

Harry Potter

Carry You Home

*hgfan1111*

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# Carry You Home

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**Summary:** Two years have passed since the defeat of Voldemort.

Nymphadora Tonks struggles through her life as she tries to fulfill promises she made to Harry before he died and promises she's made to Ginny and others since. Tonks is the sole person on earth who knows the truth of what happened at the Final Battle and the aftermath; but it's almost time to share her story.

# Chapter 1: Trouble Is Her Only Friend

Nymphadora Tonks watched a large red bus move through traffic at a rather alarming rate. She wondered if the driver had driven the Knight Bus in another life. Glancing across the street to where her partner was concealed as a fairly attractive lamppost, she raised an eyebrow. The lamppost twinkled for a moment before dissolving completely. Tonks stood, stretched as if she'd been sitting on the bench for much longer than the ten minutes that she had, in truth, been perched, and discarded the Muggle newspaper that she hadn't read.

Their mark was on that Muggle bus speeding through London. Luckily, Tonks had been able to get close enough to the man to levitate a small tracking beacon onto his clothing. Now, as long as her sticking charm held, Eldon Fuller would be simple to locate from the Ministry.

"Mission accomplished," she stated as she entered the office of the Aurors deep within the bowels of the Ministry.

Kingsley Shacklebolt, newly appointed Head of the Auror Department, looked up from the parchment he was assessing and grinned as the young Auror collapsed into the chair across from his desk.

"And how did Marks do?"

Tonks grimaced. "Not horrid, but not great. His stealth leaves much to be desired, but his transfiguration seems up to par."

Kingsley's rich chuckle echoed through the room. "Tonks, if you're the one saying his stealth techniques aren't up to par... well, then I guess he needs real help." He laughed even harder when she shot him a rude gesture.

"I hate this, King." Her head dropped along the back of the chair and she stared up at the ceiling. "I hate being bloody useless. And I hate that you're holding me back."

"Tonks," Kingsley's tone hardened considerably, "it's not me holding you back. You know perfectly well that your injuries-

"Are healed," Tonks finished decisively. "It's been two years, King. Think about how you would feel if someone told you that you couldn't do your job anymore. You'd hex them to Hades and back, you know it."

"I would," he confirmed. "But I didn't sustain the types of injuries that you did."

"Bollocks," Tonks swore. "I hate this," she breathed out. Mostly it was the fact that she didn't have the energy to fight the injustice anymore that she hated.

"It's been two years, Dora." Her head snapped up and she glared at her superior officer and friend as he used a name that only a few people in the world had ever been allowed to use: and only one of those was still alive. "We all thought you'd be able to pull through, but..." Kingsley sighed and looked down at his hands. "The truth is, Tonks, you haven't. I know what it means to lose

someone."

"I know that," Tonks snapped, but her voice was soft and she cursed the tightness that had crept into her throat.

"We've all lost someone. I know that we can't expect you to just forget about Remus."

"Don't," she flinched. "Just don't, King."

Kingsley stood behind his desk and leaned down on his knuckles. "Maybe you need a few days off. It's about that time of year again--"

Tonks swore quietly. "I don't need time off. I need to be away from these rookies. Find me a different assignment or I'll quit." She stood abruptly and left the room, only pausing in her determined gait once she was several corridors away from the Auror office. In the darkened corridor across from the seldom used Law Division, Tonks allowed herself to lean against the wall and sink to the floor. Her red Auror's robes pooled around her feet as she wrapped her arms around her knees and lay her head on them. The tears weren't long in coming.

She hated it when everyone looked at her and knew. They could tell, just by looking at her. She'd lost her heart, her life, that day two years ago in June.

Late at night when she was completely alone in an eerily quiet flat, she could swear she still smelled the smoke from the battlefield. She could still feel the burning in her side where the cutting curse sliced her open, even though the wound had been nothing more than a pale, ugly scar for a long time.

And, every once in awhile, she would reach out in the bed, in that haze halfway between sleep and awake and swore she could feel his warmth in the bed next to her.

She'd allowed other men into her bed since then. There was Willis, a brief fling that lasted far too long in her opinion. There had been no relationship to speak of; both were only in it for the sex, as often as they could both manage and without any strings attached.

And then Andy: sweet freckle-faced Andy who was far too young to be with her. She had been, after all, his trainer and she shouldn't have done that to him. Nineteen years old and completely innocent when she'd shamefully seduced him. That relationship had lasted longer than any others. Finally, Tonks told him to leave when she'd caught him watching her as she slept. She'd woken to find him staring at her with a horribly lovesick look on his face. She'd had to bite her tongue when she almost called him Remus. How many times had she awoken to find him in that similar position? Far too few. Andy had no right to be there.

The guilt had overwhelmed her and so she'd thrown things at him and cursed at him until he'd gathered his trousers, toothbrush and rumpled Auror cloak, and Apparated away wearing nothing but his boxers. Kingsley had put her on Administrative leave for three weeks and Andy had been transferred to another division.

Alone was better. Alone was how she liked it best. She'd been alone before Remus and she'd bloody well survive alone without him. She had family, for sure. Her mother and father invited her around

for dinner often enough, but they'd never met Remus; they just didn't understand.

The Weasleys had been wonderful. Their own losses had been staggering; Percy, George, and Harry—all gone. And Remus had been rather close to them. They'd almost lost Ginny as well.

Molly checked on Tonks often, even though it secretly irritated the hell out of the Auror. She didn't need another mother. She knew that Molly meant well; Tonks was, after all, one of the only ones that Ginny still turned to. It was completely natural for Molly to include her daughter's best friend in all the family functions.

But Ginny was distant as well, held at arms length by Tonks herself. Ginny had her own grief, which Tonks could relate to, but never fully understand.

That was a different story, she affirmed as she dried her tears. She hated it when the grief washed over her like this. It had been two years—two very long, tiring years. It was time to move on. It was time to put the mask back in place and be who she was supposed to be. Tonks was only allowed to be 'Dora' with one person; and she wasn't here right now.

A few deep breaths later, Tonks had composed herself enough to cast an illusion charm on her swollen eyes. She straightened her robes, pasted the determined look of an Auror on her face, and made her way through the Ministry to the Atrium where she could Apparate.

"Evening, Tonks."

She held in the grimace as she was recognized in the queue for the Apparition point, and turned to smile at Ron Weasley.

"Wotcher, Ron."

"Haven't seen you around much," he observed with an easy smile. Tonks immediately hated that it seemed genuine and then hated herself for feeling so horrible toward someone who didn't deserve it. Ron had worked hard to move on with his life. Just because she couldn't didn't mean she should hate him for it. But it was hard to convince herself of that today.

"Someone's got to train all the rookies," she smirked at him.

Ron had fought next to Harry during almost the entire Final Battle, only being separated at the end when Harry went after Voldemort. He and Hermione had eloped in secret a few weeks after they'd been released from the hospital. Molly had cried for days afterwards but no one was sure whether it was because of the deaths or because none of their family had been present at Ron and Hermione's wedding.

They'd bought a run-down flat in Diagon Alley and really made into a home. Tonks had been to their place on a few occasions since and could truly say that it was unrecognizable. There were curtains on the windows and new paint on the walls. It was cheery and homey and clean: everything that was the opposite of Tonks' own flat.

Both Ron and Hermione had studied hard to earn their N.E.W.T.s and, even though Ron's weren't the best marks, he'd somehow scratched his way into the Auror Academy. It had been a rough two

years but he was now a fully qualified Auror and one of Kingsley's favorites.

Ron had been interviewed once and had said that he had done it in his best mate's memory. He even carried a bit of Harry with him during training, in the form of a lightning bolt tattoo he'd gotten on the left side of his chest. Tonks fondly remembered the row with Molly when the article had come out. Molly had obviously never known about the tattoo.

Hermione was now expecting their first baby; a boy it was rumored.

"I'm glad you weren't my trainer," Ron chuckled. "I'd have been afraid you'd have made it too hard on me."

Tonks grinned despite her dark thoughts. "Too right, Weasley. My trainees tow the line."

"Just as well," Ron shrugged. "You haven't been to a dinner recently," he observed. There was a bit too much casualness in his voice and Tonks bit back a sharp reply.

"Been busy," was all she answered.

"Seen Ginny lately?" Ron asked as the two moved forward in the queue.

"A few weeks ago," Tonks shrugged. "We went to a film then out to dinner. She seemed alright."

Ron nodded. "She's doing well, I think—smiling more and more. She's dropped by to see Hermione a few times lately also."

"That's good," Tonks agreed. "I heard that things are going well with the Foundation."

"Bill said so," Ron said and then shrugged. "I don't really understand it all. Hermione has the nose for that type of thing, but Ginny just keeps saying that she needs to do it. It surprises me, actually. I never pictured Ginny being that type."

"What type is that exactly?" Tonks felt a particular defensiveness for her friend. They were bound by much more than loss and friendship and she hated it when people thought they could understand when they really had no way of doing so.

"The... I don't know... planning type, I guess. Ginny usually just made things up as she went along, you know, like... Harry... used to. What she's doing now, pulling together that committee, founding that orphanage and all the other things..." He ran a hand through his hair. "I guess I never really saw her doing those types of things."

Tonks nodded thoughtfully. "I think she needs it, Ron. It gives her purpose."

"I suppose so," he conceded. "I just wish..."

"What?"

"I just wish she could move on. Even though she seems to be doing better, she's still thin and sometimes looks so lost. She's still wearing that engagement ring, for Merlin's sake," he sighed. "How is she supposed to meet someone and move on when she's walking around like... like Harry's

widow?"

Tonks took a deep breath and swallowed the anger that bubbled up like acid in her throat. "Some of us can't move on, Ron." She could tell he felt bad for his comment, but she waived him off and pasted that now-familiar smile on her face. "Forget about it."

"We're having a dinner this weekend," he offered. "Mum will have a fit if you're not there."

"I'll try," she shrugged. "Kingsley's got me on a lot of shifts" she lied. "Loads of rookies to train."

"Try anyway," Ron suggested with a rather knowing look and motioned to where Tonks was next to Apparate out.

The moment before she popped out, the rugged face of the ginger-haired Auror disappeared and she saw a sixteen-year old boy standing at Harry's left side, dirt on the end of his nose and his hair, longer than Molly approved of, ruffling over his ears; a slow, easy smile stretching his face into a vision of relaxed humor. She blinked and the battle-hardened Auror returned.

Then he was gone and the dingy interior of her flat was in his place. Resigning herself to the existence she'd let envelope her, Tonks fixed a rather quick and tasteless meal and watched a nameless show on the telly; one which she'd never be able to remember an hour later.

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Bright lights flashed all around her through the hazy darkness. Mostly orange and red and occasionally green. The flashes silhouetted the few forms around her and Tonks wondered why everyone was moving in slow motion—knowing, not too deep down, that not much made sense in a dream.

If only it was 'just a dream'. She couldn't stop herself from walking forward, even though she knew what she'd find. Two steps, five steps... the haze swirled a bit... the sounds far away. Voices echoed and Tonks knew what they were saying but didn't care. She'd heard them plenty of times before.

Ten steps away and Tonks wanted to clench her eyes closed but couldn't, just as she couldn't that day. She never could. Why did the mind remember such details?

His broken body lay on the spongy ground, blood seeping—no longer pumping—from his many wounds. His face was a mess of cuts and scratches. Tonight her eyes traveled past the ruined face and to his hands. Many of the fingernails were missing; pulled off, she supposed, in his struggles. Hair stuck in those that were left. His right hand was opened, the fingers reaching toward the dull piece of wood resting just inches out of grasp.

