerked her hand away from the marker and her grief abated a little. Yet, still feeling the profound tragedy of losing a baby, Ginny whispered a charm and blew a kiss to the marker. The charm wasn’t anything particular, just something old and sweet her Prewett grandmother used to say as she put children to bed. Ginny wiped away her tears, got up off the ground and made way to leave. As she made her way out of the cemetery, the moonlight caught on an arc of white ragwort. Astonished Ginny looked around realized that the entire cemetery was enclosed in a humble looking but wide fairy ring of the ragwort. What happy fortune! Ginny closed her eyes and made a wish and let out sparks with her wand. The clump of ragwort unfurled and Ginny passed through and walked her way home.

As she settled herself into bed that night she smiled at her silliness. Few people took the wishes in fairy rings seriously as they rarely had any real power. Professor Sprout had rolled her eyes at them in school when Luna had asked about them. But Ginny grew up on tales of fair maidens making life altering romantic wishes in such rings. So she had wished for a happy future for her and Harry. And if she saw the faintest image of two little boys when she had closed her eyes, well
that was all Parvati’s fault!

The next morning, Ginny awoke from the most peculiar of dreams feeling utterly at peace. Once awake she only remembered wisps and embers.

A warm summers day, children laughing and running. Arched gables of a castle.

Running in a castle? No, it wasn’t stone like Hogwarts, it was hardwood. A house.

Shallow streams edged with willows.

A baby in a cradle...

So wrapped in the pleasant haze was she, that it was only after her shower that she noticed that the house and environs were covered in feet of snow! How had she missed the storm? It hadn’t seemed like snow last night. The house properly looked like Christmas though just in time for Harry, who was scheduled to come home in two days.

After a bit of baking, Ginny popped over to Nympara (Demelza and Warrington’s abode in Cornwall) to drop off Christmas treats and spend time with her friends. The next day, Ginny woke early to help Hermione with engagement errands. She wanted to come back to Stinchcombe early enough to prep a little for Harry who was due that night. Around 8:00 Ginny begged off from a working-dinner at Ron and Hermione’s. She got the fire going, put the kettle on, and set out a some leftover Welsh cawl to warm (should Harry return hungry). She made herself a cuppa and settled herself on the sofa by the roaring fire in the living room with a book.

Around 10:15 Ginny went up to the bathroom, scourgified the tub and set out some bath salts in case Harry wanted a good soak. Too giddy with anticipation to read she washed her face, brushed her hair, played with some makeup and washed her face again. She eventually plodded into the kitchen and decided to check the store of Pepper-Up and make some Dreamless Draught. Around 11:00 Ginny decided to call the receptionist at the Auror office for a quick check-in.

She wasn’t worried, she knew that Harry would have a lengthy debrief with Robbards once they returned and also a pretty detailed medical check. She just wanted to know how far along they were. Another hour or another fifteen minutes?

“I’m sorry miss, as a policy we do not disclose any information about any Auror missions active or not. But I can say Chief Robbards is not in at the moment.” The cool professional voice of the receptionist responded when Ginny called.

Irritated, Ginny bit back a rude response and hung up. She pulled a large helping of the rumbledethumps Demelza had sent her home with, and after a quick heating charm, proceeded to devour all of it in front of the telly. When it hit half past midnight, Ginny could no longer ignore the gnawing worry in her gut that something was off. Harry had told her that their scheduled time of arrival was 6:30 GMT… She went upstairs to change into proper clothing, going slowly on the off chance Harry flooed in suddenly. Finally, she informed the elves to inform her if Harry came in suddenly, and flooed to the Ministry.
In the hallway to the Auror Department she stumbled into Ernie looking jumpy.

“Oop. Sorry Ginny I…um…you wouldn’t happen to know when Sharon gets back in would you?” Ernie asked.

“They’re not back yet?” Ginny asked her anxiety suddenly jumping higher.

“Erm..who? Sharon and I have been…um owling about some professional help I’ve been giving her and I travel quite a bit. I’m heading out to the States in a few hours and Sharon said she would be free for um…a meet up tonight after she returned from a work trip herself.” Ernie answered blushing.

Ginny surmised that Ernie and Sharon were probably too early in their courtship (if it could be called that yet) for Ernie to be purview to the greater details of Sharon’s work trip.

“They won’t let you in?” Ginny asked.

“Oh uh, Mrs. Findlay, very nice lady, suggested I wait outside.”