"Remus!" Her own voice sounded foreign as she felt herself fall to her knees. "Moony, don't you die on me!"

Her hands became painted in his blood as she tried to stop the bleeding; pressing what was left of his worn robes into the gaping wounds on his chest. Frantically, she tore off her own robes and tried to use them.

The red blood soaked into the red of her robes until she couldn't tell if there was any clean space on them.

Red on red.

Tonks gasped as she finally woke, wrapped tightly in her sheets. She looked at her hands, knowing that she'd find them stained in blood. Pale white skin was all she found.

She rubbed harshly at her eyes and looked around for the clock. Quarter past four. She'd managed four hours of sleep tonight. Better than some nights, worse than others.

She untangled herself from the sheets and stumbled from the room through the narrow hallway and into the small kitchen. Rummaging through the cupboard above the sink, she found what she was looking for and quickly poured herself a generous shot of the amber liquid. It didn't even burn anymore as she swallowed it and poured another.

Why was her life so hard? Why did it have to hurt so much after so long?

Deep down she knew that her life had a purpose, had even had it confirmed for her in so many words once. She winced as she remembered that time and drowned it with another drink. She didn't want to think about that now.

How much longer would that purpose be around? How much longer until she finally gave in and lost herself completely to the darkness that was ever edging into her life? It couldn't be much longer, she thought. She'd been surprised it had taken all of two years so far. But, if Ginny could hold out this long...

No. She couldn't think that way. They'd warned her it wouldn't be easy. They'd warned her that the darkness was there. She'd made her choice and now she'd live by it.

Tomorrow she'd check on Ginny. Maybe they could go out to lunch or go shopping. She almost snorted into what remained of her drink thinking about that. There wouldn't be two more fish-out-of-water than she and Ginny shopping.

But they'd made it this far together, and they could make it however much longer there was. That was the promise she'd made, after all, wasn't it? And you weren't anything if you broke the promises you made. Harry had taught her that... it seemed decades ago.

# Chapter 2: The Only Way Is Down

Ron Weasley was a contented man. The past two years had been beyond hard, but they were over and the future was looking much brighter. His eyes scanned the room and he had to smile. The Burrow was full once more, all the Weasley's, those that were still living anyway, in attendance.

Molly Weasley was buzzing around the kitchen, a wooden spoon stuck in her hair and her wand absently hanging out of a pocket on her apron. Ron smirked to himself and wondered if she knew she'd mixed the two up. Well, she'd know soon enough.

There was a white streak down one side of her face that looked to be flour. Her once-red hair had dulled and mixed with grey until it was a muddy, almost pink mixture. Hermione had offered to charm it for her but Molly had waived her off and never mentioned it again.

Arthur sat in his usual spot at the large family table, a grandson on each knee as he slowly bounced them up and down, singing some ridiculous song about a pony. The two boys, identical down to their curly, strawberry-blond hair and bright blue eyes, giggled as they clutched their grandfather's fingers in their pudgy hands.

Jean-Luc and Pierre had been the first-born grandchildren for the Weasleys. Bill and Fleur had wasted no time, having the twins only ten months after their marriage. The boys were going to turn four in a few weeks, but they still maintained that baby look to their faces.

Across the kitchen from Ron were Alicia and Fred. Ginny was sitting next to them holding their daughter, Pandora. The red-headed baby cooed and giggled as Ginny poked and tickled her. Ron was happy to see his sister. She'd been very busy all week and had told Bill when he'd run into her at Gringott's Bank that she was unsure if she'd be able to make the gathering.

Her color was good, even if she was still rather thin. She wore a smile tonight, but Ron could tell it wasn't completely genuine. At least she was smiling. Six months ago, she'd suffered another major setback and Ron had been afraid they'd been close to losing her again. Tonks had been the one to find her in her flat and bring her home to the Burrow. They suspected she'd been locked away since Christmas; that was the last time anyone had seen her.

She'd been almost inconsolable for days and Molly had been only hours away from flooing St. Mungo's for help when something amazing had happened. Somehow, and from somewhere, a renewed energy had found Ginny and she got up out of bed, began feeding herself and went right back to work. When confronted with it, Ginny would only smile sadly and say that she'd lost her focus for a time and that once she found it again she was fine.

Life had not been easy for Ginny. She and Harry were secretly engaged to be married when the Final Battle happened. Ginny had found Harry, broken and already dead, in the Forbidden Forest. His final meeting with Voldemort had not turned out well for either side. Voldemort had fallen, but so had Harry.

Tonks had found them both, hours later. She'd sat with them as Ginny rocked Harry's lifeless body and cried until there were no more tears. They were both injured quite severely, and required stays

in the hospital, but the exact nature of their injuries was never revealed. St. Mungo's, with pressure from the Ministry, had sealed Tonks', Ginny's, and Harry's medical records. Ron thought it was a bit much, but they had been the only ones in the area with the remains of Voldemort, so maybe...

The press was relentless during the weeks following the Battle. They hounded Ginny everywhere she went, but she handled herself with a grace that Ron had never seen in the tiny dynamo. He and Fred had a bet going as to which reporter would be on the receiving end of Ginny's famous Bat-bogey hex, but had abandoned it when Ginny never rose to the bait. She carried herself with a quiet elegance that more than one person had commented on, privately of course.

Harry's funeral was a horrendous public spectacle that had brought more huge headlines. The papers reported that Ginny collapsed during it and had to be removed, wailing and crying the whole way. The truth was, Ginny broke out in hysterical laughter part way through the Minister's speech and Tonks, Bill and Charlie had herded her out to prevent the truth from coming out. Later, in private at the Burrow, Ginny had laughed again saying how much Harry would have hated everything.

In the end, Ginny, with support and political power of the Order of the Phoenix, had placed Harry's remains in Godric's Hollow next to the graves of his parents. Ginny, with Tonks' help, had insisted that the whole area be placed under a Fidelius charm. Harry would never have wanted a public memorial or monument in his honor.

Harry had left everything to Ginny. It still boggled Ron's mind the amount of money that his sister sat on right now. Bill and Arthur had waded through the paperwork in the days following the funeral for Ginny. She, in turn, had laughed it off and told them that she would worry about it all later.

Two weeks after the funeral, Ginny disappeared. The Weasley's feared the worst until Tonks delivered a letter telling them that she had left, of her own free will, to get help from a mind healer.

The whole situation had puzzled Ron, as Ginny had seemed so strong and determined through it all. Molly and Hermione had both insisted that Ginny was a terrific actor and that deep down she was a mess. That must have been the case as Ginny was gone for almost ten months. She returned well enough in body, but Ron could see the dark shadow that loomed over her. The next year she had pulled herself together brilliantly, taking over the Potter finances and organizing things that Ron himself would never have dreamed of.

She stood up to Minister Scrimgeour on many accounts, sometimes in a very public setting. She vilified the Ministry in the press and used her considerable wealth to back her position. Charlie had begun calling her the 'littlest dragon' for the fierce way she protected both Harry's memory and his ideals.

She'd burst into a meeting at the Ministry to plan a memorial statue to Harry and had quickly taken control, over the Minister's quite vocal protests, and completely changed the focus of the whole project. Instead of having some monolithic bust of Harry's face in the Ministry building, a simple black obelisk was placed near the outskirts of Hogsmeade, just on the fringes of the forest where Harry had perished and the Final Battle had taken place. And it wasn't only Harry's name inscribed in the mirror-like granite. Every victim that Voldemort, or his minions, had killed was listed there—

Wizard, Goblin, House-Elf, and Muggle alike.

Ron had never been prouder of his little sister than in the moment she'd stood in front of the dedication ceremony and valiantly touted Harry's ideals of equality and love. He'd needed to lean heavily on Hermione when he looked back after mingling with the crowd a bit to see Ginny press her fingers to her lips and then transfer the kiss to the place where he knew Harry's name was inscribed. And then she'd vanished, Apparating away as quietly as she'd come.

Bill had warned her that she might run out of money if she kept spending like she was; that she should save some to live on later in her life. Ginny just laughed and said that it wasn't her money to spend on herself. And Ron could see very little evidence that she spent anything on herself. The flat that she lived in had been purchased by Harry in the later part of their Horcrux hunt. Ginny lived simply, still wearing second-hand robes. She traveled only where she needed to keep up with the various charities and foundations that she had started.

Ron's eyes caught his sister's across the Burrow. He smiled at being caught staring at her. She smiled back before dropping her eyes to the baby she held.

"She seems happy," Hermione commented as she came up behind him and laid a hand on his back.

Ron turned to take her into his arms and grinned down at his largely pregnant wife, nodding. "She does. I was hoping that Tonks would come tonight as well."

"They are very much alike, aren't they?" Hermione asked. She had mellowed so much with their marriage and her pregnancy that it still sometimes surprised Ron that this was the same Hermione he and Harry had gone to school with.

"Who, love?"

"Tonks and Ginny," she clarified. "They've both lost so much."

Ron nodded. "Yes, but they've handled it so differently. Tonks was a mess right at first, remember."

"Yes," Hermione nodded. "But she pulled it together when Ginny needed her." Ron had to agree with that. Whenever Ginny had been in need, it was Tonks who came to the rescue. She'd found the mind healer for Ginny and made arrangements for her to stay there. Tonks had even taken a leave of absence herself, saying that she was staying with Ginny for a bit at the end of her treatment. She'd been the lifeline between the Weasleys and their youngest daughter during those times. She'd even been an un-official bodyguard to Ginny on many public appearances.

"Although I think Ginny's more together than Tonks these days," Ron mumbled. There had been rumors running through the Auror department of Tonks' wild side. The arrogant and boisterous Ludlow Willis had been very less than flattering about their short-lived relationship. He'd called her horrid names and told the most unflattering stories about her. Ron had heard that Kingsley had privately pressured the Auror to shut his mouth, threatening him with the worst shifts and assignments if he ever said another word about Tonks again.

Then there was poor Andy Hendrickson. The kid had barely been legal when Tonks had pounced on

him. He'd been a mess when he'd been transferred to Ron's division. Somehow the kid had pulled it together and was now assigned as Ron's junior partner. The subject of Tonks was strictly taboo between them, however. Andy had let a few details slip on a long overnight shift and Ron's opinion of his long-time friend had forever been damaged.

But, there was no doubt that she had been there, one hundred and ten percent, for Ginny. Ginny rarely had to ask for anything before Tonks would be there. Ron supposed it was shared misery that brought them together.

"Hopefully it's just a rough patch and she'll get over it soon," Hermione mused. Her attention turned away from where Ginny was teasing Fred about his daughter and back to her husband. "Have you had a chance to ask Ginny yet?"

Ron winced. "No, I haven't." He wasn't looking forward to the conversation, or the feelings it might dredge up. He hoped that the good mood Ginny seemed to be in tonight would help their cause.

"Tonight might be a good night," Hermione suggested.

"Yeah, I think so too. I'll see if I can't get her alone later."

Hermione nodded and they both turned as the back door opened and a rather sedated Tonks entered. Sedate for Tonks, at least. The top half of her head was a dark burgundy while the bottom half was pure white. It was cropped close in the back, only an inch at most away from her head and the burgundy parts were longer in layers toward her face. She only had one piercing today it seemed: a diamond stud on the side of her nose. Oops! Ron spoke too soon. It looked as if she had something or other right through the middle of her tongue. Ergh.

"Wotcher all," she greeted with a large smile. Molly gathered her up completely in a hug and the room settled back into the buzz of conversations. Ron watched as Tonks worked the room, greeting people, hugging wives and pinching children's cheeks. It was only when her eyes and Ginny's met that the familiar shadow crept onto both of their faces. They exchanged a brief hug, whispered words that Ron couldn't hear, and then moved away from each other.