Fuck that Ginny thought and marched past Ernie straight through the doors to the Auror department and up to reception desk.

“They’re didn’t make it back?” Ginny demanded sounding rather rude.

Mrs. Findlay the receptionist at the desk looked up at Ginny confused.

“I’m Ginny Weasley, could I speak to Auror Robbards?”

“Ms. Weasley, we are not in the habit of allowing everyone who walks in a meeting with the chief. I can however book you an appointment if you return during office hours. I believe Deputy Gavin is available on Monday at 3,” Mrs. Findlay replied coolly.

“Mrs. Findlay, I understand, but I need to know if…” Ginny broke off unsure how to go forward.
Suddenly she spotted a flash of familiar red hair and a bushy mane around the corner behind the reception entrance and cried “Ron! Hermione!”

“Ginny?” Ron spluttered bout-facing and looking confused. “What are you doing here?”

Ginny felt the color drain out of her face. There could be no happy explanation if Ron was here, especially if Ron was here in his trainee uniform and Hermione carrying a few tomes with her. Why would they call Ron, technically on reserve, unless something bad happened?

“What happened?” she choked out, “They didn’t make it back did they?”

“Auror Weasley,” Mrs. Findlay broke in, “You are not at liberty to share-“

“Sign her in under my name Mrs. Findlay” Ron interrupted, already leaning down to write Ginny’s name on the sign-in sheet with his signature. “You have to cast your patronus and go through some detectors Ginny,” he added as an after thought. Hermione was already ushering Ginny towards the Probity Probe.

“Auror Weasley!” Mrs. Findlay cried, “You were called in under special status, you simply cannot willy-nilly invite guests into a secure facility during non-office hours during an operational lockdown!”

“*Expecto Patronum*” Ginny whispered in front of the security recording area once the Probity Probe finished swabbing her.

“Its fine Mrs. Findlay,” Ron started exasperated.

“Auror Weasley! I am sure your sister is concerned but I cannot allow NON CLEARANCE personnel into the building especially when she has NO LEGITIMATE –“

A massive silver doe shot out of Ginny’s wand and shot to the right of the room and was immediately followed by a large lion that shot left. Ginny stepped back surprised at the sudden wave of energy she felt flowing out of her wand and looked bewildered around at the now silent atrium.
Mrs. Findlay stood frozen clipboard in her hand, shocked. Hermione stared, beaming and Ron looked blank faced. He dropped the quill he was holding high in his hand away from Mrs. Findlay.

“Right. List her as Harry Potter’s next of kin Mrs. Findlay. There’s your legitimate purpose of visit,” he stated in a strange voice as he walked to Ginny and guided her down the hallway.
Chapter Summary

I promised my readers an update.
I didn't hear back from my proof reader-so part one of this chapter is going up sans proof reading cause I didn't want my readers to keep waiting!

PLEASE check back in for the second half!

Ginny followed, a little astounded at her own patronous, after Ron and Hermione who were walking briskly down the Hall and around the corner.

“Right, Weasley and Granger, thank you for coming in—“ Chief Robards broke off as Ginny trailed in. “Weasley! This is a highly confidential case your kid-sister cannot just barge in I don’t care how much of a celebrity she is!” Robards barked.

Ginny’s eyes flashed, taken aback by Robards’ description of "kid sister" honestly, she was in her twenties!

“I’m Harry Potter’s next of kin,” she stated defiantly, jutting her chin up.

There was a beat of silence as Robards and all the Aurors around him stopped to stare at her. Robards, eyebrows raised looked at Ron who nodded in acknowledgement.

“Very well, Ms. Weasley,” Robards sighed and then dismissed her with, “Deegan please take our guest to the family waiting room to be briefed, while I talk to Weasley and Granger.”

Ginny knew this was protocol. Non-Auror Family members were debriefed on a need to know basis but… it was just so unfair. She seethed all the way to the waiting room and snapped at the shy young Junior Auror when he asked if she wanted any tea. She wasn’t just anyone dammnit! She could help! There was a small pang to her teenage years where Ron and Hermione got to know everything but she was shoved aside!

The more rational side of her (a small voice in the cascade of fury and worry), knew that Hermione actually had high security clearance and was technically listed as a reserve Auror Researcher, and that Ron actually was and Auror on reserve status. But logic and rationale did not prevent her feeling utterly useless, angry, and frustrated.
Once Ginny was led away, Robbard gave Ron and Hermione an incredibly irritated look to indicate that he did not appreciate this abuse of privledge and swept towards the command Room.

“They…live together,” Hermione mumbled weakly, following Ron and Robards.

Once in the room, Robards tapped his wand to make visible the various maps, charts, and communication logs on the wall.

“Right.” Robards began gruffly, “Two weeks ago Aurors Cartwright, Longbottom, and Potter, departed to the western block of Serbia by way of Romania for the first phase of Operation Hummingbird. The objective of Op. Hummingbird was to investigate the magical ties the Serbian Zemun may have. Specifically magical ties connected to the production of muggle style explosive devises and the kidnapping of The Hon. Dodge. This was fact finding exploratory mission only. Agents were to track connections and persons of interest but not engage.” He tapped the map with his wand and it expanded and zoomed to a high detail of a neighborhood in the south western part of Kosovo. Everyone in the room was incredibly familiar with this map since the Falmouth Attacks.

“Ten days ago, the Hummingbird team sent their touchdown confirmation communica after which there would be a total communications blackout. Covert Intelligence received a few dings from silent trackers on a porkey convey leaving the Magical Kosovo towards the Belgrade Porkey Docks at 0800hrs, two days ago on the 20th. Team Hummingbird was due back today in London at 1900hrs GMT. As it is 4 hours past their return and the team has not made any of their check in points, we are in code yellow for Operation Hummingbird. Dellingworth”

A frazzled looking middle aged Auror from the Covert Intelligence office shuffled up to take Robards’ place and waved his wand on the map. The map transformed to show the layers of spellwork and magical transportation layers and pinpoints in red.

“Team Hummingbird carried with them 3 covert undetectable porkeys to take them to this extraction point,” Dellingworth began pointing to one of the red pinpoints. “In case of a medical emergency or compromised evaction the team was to turn to this two unplottable locations that were created by the Longbottom advance team three months ago. All three C.U.P’s were configured to activate at 13:30 local Serbian time from Building C here.”

Dellingworth waved his wand again and next to the maps appeared a black screen listing time and location logs.

“As you can see, all three CUP’s were activated at exactly 13:30. All three CUPs were retrieved from the extraction site by the Scottish XO team. GPS charms reveal that the CUPS were not
moved or tampered with. Our onsite CI team camped on the Albanian border has reported no
magical activity in or around the safehouses. Our Bulgarian On-site monitoring team has also seen
no activity. The intelligence researchers at the Bulgarian office are combing the magical signatures
and activity of the area and piggybacking off of the wizards at the muggle U.S. satellite monitoring
stations for aerial images. There have been no flares of activity, muggle, magical, or otherwise
reported or seen in the past 48hrs and no spikes in residual magical energy from keyhole satellite
spells. The only noticeable change seems be increased cloud cover in the area, though a storm
system was expected to roll in according to satellites. The Albanian and Bulgarian offices are also
currently looking into possibilities of storm tampering.”

Dellingworth shuffled away and Robards took his place. Taking a deep breath he began,

“In two hours, the Buglarian Off-site will commence Operation Niffler, a search and rescue
initiative for the Aurors of Operation Hummingbird. The Auror office has already sent dispatches
and priority memos to the Foreign Affairs Minister in deference to England’s political relationship
with Serbia. The Prime Minister will be notified during his daily intelligence briefing and up until
we receive the go word from the Minister, these Operation Niffler will continue to be a covert.
The Defense Minister will also be informed during his morning briefing at which time the Auror
department will request a force extraction plan and report in the case the need arises. Any
clarifications or addendums to this information?”

There was a murmur of no. Ron and Hermione exchanged a look. If Harry and his team were
truly missing or captive, this had the potential to be an explosive situation from a Defense and
political perspective. Robards continued,

“Weasley, Granger, and Belling, I’ve requested you because of either your expertise with our
agents currently in the field. Granger I want you to sit with the researchers and comb through
everything and anything they might have missed and add any particular insights you may have to
our Bulgaria and Albanian teams. Weasley and Belling, I want you to get on floo with Bulgaria
and go over potential turns the in-field team might have made to make them miss their extraction.”

Ron started to raise his hand “-Weasley, adding you to Operation Niffler will not be discussed at
this time. We’ll talk after the Minister’s intelligence briefing.” Robards interjected anticipating
Ron’s request.