Dinner went rather well, Ron thought. Bill's boys only upset three dishes of food. Fred attempted to slip a new product onto Ron's plate but, with Hermione's help, he gracefully avoided it. There was a minor argument when Bill began talking politics and Charlie objected. For the most part, both Tonks and Ginny stayed quiet.

After dinner, Hermione prodded Ron to where Ginny was speaking softly with her mother. Ginny's tendency to disappear right after dinner made the conversation that Ron was not looking forward to imminent.

"Hey, Gin."

"Hello, Ron." The fake smile was back, but this time it looked as if she was putting as much effort as she could muster into it.

"Listen, Hermione and I were wondering..."

"Yes?" Molly had moved away, possibly sensing that the discussion was to be a serious one, and Ron had Ginny's full attention.

"Well, we found out that we're having a boy." Ron waited for some sign that Ginny had heard him but she only nodded politely.

"Mum told me. I hope that you weren't trying to keep it a secret."

Ron ruffled his hair and glanced backward to where Hermione was prodding him onward. "No, not really."

"Good," Ginny chuckled, "because you can't ever tell her anything like that and not expect everyone to know about it."

"Good point," Ron smiled. "Anyway, Hermione and I were talking and..." he glanced up to find Ginny watching him in curiosity, "we were wondering if we could... namethebabyharry."

"Come again?" Ginny leaned toward him a bit.

Ron sighed. "We wanted to name the baby after Harry." He tensed waiting for Ginny's explosion and was surprised when it didn't come.

"I don't think that's a very good idea, Ron," Ginny said calmly with a small smile on her face. Ron saw her hand drift down to twist the diamond engagement ring around and around her finger. She glanced behind him as Hermione came up to listen in. "Harry would hate that, and you know it. He'd hate all the things that are being done in his name."

"You've done some rather good things in his name," Hermione protested as she joined her husband.

"That's a bit different, isn't it?" Ginny asked. "I'm just doing things that Harry himself would have done if he'd been here. He's not, so it's now my job to do them."

Ron wasn't surprised at her answer. Frankly he'd expected it, however he and Hermione felt that if anyone deserved to name a child after Harry, it was them. Tonks came up beside Ginny and laid a hand on her shoulder. Ginny smiled tightly at her and turned back to her brother.

"What about James?" Hermione asked. She and Ron had also talked about using that name so he wasn't surprised when she mentioned it.

What did surprise him was Ginny's reaction. He could have sworn she nearly fell down. Tonks grabbed her arm as she started to shake violently.

"No! You can't use either of those names."

Ron was bewildered by the anger that Ginny was radiating. Tonks glared at him for a minute before looking down on Ginny again, who was trying to calm herself by breathing deeply.

"It's important for us to remember, Ginny," Hermione protested. "Giving our son Harry's name is a way to honor him since he'll never have a child of his own." Ron winced as Ginny turned away almost as if being hit by an invisible force.

Ginny took a few breaths and turned back and Ron was amazed at the change in her face. Her skin, in that instant, took on a rather grey pallor and dark circles seemed to form under her eyes, which were now dull and lifeless.

“Please choose a name that will give your child an identity for the future. Using something from the past will only tie him to something that he could never understand.”

They stood quietly for a moment letting the words disappear between them.

“Then will you at least consent to being his godmother?” Hermione asked, a hopeful look on her face.

Ginny smiled sadly and patted Tonks’ hand as it rested on her shoulder. “I’m sorry; I don’t think I can do that.” She turned without further explanation and walked out of the room.

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Tonks grimaced to herself as she noticed Ron and Hermione approach Ginny. This couldn’t end well, she knew.

In the end, Ginny had held her considerable temper together and hadn’t faltered as much as Tonks had expected her to. She knew that their unknowing remarks would hurt deeply for a long time, but they had been just that—unknowing.

Ginny looked much better when she came out of the bathroom a few minutes later. Tonks watched her mingle for a few minutes, avoiding both Ron and Hermione, before saying her goodbyes. She caught Tonks’ eye for a moment and the silent message was understood.

Tonks made her own excuses only a few minutes later and apparated to Ginny’s flat.

Not much had changed in the past two years here. The little touches Ginny had added had only accentuated Harry’s good taste in furnishings. He’d laughingly told Ron and Hermione that just because they had to come and go from the flat so much didn’t mean they couldn’t be comfortable while there were there.

“I’ll be right out.”

Tonks heard Ginny call from the back bedroom. She took her time inspecting the few photographs and mementos that were scattered around the room. Her favorite photo was one of Harry and Ginny taken a few weeks before the final battle. Harry had proposed to Ginny that day and Molly had insisted on bringing out the camera. Happy times were few and far between back then.

The couple in the photo was obviously deeply in love. They exchanged brief, although passionate, kisses now and again and lost each other in deep gazes. Not for the first time, Tonks wished she had a picture of Remus and herself together in such a state. She’d always been such a clown when any camera had come out that there was never a serious one taken.

Remus had teased her about that but had, in private, told her that she didn’t have to act up for him, that he could see through her masks and that he loved her anyway.

"I hate those things," Ginny grumbled as she shuffled into the room. Gone were the wizarding robes, exchanged for a rather masculine pair of flannel pajama pants and an old Quidditch jersey. Harry's clothing.

"Me too," Tonks sighed as she loosened her own clothing a bit, tossed her boots into a corner by the door, and sat down on the sofa across from Ginny.

"You don't have to come, you know," Ginny smiled tiredly. "You're not obligated to them."

Tonks shrugged. "I know." She studied her friend closely before raising an eyebrow. "Come on now, let's see it."

Ginny grimaced and shook her head. "I'm not sure I can tonight, Dora."

"I need to know, Gin."

The two women appraised each other for a moment before Ginny sighed and reached for her wand on the sofa table. "Finite Incantatem."

Tonks bit the inside of her lip rather than make a sound at Ginny's appearance. Thin wasn't the word... skeletal was more like it. Her skin was a pale grey color, and even her lips had lost most of their distinction. Her eyes were sunken and dull, tears pooling at the corners. The once vivid hair was lifeless and hung down in clumps on her shoulders.

"Oh, Gin," Tonks finally whispered. "It's not long now, is it?"

Surprisingly, Ginny smiled a genuine smile. "No, it's not. A few weeks at most."

"Will you tell them?"

Ginny shook her head and slowly gathered her knees up toward her chest, wrapping her arms around them. "No, I can't. I can't stand to see their faces. I've watched death, Dora, and I can't let them see me like I had to see that."

Tonks swiped at the tears that dribbled out and ran down her cheeks. She sighed deeply and then drew a large breath. "Do you need anything? Pain potions or something?"

Ginny lay her head against the sofa cushion and shook it slightly. "I've gotten good at brewing them myself."

"And bloody good at the charms to conceal all this mess, too," Tonks praised with a sardonic laugh. "I don't know how you manage it, Gin."

Ginny closed her eyes and shrugged a shoulder. "I don't have a choice, Dora. I do what I need to do to make it through the day. At night, every night, I pray for Harry to come and take me away. In the morning, I open my eyes and know that I have to get up." Her voice trailed off and Tonks wondered if she'd fallen asleep.

She took a moment to observe the dying woman across from her. Deep purple bruises marred the pale skin that showed the map of veins underneath. She prayed that the pain potions were enough

to ease her suffering.

A rattled breath awakened Ginny and she looked away from Tonks' knowing gaze. "Not much longer."

"You'll let me know if you need anything?"

"Like we've talked about," Ginny confirmed.

Tonks shook her head. "I really don't like the idea of you being alone. You shouldn't be. At least let me be here."

Ginny smiled gratefully at her only friend but shook her head. "That's not the way it works."

"I was there for the others."

"I know," Ginny said softly. "And it meant the world for me then. But this is something that I have to do. You're messed up enough as it is. Maybe it was a mistake to involve you in this, Dora. You don't need to see me die, too."

They'd had this same conversation a million times it seemed and it always ended the same. Ginny would be stubborn and Tonks would give in, like she always did. She had promised, after all.

"Let me help you get to bed at least." Tonks helped Ginny move slowly to the bedroom that she and Harry had shared, secretly, if only a few times. All of Harry's things were just as he had left them. His robes hung in the closet. His Firebolt leaned in the corner. Hedwig was sleeping with her head under her wing in the corner of the room. She didn't make many deliveries now, but seemed to dote on Ginny instead. Tonks wondered if the old owl knew what was really happening.

"Wotcher, Hedwig," Tonks greeted the owl softly and Hedwig ruffled her feathers. "Will she be alright?" Tonks asked, looking back to Ginny.

Ginny smiled as she eased down onto the right side of the bed. "She'll be fine. I'll let her know where I'm going and she can decide for herself."

Tonks chuckled dryly. "Can I make that decision too?"

Ginny shook her head. "Sorry, not my call to make. Besides, I think you already know that answer."

Tonks nodded absently and pushed the dark thoughts further back in her mind. "I'll check on you tomorrow."

"Don't bother," Ginny mumbled as she lay back onto the white pillow. "I don't have meetings scheduled so I'm going to stay in bed."

"The next day then," Tonks said firmly, and Ginny just smiled.

"I'll be here."

Tonks' throat closed up then and she could only nod. She tucked the heavy quilt around Ginny's frail

body and watched as her breathing deepened and evened.

“Watch over her Hedwig,” Tonks whispered and the owl ruffled again.

# Chapter 3: No One's Got Much To Say

There was blood on her hands again. This time it was someone else's.

Ginny screamed and Tonks flinched.

"Make it stop," Ginny gasped and Tonks clasped her eyes shut. There was so much pain in the air that she swore she could taste it. The room was dark, only lit by a few candles on the wardrobe and the small table next to the bed. The flames flickered and made the tall shadows dance on the wall.

"I can't, Gin," Tonks whispered, glancing again at the stain of red spreading on the white sheet. "I can't stop it. I... I think we need help."

Ginny screamed again and rolled herself tighter into a ball. "No! No one can know! You promised."

"You'll die, Ginny!" Tonks screamed back as she grabbed Ginny's shoulders and shook her once violently. "You'll die and so will he. I thought I could do it but... it's too soon."

The two women's eyes connected for a moment and Ginny nodded. Tonks took a moment to wipe her hands on the sheet before disappearing.

The dream morphed and Tonks was watching as her mother bent over the bed, whispering soothing words of encouragement. Ginny was calm now, staring at the dark shadows in the corner. Tonks listened to the sounds Ginny and Andromeda made but did not hear the words. Her eyes were riveted on the two bloody handprints that marred the side of the sheet.

Red again.

"Damn it! I hate that one," Tonks grumbled as she struggled to sit on the too-small sofa she'd fallen asleep on. Once she'd made sure Ginny was completely asleep and placed a pain potion on the bedside table for her, she Apparated home. She cried herself to sleep curled around her knees.

Tonks felt horrible for envying Ginny, but she did all the same. Ginny's struggle was almost over. She grimaced. What a horridly morbid thought. Then again, death seemed an old friend now.

The red clock showed the time to be near two o'clock in the morning. Tonks harshly rubbed her face knowing that she needed more sleep. She stripped on the way to her room and fell into bed completely naked, waiting for the dark to take her.

"I love you, Dora."

It had been too long since she'd heard his voice. Even if it was only in a dream, she welcomed the warmth that flowed over her.

"Right back at'cha," she had teased. She cursed herself for never telling him enough.