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Chief Robards found Ginny Weasley pacing the waiting room with her wand out and a fearsome
expression on her face.

“Miss Weasley,” Robards intoned gesturing to the chair on one side of the small table. Ginny sat
down and Robards pulled out the chair on the other side.

“Are the walls enchanted to be see through?” Ginny asked brusquely.
Robards raised an eyebrow.

“This is our family waiting room Miss Weasley, it is not an interrogation room.”

“It feels like a cell.”

“We’ll… work on that”

There was a bated silence.

With a sigh Robards began, “At this time Auror Potter and his team are four hours past their expected return time. It is protocol to raise a high level alert after 12 hours. Due to security concerns I cannot tell you the nature and details of our operations but please be assured we are doing everything in our power to retrieve your…..to retrieve Auror Potter.”

“Were they not able to make their extraction or do you not know where they are?”

“Miss Weasley, I’m afraid I ca—“

“Did their CUP’s activate?”

“Miss Weasley, I can’t tell you tha-“

“Do you have a last known location? How long have they been observing communication silence?”

“You know I cannot…”

Ginny leaned back and crossed her arms over her chest.

“Chief Robards, you can’t expect me to sit here quietly with no information!”

“Just because you know more than the average civilian doesn’t mean I can share classified information Miss Weasley, being Minister Weasley’s daughter does not –“
“I’m not *asking* as a Minister’s daughter!”

“Miss Weasley…” Robards implored.

“Is Hermione at least with the researchers? That lot can’t find their nose if there isn’t an official report about it!” Ginny burst our frustrated.

“Oh Good, you’ve inherited all of your brothers’ biases.” Robards said dryly, “Yes both Auror Weasley and Ms. Granger are already liasoning with our current teams to ensure a safe retrieval of Potter.”

Ginny deflated. There was nothing she could do. “I care about Neville and Sharon too you know” she said more cattily than necessary. Robards said nothing.

“If Harry saw someone or something that needed rescuing, he wouldn’t just ‘observe and track’ “ Ginny flung at Robards. This was she knew to the depth of her being, Harry Potter would throw the rule book out the window to save anyone. Just because he had Auror training and was slightly more trusting did nothing to temper his tendency to fly off the handle when there were potential victims involved.

“Miss Weasley, please stop talking. You are opening up Auror Potter to legal investigation for sharing classified information with a non clearance civilian!”

“Oh Harry didn’t tell me that. He’s annoyingly rule abiding about this! I figured it out from Neville and Sharon,” Ginny stated unrepentant. Robards closed his eyes and took a deep breath muttering something that sounded like “Merlin give me strength”

After a few moments of silence where both partise said nothing Ginny finally asked, in a defeated tone,

“You aren’t going to tell me what you found out about last weeks break in at the Ashmolean either are you?”

Silence.

“With all due respect Chief, at least tell me what Magical Law Enforcement said! That can’t possibly be classified! It was in the muggle papers!”

Chief Robards was staring at Ginny, steadily turning a darker and darker shade of purple. Ginny repeated her question about the break in.
Eyes wide and quite purple now he choked out, “What. Museum. Break In?”

Ginny blinked, “Um…the one that was listed as ‘museum disturbance in Oxford’ in The Guardian? I assumed the Aurors were at least looking into it because of you know...Even the Prophet said tours to the Magical side of the museum were shut this week...”

“DEEGAN! TATE!” Robards roared.

“Sir!” Deegan popped in looking terrified but attentive, Tate running down the hall to arrive a second later.

“Find out Everything about some museum disturbance at Oxford from MLE and brief me in 30 minutes. Tate! Why the hell isn’t someone on this?!?!”

“Yes Sir-“

“Sinclair and I followed up as soon as we got the weekly briefing from MLE Sir! MLE still has the scene and wouldn’t let us through! Its filed as an attempted burglary. We’ve requested access to the incident report and evidence.” Tate informed Robards.

“How long ago was this?” Robards barked, entirely purple and looking hard not to shout.

“Four days ago Sir”

“FOUR DAYS AG-?!? –DEEGAN GET ME THE HEAD OF MLE IN MY OFFICE RIGHT NOW!!!”

“Its past midnight Sir, He’ll be aslee—“

“I DON’T CARE IF HE’S IN THE MIDDLE OF SHAGGING HIS WIFE!”