Remus gathered her into his arms and placed a kiss on her temple. She remembered the day well. It was a rare sunny and warm day in April and the trio had come home to the Burrow for an

unexpected visit. She had overheard Harry whispering to Remus when they'd arrived.

"Close," was all he'd said, but the two men had exchanged significant looks. She wondered, then stopped herself... Not today! She wouldn't allow thoughts of the war impede this perfect day. They were too few and far between to ruin.

Tonks' gaze drifted over Remus' shoulder and out over the back lot of the Burrow. Arthur and Bill were levitating tables and chairs out so that the whole group could sit outdoors and enjoy the warmth. Hermione, Fleur and Molly were following behind, carrying and levitating bowls and dishes piled with food. Ron, George and Fred were off in one corner having some sort of discussion; every once in awhile Fred would eye his mother's chickens. Tonks had to grin and wonder when the chaos would begin. Harry and Ginny had completely disappeared.

The dream continued along the memory until Harry and Ginny reappeared, hand in hand, wearing foolish grins.

"What?!" Ron confronted them first, a knowing smile on his face.

"We're getting married!"

Ginny's announcement thrilled everyone. The couple was soon lost in a sea of hugs and back slaps. Tonks stood frozen on the edge of the action. She didn't feel completely welcome, and she couldn't explain why.

"Let's go greet the happy couple," Remus had whispered in her ear and Tonks nodded.

The dream morphed again and Tonks was back in a dark and smoky battlefield. A huge flash of light erupted in front of her. She stumbled backwards as a ripple of energy passed through her. A piercing scream shook the silence and Tonks crawled forward, trying to pull herself up.

Tree roots and rocks gouged her knees and palms as she pressed silently into the forest. It was dark, almost pitch black, and the acrid taste of burning filled her face, causing her to retch. There was nothing left in her stomach to come up.

The sight she finally stumbled upon was enough to make her vomit again; acid burning her throat and searing her nose.

The center of the forest was now a large charred circle. In the middle of the circle a heap of black robes burned, the source of the acrid smoke. Tonks slammed her eyes closed, knowing instantly who it was. Relief flooded her being. He was dead. Harry had won.

When she was finally able to grasp that idea, she let herself look around. A handful of steps away, she could see two people. One lay sprawled with his head in the other's lap. The other held the first, rocking back and forth and crying.

\* \* \*

"Again!" Tonks barked. Marks groaned and stood slowly, rubbing his shoulder. He glared at his trainer, reluctantly resuming dueling position when Tonks brandished her wand.

He blocked the first two disarming spells but fell to the blaster that she'd thrown in silently. Harry had taught her that trick and she loved to use it on her trainees.

"You fell for it again," she drawled as she replaced her wand in its holster and walked over to where Marks lay panting on the mat. "I've used that enough that you should know to expect it by now. What happens when you get out there in the real world?" Marks didn't answer, but just continued to breathe heavily.

"You'll be dead in under a month," she hissed at him and nudged him with her boot.

"Not likely," he finally shot back. "We've been training for months and I've never seen anything more than a petty thief."

Tonks glared at him. "You honestly think that there's not anyone dangerous out there still?"

Marks mumbled something.

"What was that?" Tonks demanded.

"I said, not after Potter took care of them," Marks finally snapped. He had the good grace to look slightly ashamed of his outburst.

Tonks snorted out in laughter, shaking her young student. "You think Harry killing Voldemort made all the other Death Eaters change their minds?" He flinched at the name and Tonks sneered at him disdainfully. "You think they all turned themselves in? Promised to be good now that their Lord was finally gone for good?"

"You're too naïve," she bit out. "You'll never make it as an Auror." She turned to leave but stopped when he called out.

"And you're a bitter old has-been."

She wanted to yell back at him. There was a time when she would have hexed him faster than respond, done something horribly funny to him that would have taught him a lesson. The problem was that she really couldn't see that he'd been wrong. She was bitter. She felt extremely old and she had to admit that her current role as a trainer made her feel a bit like a has-been.

"Be back here tomorrow," she said calmly instead, "same time. And if you fall for that again, I'll report you to Shackbolt." The door slamming behind her satisfied her almost as much as seeing the defeated look on his face.

\* \* \*

"I hear you've been torturing your student again."

Tonks raised an eyebrow at Kingsley as he entered his office and threw down a stack of parchment. He hated it when she entered while he was out but he hadn't been able to stop her. Fred and George had taught her how to enter almost any unlocked door. Remus, and Sirius, had been most instructive as well.

"You have a problem with me teaching them what they need to know?"

Kingsley studied her for a minute and then shook his head. "No, I don't. But you do need to let a few of these kids through, Tonks."

"I don't know how Marks ever made it through the Academy," she supplied. "His combat skills are sorely lacking." Kingsley raised an eyebrow and she continued. "He fell for a 'Harry Special', King."

The large Auror only smiled. "Even Ron falls for that now and again, Tonks. Cut the kid a little slack. We both know he'll never be the top Auror. Hell, even he knows it. But we need him. You know how thin we got at the end of the war. Ron joining the Academy was the best thing we'd seen in years, especially when he told the press that Harry would have joined himself if he'd survived."

Tonks glared at him, but knew she couldn't refute what he was saying.

"These kids all joined to be like their hero."

"Harry hated that," Tonks said softly as she laid her head on the back of the chair. "And despite what Ron said, I don't think Harry would have joined the Academy."

"Minerva said-"

"I know what she said, King. I was there, and I heard it. But..." she shook her head. "Harry and Ginny had plans, King. They wanted a family and..." Tonks blew out a breath. "Trust me; he wouldn't have been an Auror."

Kingsley studied her for a moment and then nodded in resignation. He knew how close Tonks and Ginny were, or thought he did anyway. He must have assumed that Tonks had more information than he was privy to.

"Well, then Weasley should have been." He rubbed his eyes harshly. "She's a ball of fire, that one." Tonks chuckled up at the ceiling in agreement. "She's been giving the Minister hell today." Tonks' head snapped up at his words.

"You've seen her?"

Kingsley nodded absently as he glanced through a parchment in front of him. "Yeah, she was laying into him good when I showed up for morning briefing. I could hear her from in the reception room." He chuckled a bit.

"Did you see her?" Tonks sat up straight in the chair. She'd checked on Ginny yesterday, just as she'd promised, and found her still pale and thin, but looking as if the sleep she'd gotten had done her a world of good.

"Yeah," Kingsley said, one eyebrow raised in confusion. "She came out just before my meeting started. She looked well. I know that this time of year is hard for her."

Tonks nodded distractedly. Ginny's charms were serving her well again then. "What was she harassing him about today?"

Kingsley looked a bit agitated himself. "Some of the Death Eaters are trying to exchange information for less time in Azkaban. The Minister was set against it at first but he seems to be softening. Ginny was just giving her usual views of the subject. She even threatened to hex his bits if he didn't 'get off his arse and do what was right'. Her words, not mine."

Tonks smiled at the thought. "I wish I'd been there."

"I'm sure you'll get a good enough account later today or tomorrow. Lovegood was trailing after her, a Dicta-Quill running full speed."

"Good for her," Tonks praised. Luna Lovegood had really supported Ginny through her fights with the Ministry. The Quibbler often printed things well before the Daily Prophet because of the loyalty Ginny felt for Luna.

"Skeeter was trailing along after the bunch as well."

"She's out now?" Tonks raised an eyebrow. "I would have thought Ginny would have made sure her sentence in Azkaban would have been fully served." Rita Skeeter had crossed the line one too many times in Ginny's opinion and the young witch had turned in the unregistered Animagus a few weeks after Harry's death, just before she disappeared for the better part of a year.

"Not for lack of trying," Kingsley grimaced. "Skeeter made some deal with Scrimgeour that no one knows about, I'm sure."

"Well, more power to Ginny," Tonks said with as much force as she could.

"I read through that report, you know," Kingsley said after a moment of silence. Tonks didn't have to ask what report he was mentioning. Ginny's work had stirred up enough trouble at the Ministry and her founding of the Lupin Lycanthropy Agency had almost been the final straw for the traditionalists in the government. The fact that the Agency had more than one silent and independent financial backer, and that Ginny was the spokesperson was the only thing that kept the Agency open.

Ginny had talked for months with Tonks about founding the Agency until they had both come up with what they felt were the best ideas and causes to support. Now there was a small medical staff trained, and experienced, to deal with werewolves and maladies commonly known to them. There was a safe house where Wolfsbane potion was dispensed, without cost, to those who needed it. Those in need could also stay at the safe house for a time too. Ginny had somehow been able to convince a few businesses to hire known werewolves and, although some people were still hesitant to do so, the idea was not being rejected as it once was.

The report that Kingsley had been talking about was a review of the Agency by several outside sources. Surprisingly, only the Ministry's examiner had found flaws in the plans. And, so far, the people who had taken advantage of the Agency's assistance had nothing but wonderful things to say about it.

"It's a good thing," Tonks stated clearly. "Remus would have loved it," she added in a rather small voice.

Kingsley seemed to study her for a minute before nodding. "Yes it is. Listen, I know that this time of year isn't easy," he blew out his breath in frustration. "You'll let me know if you need a few days?" He stiffened noticeably and Tonks felt a bit irritated at that. She knew that usually any reference to that June would set her off either crying or screaming at whoever was around. For some reason, and it may have been the concern in her friend's voice, it didn't this time. She was genuinely touched that he cared enough to be thinking about it.

"I think I'm alright," she admitted. "Sometimes it helps to have something physical to do, you know?" She chuckled wryly and Kingsley just studied her. She was about to dismiss the notion completely when a picture of Ginny's grey, gaunt face entered her mind. It wouldn't be long now, she knew.

"Actually, I'd like to hold that offer, King," she said, looking down at her fingernails, which were painted an electric purple today. "I might need some time soon."

Kingsley was silent and she chanced a glance up at him only to find him staring at her. She shifted a bit and then met his gaze again, willing him to not pry any further. It was a testament to their mutual friendship and respect when he nodded. They'd been through enough together that he wouldn't question her much.

"You can have all the time you want," he said softly. "Just let me know and I'll take care of this end for as long as you need."

She nodded gratefully and took a deep breath to will away the emotions that had risen in her chest. Flashing him what she hoped was a cheeky smile, she stood. "Better get back to it," she forced out and gave a little wave over her shoulder.

"Be good," Kingsley called out and Tonks laughed.

"Never."

# Chapter 4: As Strong As You Were

A whole week passed and Tonks was getting more than anxious. She hadn't heard from Ginny beyond a small note that told her Ginny was fine but was done with public appearances. She tried to visit, but the wards at the flat were erected and Tonks wasn't allowed in. She prayed that Ginny was not in pain and that she would be able to do her part.

She was a bit angry also. Ginny had told her from the very beginning that it would happen this way, but that didn't make the waiting any easier.

Tonks buried herself in work. She was surprisingly patient with Marks as she worked with him on his defense skills. By the end of the week, he could easily disarm her and avoid most of her traps.

She also felt a strange need to tidy her own affairs. Logically, she knew that she wasn't the one dying, but it was almost compulsive. She met with a goblin in Gringotts and made out a will, leaving her meager possessions to her parents, the Weasley family, and a few things of Remus' to the Lupin Lycanthropy Agency. It was something that he would have hated, and thinking of how he would have grumbled about it brought a smile to her face.

She paid her bills more than a month in advance. She went to Madam Malkin's and bought a rather nice set of dress robes-just in case. They were a rather bright purple, but Tonks didn't care.

It was on one of these trips that she ran into Bill Weasley in Diagon Alley. She'd been avoiding the Weasley's all week and grimaced to herself when she was cornered. Just seeing his smile as he held his son's hand made her insides cringe. She wanted to scream at him and beat his chest. His sister lay alone in her flat, dying, and here he was eating ice cream with one of his twins.

But it was all for nothing. Bill was completely innocent and oblivious to Ginny's situation, she knew. And that was the way that Ginny wanted it. She wanted to die on her own terms, as Harry had done. With dignity and grace, she'd told Tonks one day. That was the way that one should die; not with deathbed visits and people watching you waste away a little each day.

"Hello Tonks!" Bill cheered and held up a dripping spoon of bright pink ice cream to his lips.

"Wotcher Bill, and... Jean-Luc, isn't it?" she greeted them, hoping that her dark attitude wouldn't peek through and give her away completely.

"We haven't seen you in awhile," he commented and there was a bit of accusation in his tone. "You and Ginny seem to hide regularly."

Tonks bit the inside of her lip and shrugged nonchalantly. "Been busy," she tried. He studied her closely for a moment and then nodded.

"We all try to keep busy this time of year too," he finally offered. Tonks seized the excuse and nodded.

"It's a hard time."

Bill nodded. "Two years," he agreed. "It's hard to believe some times. There are days that I hear a commotion outside the office and for just a second, I think that maybe it's Harry, you know, coming to see me like he did that last year."

Tonks nodded stiffly. "He was... an amazing man," she said. "He died too young."

"Remus did also," Bill said softly and ruffled his son's hair. "I never got to tell him how much his presence helped those first few months." Tonks understood what he meant.

After Bill was attacked by Fenrir Greyback, Remus had checked up on him every few days. Tonks was not privy to the information that was shared, but she assumed Remus was trying to ease Bill's fears about being hurt by the werewolf. It turned out all right in the end; Bill did not have Lycanthropy and, despite a few odd behavioral changes near the full moon, he was completely fine now.

"He knew," Tonks confirmed in a small voice. "He mentioned to me once how well you were taking it and how proud he was of you."

Bill swallowed thickly and smiled down at his son who continued to eat obliviously. "Well, he was a good man," he finally ended the subject. "Mum has asked about you."

Tonks instantly felt bad. Molly was a wonderful friend whom she'd relied on much in the past and she felt like she was betraying her a bit. More than a bit. "I know," she said. "Tell her... I don't know, Bill." She ruffled her short, spiky hair a bit and glanced over the milling crowds in the Alley. "I don't know what to tell her anymore."

"Are you alright?" Bill asked. "I mean, you're not sick are you?"

Tonks couldn't help the snort of ironic laughter that squeaked out. "Alright isn't an option for me, Bill. But I'll live."

Bill narrowed his eyes at her and then looked on in confusion as she seemed to gather herself again and her mask went back on.

"Where's terror number two?" she asked, reaching out to brush the small boy's curly locks with her fingers.

"With Fleur," Bill grunted back. "Some days we need to split the two to give Mummy a break." He used his napkin to wipe the stickiness from Jean-Luc's small face.

Tonks nodded. "I'd better get back to the Ministry," she finally said. "I wasn't supposed to be gone this long."

Bill watched her closely again and Tonks looked away. "Just... take care of yourself, Tonks. You know we all think of you as family."

"I know," she said with a smile.

"And check on Ginny for us, please. Merlin knows you're the only one she lets close to her these

days. It's driving Mum crazy to see her doing this to herself."

Tonks was quiet for a minute but nodded. "I got an owl from her the other day. She's alright," the lie rolled off her tongue. "I mean, as alright as we get," she chuckled and Bill nodded in understanding. "I'll keep trying. This time of year... it's just hard."

"I understand that," Bill said. "More than you think I do."

Tonks met his eyes for a minute and then they both looked away. She stood quickly and gathered her bag. "Tell them all hello from me and I'll be in touch soon."

"I will," Bill said.

\* \* \*

The letter that she'd been waiting for, and dreading for the last two years, came on a Wednesday. Hedwig fluttered into the open window of Tonks' flat and rested on the back of a chair, staring at the woman across the table from her.

"Hedwig," Tonks whispered as she stared at the bird. Her once pristine feathers were ruffled and there was a hint of grey around her eyes and on the crown of her head. She looked nothing short of utterly exhausted, Tonks thought, as she rested. She didn't even hold out her foot where she clutched the wrinkled parchment in her talons.

"That's it then, isn't it?" Even to herself, Tonks' voice sounded harsh. Like she'd been sleeping for days and just woken up. She felt asleep almost. Taking a few deep breaths and closing her eyes to focus again, she stood from her chair and moved toward the owl.

Hedwig hooted very low and sorrowful, and Tonks felt her chest tighten. The owl hadn't been the same since Harry died and now, with what Tonks was sure she carried, Tonks doubted the bird would ever recover.

"Best get on with it, girl," Tonks whispered and used the back of her finger to rub the soft feathers on Hedwig's chest. And, for a moment, she wasn't sure if she was trying to convince the bird or herself. She slowly reached for the parchment and Hedwig dropped it into her hand. The owl continued to watch as Tonks sank into another chair, holding the letter as if it would catch on fire.

"You can do this," she repeated to herself several times, all the while breathing deeply. This couldn't be worse than finding Remus or watching Harry die or... the other. It couldn't be worse than watching someone you love waste away a little every day and knowing that deep inside, you wish you could die too.

The envelope opened easily and Tonks steeled herself. After all, it might only be a note saying that Ginny was still alive. She didn't know which would be better.

Dora,

This is the end. You have been the most amazing friend. I'll never be able to tell you how much you've done for me by just being there these past years. You've been more than a

friend: a sister, a mother, an angel, really. And I know that Harry would feel the same way. No, I know he does, actually.

I am releasing you from your promises now. Please, as a favor to me, take care of those last details that we planned so long ago. I know this will be hard, as I've been in your position before, but please don't let my family find me first.

Do what you need to do, Dora, and then move on. This half-life you've been living isn't really living and you know it.

I would like to say I'm sorry that you stumbled upon us that day, that we made you a part of something this... horrible, and wonderful, and bloody strange all the same. But I would be lying. I needed you, Harry needed you, Jamie needed you and there are others that need you. You are the only one who knows our whole story. Do with it what you will.

You know where to find me. Please wait at least twelve hours to come.

Gin

Tonks finished the letter that now bore smears and wet spots from her tears. She read it once more and then tossed it aside. She flopped back against the chair, feeling extremely dizzy and disoriented. The end had come, just as they'd said it would. The letter was beautiful and poignant and all the things Tonks hated. Ginny knew the exact things to say to make Tonks do exactly as she'd asked. Not that it mattered.

Briefly, she wondered if the sensations she was feeling were the magic releasing her from her vow. Now that she examined it, she did feel a bit... different. She couldn't say it was lighter, for the last of her best friends was dead, or dying at any rate. But the heaviness was different now.

'Damn her!' she thought violently. Asking Tonks to wait twelve hours was like asking a river to change its course. But Ginny had known she would do it. How could she refuse!?

Numbly she got up from the chair and gathered a bowl of water and a few owl treats, laying them on the table for Hedwig, who watched silently, eyes wide.

"I'm sorry I don't have more," she apologized to the owl. Next, she set about writing a quick note to Kingsley asking for the promised days off. As she folded the parchment, Hedwig held out her leg. Tonks stared at her in confusion for a moment before shaking her head.

"No, girl, you've done enough. I'll just send this out later."

The owl shook her leg a bit and thrust it closer to Tonks, who had to smile.

"Are you sure?"

The bird gave her a trademark glare and wiggled the foot again. Tonks sighed and attached the note.

"Take your time." She was about to tell the owl to leave when an idea came to her. "I'll be at

Godric's Hollow in about twelve hours. You can come if you like."

Hedwig bobbed her head once before leaving through the window. Tonks noticed that she'd not taken any of the water or treats.

Tonks moved around the flat, shutting windows and blinds, closing in the darkness around her. Twelve hours was a horribly long time to wait for something like this. And even though she knew that she wasn't bound by what Ginny had asked any longer, Tonks knew she would wait.

She grabbed the duvet off of her bed and curled up on the worn sofa in the living room. The June heat that had filled the flat only hours before seemed to fade as Tonks washed herself in grief and sorrow. Now was the time to grieve; later her work would begin. Now she could cry and throw things and rage. Surprisingly, the anger that had come with Harry and Remus' deaths didn't rise in her today. Only heart-rending grief and absolute loss poured from her heart.

The tears never seemed to end. Just when she thought she'd cried herself out, another wave would hit and more sobs racked her body. Blissfully, sleep took her only a few hours later.

\* \* \*

Tonks was back in the misty forest again. The scream she'd heard propelled her forward just as a blast of orange light and hot energy pulsed in the clearing in front of her. It threw her to the ground, aggravating the injuries she already had. She'd crudely healed the slice on her side but it would need to be reopened and healed correctly.

A thick black smoke hung in the air, burning her nose and throat. She choked a bit on the vile taste and crawled forward. She saw the carnage in the clearing, the flames licking at the bushes, debris on the ground, the pile of smoking... something... in the center and the two others in the shadows.

"Harry, don't leave me!"

Tonks' focus turned to the couple lying together. Ginny was holding Harry's head to her chest, rocking him back and forth. He was half in her lap, half out; legs spread wide and arms out to the sides. Ginny continued to plead for Harry not to die as she rocked and rocked.

Gathering herself a bit, Tonks crouched and assessed the area. There was no one else around so she moved forward slowly, calling out to Ginny as she did.

"Ginny, it's me, Tonks."

"Dora, he's... he..."

"I know," Tonks gasped as she knelt next to Ginny and got her first glimpse of Harry.

"He's not dead," Ginny whispered as she continued to rock him, her fingers roughly pushing his hair this way and that, heedless of the blood she was smearing everywhere.

"Ginny, he is," Tonks said gently but firmly. "You have to let him go."

"NO!" she screamed. "He's not dead. He's just tired."

He certainly looked dead to Tonks. His skin was a pallid gray color and his eyes were sunken dark circles. She hadn't seen him take even a single breath in the few minutes she'd been kneeling next to the couple.

"Ginny, love," she said softly, placing her arms around the small redhead's shoulders. "I know you loved him; we all did. But you have to let go. Let him die with dignity."

She wasn't allowed to continue, however, when Harry gasped for air, coughing and spluttering up blood. She helped Ginny turn him slightly as he choked and spit the sticky redness all over Ginny's lap.

"I knew you wouldn't leave me," Ginny cried, holding him to her. Harry, once he'd finally gained his breath, clutched at her tightly and they kissed several times. Tonks looked away briefly, swiping at her tears, to give them a private moment.

"Not... much... time." Harry's voice was dry and raspy and he continued to cough up thick liquid.

Tonks looked around as the clearing went deadly silent and still. She'd never thought she'd ever witness a moment where time froze, but this was it. She sat back and watched Harry and Ginny touch each other's faces quietly. Harry had pulled himself upright a bit and now held Ginny in his arms.

"I love you," he whispered and Ginny smiled through her tears. "I don't want you to ever forget that."

"I won't," Ginny answered.

Harry studied her for a moment before pressing his hand to her belly. Tonks almost bit through her lip when she realized what was going on. "You have to be strong now. You have to take care of our son."

Ginny nodded solemnly and Tonks wondered why the redhead was being so docile. She'd never seen Ginny like this before.

"Life doesn't end here, Gin," Harry continued to whisper. "I've seen the other side. Dumbledore was right..." he smiled wryly, "the next big adventure."