(Deegan sprinted out of the room already calling for the Floo administrator)

-- What the HELL is his department doing logjamming my Aurors during an active investigation?!?!”
Ginny could literally see the steam rising off Robbard’s body. With so many members of her family having been in or part of the various branches of the Ministry, Ginny was aware that departmental clashes and politicking was common. She was long ago used to the general tensions and territory games between Magical Law Enforcement and the Aurors and to a lesser extent The Unspeakables. She has also inherited, being surrounded by Aurors and growing up among the Order, the general biases and elitism of the Aurors. The Unspeakables generally kept to themselves due to their usually top secret shady dealings and presumed an even higher elitism than the Aurors.

Deegan had popped back into the room, “Chief Stebbins is on his way Sir. He claims the delay was because of Muggle Affairs - he said the new department causes an additional stoppage and paperwork and slows things down.”

Ginny was surprised to find that Robards could in fact, become even more purple.

“HE’S BLAMING IT ON MUGGLE AFFAIRS?!?! THAT’S IT! If Stebbins wants a proper Whitehall fight he’ll get one!” he strode out of the room and Ginny, not wanting to miss any crucial information quickly followed behind him, Tate, and Deegan, trying to make herself as inconspicuous as possible.

Robards strode towards his office and barked at his executive assistant Mrs. Lanningham (A lady who ruled the chief Aurors with an iron fist and was to be feared and respected)

“Debbie, work with Deegan here to write a memo for the Minister’s morning intelligence briefing detailing the delay in crucial information from MLE concerning an active mission involving Aurors Potter, Longbottom, and Cartwright. Be sure to include that Chief Stebbins claims the delays are due to Muggle Affairs and CC’ Arthur Weasley- oh and…go ahead and add a CC to Interior, Confiscation and Counterfeit, Foreign Affairs, and…anyone else you can think of!”

Ginny quickly rushed in behind Tate and Robards into the Chief’s office. She was smirking slightly at Robard’s political play when Robards finally noticed her and rounded on her.

“You! How the hell did you know about MLE turning up at a disturbance at the Ashmolean?”

“Oh…well you know my friend Demelza?” – at Robards perplexed look she continued, “you know, Dr. Robbins head of R&D at Blazeburn?” – more perplexed looks and she got the sense Robards would once again turn that disturbing shae of purple so she hastily added, “The magical mobile company that I do all the advertisements for?!?! She’s the genius who got
the magic to work! She’s the head of Research and Development there!”

“Relevance Miss Weasley…”

“Anyway, she was a Transfiguration researcher at Oxford before all that. Well, she recently made a pretty big donation to the research department, so they honored her at this their Christmas gala.”

“What does this –“

“Her boyfriend still works there, he’s a professor of Theoretical Charms. It’s a dead boring a subject but apparently very important and well funded that its housed in that beautiful building next to the Ashmolean. Because he already works there, he and Demelza had plus one’s! So she brought me along, she’s one of my best mates you see. Warrington, Demelza’s boyfriend, he brought his lunch mate Bruce. Bruce is a wizard but he works in Muggle Art History at the Ashmolean.”

Tate was blinking at Ginny looking quite glazed by her story. Robards was faintly purple again to Ginny rushed to finish,

“Anyway, at the Christmas gala which was only three days ago, Warrington and Bruce were telling me about how the Ashmolean had been shut to visitors and how Bruce who works in the building, had recognized MLE alongside the muggle policemen!”

“Thank you Miss-“

“AND!” Ginny butted in,

“AND even though the muggle policemen told the press that it was an ATTEMPTED burglary, Warrington’s mate Bruce said that MLE had still shut a few exhibits in the museum and put up distraction charms around the supposed back entrance where this happened! The MLE asked Bruce for detailed records of all the artifacts kept in storage!”

Silence reigned for a few minutes after her story. Robards breathed sharply through his nose and turning to Tate said,

“Make sure to interview this Bruce fellow and if MLE gives you any trouble after tomorrow morning come directly to me. How the hell is idle party chatter more reliable than those dingbats?!”
“There’s more,” Ginny added meekly. Robards rubbed his nose and gestured for her to continue.

“Bruce said, I think his last name is Rogers, I can ask Warrington,” She added as an aside to Tate,

“Bruce said that there are thousands of items in storage at the museum and that almost none of
them are magical, all the magical stuff that has muggle importance has magical tags on it. He said
if what was taken was from storage was muggle and small enough and not flashy or super
important, it would be almost impossible to track. Obviously, I asked why someone would take it,
why a wizard would I mean- and Bruce said that even small muggle artifacts turn a huge profit on
the art market and some of them are vaguely magical enough that you can sell them on the magical
art market too!”