Ginny's cheeks were completely wet now as she clutched onto Harry tightly. "I can't do it alone, Harry. You have to stay with me."

"I can't, love. I promise you I'll be waiting. You have things to do now, Gin. You have to take care of the baby." He stilled for a moment and stared off into the clearing. Tonks shivered as she felt another presence surround them. "The last curse he used, Gin... its killing me."

"No," Ginny whispered fiercely.

"It is," Harry sighed and shuddered through another coughing fit. "You were hit with it too."

Tonks slammed her eyes shut when she realized what he was saying. If the curse had hit Ginny... and

Ginny was pregnant... She didn't want to think about what that could mean.

"I'll go on ahead," Harry said with a strange conviction. "When our son is born..." he shook his head sadly and kissed Ginny's cheek. "He won't live long here, Gin. But I'll be waiting for him."

"Take me too," Ginny pleaded. "I won't go on without you."

Harry clutched at her shoulders and shook her gently. "You must!" he said. "He must be born here. The other place... I can't explain, Gin. But it's important. He's important there. His life will go on over there. And I promise I'll take care of him... until you join us."

Ginny looked deeply into his eyes and then nodded firmly. Tonks was shaken by a loud sob; when she realized that she had made it, she tried to turn away.

"Dora," Harry's soft voice called her back. He was laying against Ginny's chest now and she was rocking him again. There was a bit more color to his face, but the dark blood all over his lips and chin was all that Tonks could focus on. It stained him like her hands were still stained with Remus' blood.

"Harry."

The corner of his mouth turned up a bit and Tonks' throat constricted again.

"You have to promise... take care of them." Tonks could only nod her acceptance. "They need you now. Remus..."

"Is dead," Tonks blurted out.

Harry half smiled again. "Yes, but he's with Sirius and my dad." Tonks nodded again and swiped angrily at her tears. "He's alright, Dora. And he wants you to know he loves you."

A great sob welled in her throat and she didn't know if it was caused by grief or relief. She wanted to believe Harry, really she did, but she just didn't know if she could.

"I need you to be there for Ginny and the baby."

"Anything they need," Tonks nodded.

Harry studied her for a moment before holding out his shaky hand. "An Unbreakable Vow?"

Tonks didn't hesitate before clasping her hand in his and promising to take care of Ginny and Harry's son until she was released. Once the magic was bound, Harry's eyes drifted closed but he continued to talk in a much lower voice.

"I've left you everything, Gin. Do whatever you want with it."

Ginny nodded but Tonks wasn't sure she heard him.

"Are you in pain?" she finally choked out and Harry smiled up at her and stroked her hair clumsily with his dirty hand.

"Not much. It doesn't hurt much when you know it will be over soon."

"And will I..." Ginny trailed off as Harry nodded, his hand still moving over her head.

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"Will the baby..."

"Yes," Harry nodded again. "But he won't feel anything, I promise. I'll be there. I'll hold him and you'll feel me. I'll carry him home."

Ginny sobbed and clutched Harry to her. They cried together for a while as Tonks sat and numbly watched the exchange.

"We're having a son," Ginny finally laughed and Harry joined her through his tears.

"We are. And then you'll come to me and we'll be together again."

"What-what should I name him?"

Harry smiled but Tonks could tell he was fading fast. His words were slow and hard to understand now. "Whatever you want, love. There's room in Godric's Hollow."

Tonks flinched when she heard this. There was nothing left in Godric's Hollow except for a ruin of houses and a dilapidated graveyard. But she knew that's where the Potter's had been buried for years. Remus had once taken her to see Lily and James' graves.

"Even for me?" Ginny choked out.

"For you," Harry whispered. The two stilled for a long while before Harry opened up his eyes and fixed Ginny with a very determined look. "I know you can do this. Be strong and I'll always be there for you. I have to go now, Gin."

"No, stay with me?" Ginny pleaded quietly.

"I can't," Harry said as he touched her cheek again. "I love you, Gin."

Tonks wanted to look away but was transfixed by the hazy atmosphere that now entered the clearing. It was completely peaceful now, and despite the atrocities that had happened here earlier, Tonks swore she could hear birds chirping and a faint singing in the background. The sun broke through the treetops and cast a warm glow over the area.

Harry lay still in Ginny's lap and all was silent.

\* \* \*

Tonks awoke with a jerk that almost caused her to fall off of the couch. She cried out in exasperation as the memories threatened to overwhelm her. She pounded her fist on the sofa cushion and let more tears fall.

The final battle. Harry. Ginny. Their son.

She had spent the past two years protecting all that she'd seen and heard in that clearing. When she'd finally been able to pry Harry's lifeless body away from Ginny, the two had held onto each other, either too tired or emotionally drained to cry. It had gone dark again and with a start, Tonks realized that a whole day had passed without anyone finding them. Surely, the battle was over by now.

Kingsley had been the first on the scene some time later. He'd stood in complete shock, taking in the dark circle around them and then staring at the bodies of Voldemort and Harry.

Tonks quickly took charge and told him that she and Ginny had met up in the forest while searching for Harry. They had found him already dead.

The seasoned Auror studied Tonks for a moment and she felt he must surely know that she was lying. Finally, he turned to Ginny, who was barely standing and staring at Harry's lifeless body.

"Miss Weasley?"

Ginny had turned a completely pale face, covered in filth and dried blood, toward him and nodded before her knees gave way and she collapsed. Tonks moved forward to pick her up but Kingsley gently moved her out of the way and collected her frail body in his arms.

"King," Tonks said softly, but very determinedly, "You have to have them seal the medical records."

He studied her for a moment before nodding. "You both need treatment."

Tonks shook her head. "Take her first. I'm not leaving Harry's body until someone comes for him." Kingsley looked like he wanted to protest, but nodded firmly instead.

"The Weasley's will be along shortly. I'll take her to St. Mungo's, but I'm coming back for you."

"Seal the records, King," was all the reply she would give him.

The records were sealed, just as Tonks demanded. To this day she wasn't sure how Kingsley had managed it. She was sure Scrimgeour must have been beside himself wanting to know how Harry died.

Wiping her eyes, and the memories away with her tears, Tonks stood and moved to the kitchen. She'd been asleep for five hours. Seven to go, she thought dejectedly.

# Chapter 5: Tender You'll Go

She dreamed again that night. The sun was streaming through the windows in the small house, lighting up the sunshine-yellow kitchen. Tonks sat at the table sipping from a cup of tea as her mother bustled about the kitchen behind her.

"He's a beautiful baby," she mused, and Tonks had to smile.

"Yes, he is."

Andromeda Tonks sat across from her daughter and Tonks made the mistake of looking up at her. She wore a no-nonsense look that a younger Tonks had always been wary of,,, and found she was still vary of—even as an adult.

"Thank you for coming to get me," she said, taking Tonks by surprise. "I know it's hard for you to accept help, and it makes me happy when you let me into your life every once in awhile." She held up her hand as Tonks opened her mouth.

"I'm not the best mother," Andromeda stated plainly. "I badger too much and don't praise enough. But I am proud of you, Nymphadora. I'm proud of you being an Auror. And I'm proud of what you've done for that woman upstairs. This can't have been an easy thing for you to do."

Tonks finally found her voice. "I'm just a friend—"

"Hush," Andromeda chided with a smile. "I'm not stupid, Nymphadora. Don't think for one moment that I don't know exactly who that is up there, or that I don't know whose child I helped deliver."

Tonks studied her mother for a moment. She felt more than a bit of guilt wash over her at underestimating the woman across from her. "I'm sorry," she whispered and Andromeda nodded. No other words were needed. Both parties understood what the apology was for.

"Now, I'd better go check on them before you memory charm me." Andromeda laughed at the look of shock that crept onto Tonks' face. "Please don't tell me how many times you've done that over the years, child. Just try to leave a bit of my hard-earned Healer's knowledge there when you do it."

Tonks grimaced, her mind flashing episodes when she had used her mother's help in the past and then made her forget about it completely.

"You'd best come up and say goodbye to the little one," Andromeda said softly. She looked up and caught Tonks' eye. "He won't make it much longer."

"He's not in pain is he?" Tonks asked.

Andromeda smiled. "I don't think so. He's so tiny that I don't dare give him anything if he is."

Tonks sighed loudly and wrapped her arm around her mother's waist. "He won't be here long anyway. Harry promised that he'd come for him."

"I've only seen that curse a few times. It should be an Unforgivable," she spit out vehemently. "The things it does to perfectly sound bodies." She shook her head, knowing that the damage was done.

The two women stilled as they reached the top of the steps and heard a soft lullaby from inside the darker room. The door was open and Tonks could make out Ginny sitting up in the bed. She was still horribly pale but wore a look of complete and utter serenity. The tiny bundle in her arms suckled noisily at her breast and Ginny stroked the thick shock of black hair with her fingertip.

No one spoke as Ginny continued to hum to her child and study his face, her fingers brushing over every feature. He finally stilled and his mouth dropped slack away from her breast, milk pooling on his tiny chin. Ginny lifted him gently and Tonks reached forward to close her gown for her.

"James Arthur Potter," Ginny whispered as she laid the baby in her lap. Surprisingly, the edges of his mouth turned up a bit at the corners and Ginny smiled down at him. "It sounds too big for someone so small."

"It fits," Tonks whispered in agreement.

"He's perfect," Ginny said.

"So tiny," Andromeda stated as she sat on the corner of the bed. The baby's birth had been a harrowing experience. He was almost six weeks early, but Ginny's health had begun to deteriorate fast and once labor began, Tonks could do nothing to stop it. Seeing how much pain Ginny was in, she had brought Andromeda to help. The Healer had done all she could, but the curse that had killed his father was slowly poisoning little James as well.

Ginny began to hum again as she cradled James to her. Her breath ruffled his hair a bit and she closed her eyes.

"Harry's coming for him," she said and Tonks had to lean forward to hear her. "It won't be long now, my little Jamie. Daddy's coming."

"Is there anything we can do to make you more comfortable?" Andromeda asked. She wore a worried look and Tonks knew she hated to lose any patient. But knowing who this child was must have tugged at her heartstrings even more.

"No, we're fine," Ginny said. They sat and watched as Ginny rocked her child against her. Finally, she stilled and stared into the corner of the room. Tonks shivered and Andromeda clasped a hand to her mouth.

"He's gone," Ginny breathed. She stilled for a moment and then touched the baby's face again. Tonks looked hard but couldn't see the little chest rising and falling at all. She looked up toward her mother who only nodded in acceptance.

\* \* \*

Tonks' eyes fluttered open and she was surprised at the peace she felt. Witnessing James' birth and death had been nothing short of a miracle. She felt extremely privileged to be a part of it and she always would.

She sighed when she looked at the clock and realized that it had now been over fifteen hours since the letter from Ginny had arrived. She lay on the sofa for a bit longer, steeling herself against what she knew was coming. The next few days would not be easy and it was likely she would lose most, if not all, of her friends.

A shower was definitely in order, she decided, as well as a fresh set of robes. She knew better than to wear her nicest set; they would be needed in the days to come.

Wiping the steam away from the mirror, Tonks willed her mousy brown hair to change to anything remotely exciting. She managed a bit of curl at the ends but that was all. It had taken her almost six months to be able to morph again after the Final Battle. She wondered if this episode in her life would permanently scar her abilities. That was a loss that she wasn't sure she could take; her morphing was tied up in who she was at her very core.

Once she couldn't put it off any longer, Tonks glanced around her flat and closed her eyes to Apparate. She'd been to Godric's Hollow three times. Ginny had insisted that Remus be laid to rest near James and Lily. And, although they had never recovered a body, Harry had made sure a headstone was placed there for Sirius as well. The two other times were for Harry and James, respectively. Although when she and Ginny had buried little Jamie, they had been completely alone. Now she would do her duty and bury Ginny with her family.

The once happy village seemed haunted as she walked down the rough street toward the stand of trees on the outskirts. The day was brilliantly blue, birds sang in the trees and a slight breeze rustled the leaves and swirled the long grasses at the abandoned home sites.

It was rumored that Godric's Hollow had once been beautiful; a place where wizards and Muggles lived side by side. But that all changed on the fateful Halloween night when Voldemort attacked the Potters.

After the Potters were murdered, the inhabitants of the town fled. They'd heard the ghost stories and many said they didn't want to raise their children so close to where such evil had lurked. Some of the old-timers stayed, but Tonks knew that many of them had long since died or finally moved away.

The rusty gate to the small cemetery was closed and Tonks hesitated to open it. This area was always so peaceful, she remembered from her other visits, that the squeaking of iron on iron would disturb it. She glanced down the way and saw a piece of the stone fencing had collapsed in on itself. It wasn't much further down so she decided that was her best option.

It was obvious to her that no one had been in the area much over the past two years. Hardly any grass was out of place and certainly none of the older gravestones had been kept up. Off under a blossoming tree she could see the newest additions. James and Lily lay on the south side, facing the forest. Their headstones were simple, adorned with only their names and significant dates. Sirius and Remus had similar stones that were off just a bit from the Potters, but closer than any others. They had been placed on James Potter's left side.

Harry's stone was a black onyx color with a phoenix carved in the top. Below Harry's birth and death dates, Ginny had inscribed 'He chose what was right over what was easy.' The inscription fit

Harry perfectly and Ginny had not had to think long to decide on it. Harry's grave was at his mother's right, nearest the forest.

For the rest of the world, those were the newest memorials in the cemetery. Tonks, alone, could see the smallest one. On Harry's right lay his son. The small casket seemed foreign and insignificant when Tonks had lowered it into the hole she and Ginny had dug. James Arthur Potter's stone was simple and black as well. His name was listed as well as his parent's names and the inscription 'He was not meant for this world... but the next.'

Ginny had insisted on a Fidelius charm for Jamie's grave as well as Harry's. However, she had made two different secret keepers. While Ron was Harry's, Tonks was Jamie's. If the Weasley's came to visit, they would not know of the grandson and nephew who lay next to his father.

Tonks stopped a few steps away and took a deep breath. As she rounded Remus' stone, she found Ginny. She was dressed in a plain white robe, her hair plaited softly; her body resting between her son and the love of her life.

Tonks sunk to her knees a few steps away and let tears take her again.

Ginny looked like an angel, Tonks thought, her face finally peaceful after so many years of suffering. She was still horribly thin, but the serenity and love that surrounded her softened the sharp angles, making her pale countenance take on a heavenly quality.

Tonks allowed herself a few more minutes of grief before standing and beginning her work. The charms were fairly simple; ones she had learned in Herbology long ago. Digging a hole required far less magic than it should have taken, she thought. Once the earth was removed, Tonks turned back to Ginny's body and lay her in the conjured casket.

She lovingly arranged Ginny's robes and placed a flower in her hand. Closing the casket was extremely emotional, but once done, Tonks hurried to place it in the newly dug grave.

The headstone she conjured was identical to Harry's in every respect, save the details. In death, Harry and Ginny were on either side of their son, as if protecting him.

Tonks took a moment to replant the grass around the newest grave. She noticed that Ginny had cleared away the overgrowth from the Potters' and Marauders' graves. There was a small bouquet of pale orange lilies on each of them. Concentrating, Tonks cast a new Fidelius with herself as the secret keeper. Instantly, she felt a small heaviness in her heart and smiled before sinking down to her knees at the foot of the graves.

"It's finished," she said in a small voice. "You're all together again." For what seemed the hundredth time that day, Tonks gave in to tears.

"I wish I could come with you," she said. "I'm not sure where Hedwig went," she observed as she just now noticed the absence of the bird. "I hope she'll be alright. If she comes back, I promise I'll take care of her, Harry."

She sniffed loudly and glanced at Ginny's stone. "I kept all my promises—except the last," she whispered. "It might be hardest thing you've ever asked of me, you know." She glanced off into the

trees as she thought of what she was going to say to the Weasleys. No inspiration came.

"You two are going to have to be with me when I go. I don't think I can do it alone." She trailed off on that thought and let her eyes glaze over. "I'll do my best, I promise you that," she finally whispered.

"I just want you to know... I'll never forget you. You trusted me with something amazingly precious and I want to say thank you, and... just..." she sighed. "I never asked for anything in return and... bloody hell, I don't need much. Just, please, if you see Remus... tell him I still love him and... tell him to hurry up and get me."

"I don't want to be alone anymore," she whispered in a tortured voice.

The breeze rustled the tree above her and Tonks stared up at it. "I hope that's your way of agreeing with me," she choked out in a laugh.

"I don't know what else to say... so I guess I'll say goodbye. I love you both. All of you, really."

The tree swayed again and Tonks waited for some feeling to come over her; something that would calm her heart and would give her the strength to finish what she needed to do. She waited several long minutes before standing and brushing the dirt off of her knees. She focused in on each headstone one at a time and said a silent goodbye before turning to walk out of the quiet and sacred place.

# Chapter 6: If She Had Wings

This was utterly ridiculous. Completely mental. Ron blew out a huge breath and ruffled the back of his hair again, glancing around the Alley.

He was needed elsewhere. He should be home with his wife and new daughter. He smiled slightly at the thought of that pink bundle with the curly red hair. Sarah had definitely been a surprise when she'd been born only two days ago. Hermione had been disappointed, but only for an instant, when their son turned out to be a daughter.

Ron secretly thought that it was because she had done the gender charm wrong. That thought had given him much to smile about over the past few days. Hermione Weasley had messed something up.

But Ron was thrilled to have a daughter. He would have been equally happy with a son, but deep down, he knew that the little girl would have him wrapped around her fingers before the week was fully out. In fact, he mused, she'd probably already done it the moment she opened those crystal blue eyes at him.

He should be home with his family. Instead, he was out searching for his sister. Again. This was twice in a year that she'd disappeared and Ron was tired of dropping everything to find her. He loved her, for sure, and would do anything for her. But it was time that she faced the facts. Harry was gone and he wasn't ever coming back. Being depressed and locking yourself in a flat that held nothing but memories wasn't a way to move on.

It had been almost two weeks since anyone had heard from Ginny and Molly was beginning to get frantic again. She had floored all of her sons and demanded that they split up and search for the missing Weasley. So Ron, being the ever-faithful child, called his mother-in-law to come and sit with his wife and child, and began searching for his sister.

Hermione felt a bit helpless but was unable to do anything more than lend moral support and ideas. She'd finally confessed to Ron just this morning that she feared Ginny was close to a complete breakdown. The word 'suicide' hadn't been uttered, but Ron knew it was on everyone's minds.

And now Tonks was missing too. Ron had just come from Kingsley Shacklebolt's office where the Department Head had told him of Tonks' request for time off four days ago. He swore that he didn't know where she was or when she'd be back. He also promised that he would contact the Weasleys the minute that he heard anything.

Ron stalked down the Alley, glaring at anyone who dared get in his way. He knew he was being completely unfair, but didn't really care. Two quick left turns brought him to the flat above the storage facility. He took the stairs two at a time and was surprised when he ran into Bill and Fred still huddled on the stoop where he'd left them an hour ago. He was sure that they would have been inside by now.

"Er..."

Bill continued to wave his wand in intricate motions and chant something under his breath. Fred

shushed Ron and shook his head.

"No luck," he whispered and Ron scratched his head in frustration. He continued to watch as his brothers worked on breaking the wards surrounding the door.

"What the hell did Potter put on this?" Bill muttered at one point as he slid to the floor and continued waiving his wand near the bottom of the door.

"What is it?" Ron asked.

"It's... layered," Bill said as he shook his head. "Almost as if several people each cast different wards. But I've never seen some of these."

"Wouldn't you be keyed into them, Ron?" Fred asked, raising his head to look at his tallest brother. "You did live here after all."

Ron shrugged. "Not those last few months. Harry... well, he wanted a bit of privacy."

Bill stopped his motions abruptly and glared up at Ron. "You mean he and Ginny..."

Ron could feel his ears turn red and he sighed. "I don't know for sure, but that's what I think. Neither of them would say anything about it."

"I should hope not," Fred muttered as he grimaced.

"She was of age anyway," Ron mumbled. "You try telling her not to come around."

Bill eyed him for a moment before turning to continue. He cast two more spells before stopping cold, his jaw dropping open. Finally, he tucked his wand into the waistband of his trousers and shrugged in defeat.

"We're not getting in here today, lads. Potter, or someone else, put a bloody Lineage charm on the door."

"You mean we have to get someone from his family?" Ron asked, stunned. "That wasn't on here before."

Bill shook his head. "It's been modified. It would mean anyone that Harry would have designated as his family."

"I guess he didn't feel we were close enough," Fred suggested, a disgruntled look on his face.

The three men exchanged glances and Ron stepped forward. "I should be able to just open it then?"

"In theory," Bill shrugged. "But it looks like there may be another layer in there somewhere. I can't know for sure until you get through this one."

Ron nodded and pulled his wand nervously. Several attempts later and they were still no closer. "Bloody Harry," Ron mumbled.

"Right," Bill said, running a hand through his long hair. "I don't think Ginny's in there. The storekeeper across the way said he hadn't seen anyone come or go for weeks."

They all stood quietly, contemplating what that meant.

"You don't think... she wouldn't..." Fred finally stopped, wincing at the thought.

"Maybe," Bill said. "This time of year has never been good. We need to find Tonks," he finally nodded. "If anyone can get to Ginny, it will be her."

Ron grimaced. "She took a leave of absence from the Ministry," he supplied. "I haven't been to her flat yet, but..."

"Yeah," Fred clapped him on the back. "Let's try there next. If we don't find her there we'll keep looking."

\* \* \*

The flat Tonks lived in had hardly any wards on it and Bill had them inside in less than five minutes.

"Pathetic, really, when you think about it," Ron said as they looked around in disgust. The flat was filthy and looked slightly abandoned. There were days worth of Daily Prophet's strewn about on the floor near the table. Both Ron and Fred cast fresh air charms in the kitchen as food that had been sitting out on the counter was now spoiling. The rubbish bin in the corner overflowed with molding cardboard boxes and empty take-away containers. Fred quickly vanished the disgusting pile.

"Doesn't look promising," Bill said as he entered the room and waived his hand in front of his face. "There's no sign that she's been here in days."

"Right, where to next?" Fred asked as he made his way outside.

Ron followed him out and Bill recast the wards on the door. "Charlie and Dad checked Headquarters already," Bill said with a sigh. "I think they were moving on to Hogwarts next."

"They should check Hagrid's old hut," Ron suggested quietly. "He and Harry were close and I think he and Ginny were too." The other two nodded in thought as they continued to walk down the street.

"I'd say we start checking the pubs," Fred suggested with a sideways grin, "but there are so many to choose from."

"I'll floo Aberforth when we get home," Bill said. "I still think our best bet is to find Tonks."

"It's a long shot but... there is one person who might know something," Ron said as he looked down at his shoes. "I hate to bother him with this though." He rubbed his eyes harshly and then told them his idea.