Robards cursed under his breath and tapped his wand on the side of his desk, pinging the
intercom,

“Debbie, Floo Auror Wise and tell her to start reading the Contini case reports. Have her start
setting up an Art Crimes unit to work alongside Tate here and get her started on the Muggle
Affairs paperwork to liaise with Interpol Art Crimes. Cc Arthur Weasley on the paper work if you
have to get this expediated.”

Robards moved his wand and turned to Tate who, Ginny belatedly realized, had been jotting
down the information from her story.

“Call in who you need to and pull some trainees from the floater pool to go through the art files.
Be on-call to go Oxford after the Minister’s intelligence briefing. I’ll sort out Stebbins and then go
brief the Op. Niffler team.”

*Chief Robards, MLE Chief Stebbins has arrived* floated in over the intercom.

Robards gestured for Ginny to leave the room.

Ginny gave Stebbins a judgemental look as she passed by him on her way out. She wanted to hear
Robards lose it over the MLE chief. Watching Robards had at least distracted her from her rising
panic and frustration. She wanted to give Stebbins a piece of her mind too! Blaming her dad's
department for a four day delay! Prejudiced Prick!

She also felt at least vaguely useful for having shed some information. But now she was back in
the corridor, aimlessly loitering, and the panic and worry was building up again.

Mrs. Lanningham worked diligently across from her and Aurors were making calls and walking in and out of cubicles and sending winged notes every which way. Some of the Aurors smiled at her as they went by and Mrs. Lanningham at some point had extracted a chocolate frog from some drawer and nudged it in Ginny’s general direction. But all of this was useless. Ginny couldn’t sit and she couldn’t stay still. Ginny closed her eyes and started visualizing the past season’s playbook as a means of distraction. If she focused on anything relate to Harry she might actually scream, or worse, cry. She knew her pacing was probably annoying but what else could she do?

At quarter to three, Ginn was startled out of her concentration by a thunderous herd of heavy steps.

“WE FOUND THEM!” Dellingworth was crying out as he was running towards the Chief’s office. Behind him, down the hall Ron and Hermione running up as well looking exuberant. Robards popped out of the room looking the happiest Ginny had ever seen him, and immediately started barking orders, but Ginny couldn’t hear him.

Hermione had caught up to her and had enveloped her in a hug, jumping up and down, crying “They’re safe! They’re coming home! They’re in Bulgaria, they’re completely fine!”

Ginny hugged her back and suddenly found herself gasping for breath as the sheer enormity of relief threatened to overwhelm her. She collapsed into a chair clutching Hermione who followed by awkwardly collapsing into the plastic chair next to her. Everything around her turned into a distant muted cacophony.

He’s safe.

He’s safe.

He’s safe.

_He’s coming home._
Note to Readers

Dear Beloved Readers, First of all, thank you all so much for sticking with me and sticking through the past two years as I slowly chug this thing out. I LOVE almost all the comments and response I get and really appreciate that many of you really get into the story and character development. I wanted to take a moment to apologize for my lack of response and overall absence. I had last promised that I would be updating relatively soon and then essentially disappeared for five months. I apologize for this. I have had a particularly difficult year and a half. I am incredibly appreciative of those of you who were so kind and send such lovely messages when my grandmother was in the hospital. I had hoped to get back to writing when she was all better. Unfortunately life has taken a bit of a detour as I ended up being diagnosed with a large and weighty medical issue which has taken the past few months to properly investigate, diagnose, and tentatively start a plan of action.

All of this to say,

I have been in and out of the hospital for the past few months and am scheduled to start a more aggressive medical treatment starting next month. Therefore even when I have had the will to write- I simply have lacked the physical energy or ability to stay awake.

I COMPLETELY intend to finish this story. I have drafts sketched out and an even ideas for one shots later down the line. I have conversations planned out between my characters in my head and have done literally hours of historic research for the more magical plot elements of this story.

I hope that my time coalescing will give me changes to write but at present i can't promise anything.

When I do update it will likely be a huge chunk at a time. So readers, if you enjoyed this story, please don't give up! More will come.

I encourage you read the one shots associated in this series and definitely reread!

Once again, apologies for the insane delays.

Love,

SD

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