\* \* \*

Andy Hendrickson stumbled to the door in just his boxer shorts and a t-shirt; it was almost July after

all. He held his wand at the ready and glanced out the window before relaxing just a bit. It wasn't unusual for his partner, Weasley, to come to his house. It had happened twice before. But it was strange for it to be this late at night, and to see two other redheads that looked to be related to him.

"Ron?" he asked as he cracked the door.

"Sorry to bother you, Andy," Ron mumbled, "can we come in?"

Andy studied him for a minute before nodding and moving to let them in the open door.

"This is Bill, my oldest brother and Fred, another brother."

Andy nodded politely and they stood awkwardly in the small living room. He finally motioned for them to sit down and crossed his arms as they did so. "Is there something that you needed, Ron?"

Ron sighed and glanced at his brothers before looking again at Andy. "We're looking for my sister."

"Ginny?" Andy asked. He'd met the small, sad woman once since becoming Ron's partner, and once before when he'd been seeing Tonks. She always struck him as a tragic figure and, given her past, he couldn't say that he blamed her.

Ron nodded. "We were wondering if you might know-"

"Why would I know anything about her?" Andy asked. "I only met her a few times."

Another deep sigh and Ron looked squarely at him. "Actually, Andy, we were wondering if you could tell us a few of the places that Tonks might have gone in the past. If there were pubs, or hotels or... something; anything you could tell us."

Andy nodded as the situation became clear. He knew that Ginny and Tonks had been very close. "Tonks is missing as well, isn't she?" he asked, never meeting Ron's eyes.

"Yeah," Ron said, "she is."

"And you've tried her flat?" Andy felt very uncomfortable talking about Tonks with these men. The subject was still very sore for him. He thought that he may still have feelings for her even after the way she'd humiliated him.

Ron, his face now rather red, nodded. "Looks as if she's been gone for days."

"She used to disappear sometimes, said she was at Ginny's," Andy offered. "I never knew where it was, but..."

"We've already tried there," the older one supplied, and Andy nodded.

He finally shrugged. "I can give you a few names of places we went, but we really didn't go anywhere except here and her place." He knew his face was red at this admission, but he really didn't care. He knew enough about Ginny Weasley to know that her brothers might have good cause to search for her.

"Anything you can offer might help," Ron said as he stood and shook Andy's hand. "And for whatever it's worth... I think... Tonks may have had real feelings for you, Andy."

The two men stood looking at each other for a bit before Andy nodded jerkily and quickly conjured parchment and a quill.

"I hope everything turns out alright," he said quietly after he had handed over the scribblings.

"You're a good man, Andy," Fred clapped him on the back.

"Listen," Andy's voice stopped them as they walked out the door. "If you do find her... Tonks... just," he ran his hand through his hair roughly, "don't tell her I had anything to do with it."

Ron smiled sadly at him and nodded. "Sure thing."

\* \* \*

It was after midnight when the three brothers finally returned to the Burrow. The house was dark save a single candle burning in the kitchen window. Ron winced at the familiar sight. When the trio had left the Burrow in the middle of the night to begin their horcrux hunt, Molly Weasley had sent all three of them a horrible howler and then proceeded to tell them that if they returned and saw a candle burning in that window, they would be welcome home.

Afterwards, Ron had learned that Molly had pawned her wedding band and several other precious family heirlooms to be able to purchase a never-ending candle. That window had held light ever since. Ron had mentioned to his mother once several weeks after the final battle that she could now extinguish it. She had turned a very hurt face to him and quietly said that it would burn forever because not all of her children had come home.

"You two go on home," Fred said. "I'll report in to everyone and let you know in the morning."

Ron and Bill both exchanged anxious faces but agreed.

\* \* \*

The next morning the entire Weasley clan, minus Ginny, was seated at the kitchen table that groaned under the weight of so much food on it. Ron shook his head at the whirlwind that was his mother. When she was in a stressful situation, she cooked. His father had told him that he had actually gained weight while the Trio had been out hunting bits of Voldemort's soul.

Hermione was in the living room breastfeeding their daughter as the rest of the family sat in council.

"I flooded Aberforth late last night," Bill said as he finished his glass of pumpkin juice. "He said that Tonks came in three days ago. Said she looked like hell; flat brown hair, dull, lifeless eyes. She drank half a bottle of firewhiskey and refused to answer any of his questions before she disappeared."

"Ted and Andromeda haven't heard from Tonks in months," Charlie supplied. "They said she

stopped coming around lately and although they weren't really worried before, they're both willing to help. It's not the first time she's disappeared." There were nods around the table.

Arthur sighed heavily. "Does anyone remember Ginny saying anything about that mind healer she went to the first year?" Everyone shook their heads. "Maybe she went there again."

"And took Tonks with her?" Alicia asked as she cleaned scrambled eggs off of baby Pandora's hands for the fifth time.

"We could only hope," Molly suggested. "Merlin knows the two of them could both use some help."

"Has anyone checked the clearing?" Charlie finally asked and there was silence. Everyone knew exactly where he was talking about. "Or Godric's Hollow?"

Ron nodded. "I checked the graveyard first. The area has been kept up well and it looks rather recently cleaned, but I can't be sure. There were some flowers but with the anti-wilting charms florists use now days..."

Bill sighed. "I spoke to Hagrid and he checked the clearing. He says it doesn't look as if anything's been disturbed and he hasn't seen anyone there recently. Although, he admits that he hates going there and avoids that part of the forest usually."

Silence settled on the room as they all felt the heaviness of loss once again.

"I think we're out of options until one of them shows up again," Arthur finally suggested in a quiet voice. And, although they all hated the idea, none of them could protest.

"I'll keep working on the wards at Ginny's place," Bill said. "I can call in a few favors and maybe see if anyone I used to work with knows of a way to break that curse."

"You won't have trouble getting in anymore."

Everyone in the room turned to the doorway where Tonks stood. Her hair was indeed a dull brown, her skin pale and her face looked gaunt, as if she hadn't eaten for days.

# Chapter 7: When It Is Quiet

“Nymphadora Tonks!” Molly rushed toward her and Tonks was suddenly worried that she was going to get hit. Instead, Molly gathered her into a huge hug and they held onto each other for a few minutes. Finally, Tonks pulled back and Molly wiped her face with the dishtowel that was in her hands.

Tonks smiled sadly and then glanced around at the full room, of which she was the center of attention.

“I’m sure you think I have a bit of explaining to do.” She forced a smile onto her face and then let it die when no one else moved.

“Are you alright?” Arthur asked as he stood and offered her his chair. Tonks didn’t move but bit her bottom lip and shrugged.

“As well as I can be.”

“Have you heard from Ginny, Tonks?” Molly finally burst out. “No one has seen her for days.”

Tonks sighed heavily, feeling the weight of what she knew pressing down on her more than ever now.

“Ginny is... well, she’s fine now.” Chatter broke out all over the room and Tonks could feel her head spin.

“Listen, I know you all have things to do... but I could really use a shower,” Tonks burst out. The room stilled again and she glanced around hopefully. Arthur met her gaze and nodded.

“Of course, Tonks. You look like you could use a meal also. Go on upstairs and Molly will bring you up some clean robes. We’ll all be here when you get back.”

Tonks nodded gratefully and avoided Molly’s gaze as she trudged up the stairs. She let the water run scalding hot and winced when it hit her skin. It was good to feel something.

Five days. It had happened five days ago. After leaving the cemetery, Tonks went to the Hogshhead in Hogsmeade and drank herself into a stupor. She stumbled into the forest and miraculously found the clearing. Allowing herself one more round of tears, she fell asleep curled up near the base of the largest tree.

The stillness of the morning sunshine filled her with new resolve when she awakened. After sorting her memories, she had Disapparated to Ginny’s flat, where she’d spent the last few days packing Ginny and Harry’s meager belongings, painstakingly marking the boxes and cleaning the flat. She’d even scrubbed the walls and floors by hand.

Their entire lives were now packed in a handful of boxes and stacked in the center of the flat awaiting their trip... to the Burrow, she guessed. She’d only saved a few things for herself. She’d shrunk her favorite photo of the couple and tucked it in the pocket of her jeans along with several

letters she'd found addressed to the Weasleys and a thick leather-bound journal.

She'd taken several breaks during her packing to read through the journal's pages and found them very enlightening. Ginny had kept this record from the time she and Harry had gotten back together in the beginning of Ginny's sixth year. It contained her thoughts before and after the battle. Tonks sobbed through the sections where Ginny mourned Harry.

The passages that hurt the most, however, came after James died. Ginny had felt her life meant nothing once he was gone. She'd written page after page pleading for Harry to come and take her to be with her son.

Finally, Ginny accepted her loss and resigned herself to finish the work she had left to do. The last page filled Tonks with peace. In it, Ginny described several dreams she'd had of Harry and how he had told her he was proud of how strong she had been and that it wouldn't be long before she was with her family again.

Her back was now completely numb so Tonks reluctantly ended her shower. Draped over the sink was a set of faded black robes. She wasn't sure who they'd once belonged to, but she was grateful that she didn't have to put on the worn jeans and t-shirt she had been in earlier.

She took her time brushing her shoulder-length hair and peering at herself in the mirror before she cracked open the door. From the top of the stairs she could hear the faint murmurings of conversation and the scrape of silverware on plates.

Steeling herself, Tonks gathered the few things out of her jeans and moved slowly down the stairs.

\* \* \*

She had hoped to make it into the room unnoticed, but fate decided that for her as well. The last stair creaked horribly and she cringed as everyone froze and looked right at her.

"I feel like a new witch," she joked but only got a few smiles in return.

"Please take my seat, Tonks," Arthur offered and held the chair out for her. She nodded nervously and took the spot at the head of the table.

"Tea, dear?" Molly asked. Tonks cringed when she saw the already-red eyes of the Weasley Matriarch. She hoped that she could get through this without breaking down herself.

"Tea would be wonderful, Molly."

"Somzing to eat az well?" Fleur offered, pushing a full plate of eggs toward the Metamorphmagus. Tonks felt her stomach heave and shook her head as politely as she could.

"Tea will be fine, thank you." Once the cup was in front of her, she took a small sip but didn't taste anything. Nervous bile rose in her throat as she decided where the best place to start would be.

"I have some things to tell you," she finally decided upon. "I'd like to say that I have all the answers, but I don't." Her breath caught in her throat and she closed her eyes, praying for anything

to help her. She stayed like that for several seconds before what felt like a warm breeze hit her face.

The calm she'd only felt on three different occasions washed over her once more. Suddenly, it was as if she were back in the clearing hearing Harry's final words, or in the room watching Ginny rock her son for the last time, or at the graveyard kneeling in the green grasses. She knew she could do this; the words that she'd been searching years for were all in her brain. A calming breath exited her lungs and filled her with energy that hadn't been there before.

She reached into the pocket of her borrowed robes and produced a small vial of clear liquid. Placing it on the table in front of her, she looked up and into the eyes of everyone present.

"I'll take that if you need me to; I'd prefer not, but if that's what it takes for you to believe me..."

The group exchanged glances as Tonks looked around. Arthur and Hermione were the only ones whose eyes stayed constantly on her. It was only now that Tonks noticed the small bundle in Hermione's arms. Later, she thought, as she pushed the questions to the back of her head.

"I don't believe that will be necessary, Tonks," Arthur said quietly. Tonks met his eyes for a moment and was instantly grateful to the soft-spoken man for his trust.

"Okay," she nodded. Her hands clasped in front of her on the table and she leaned forward a bit in the chair. It seemed the only thing to do was start at the beginning.

"After I left Remus on the battlefield I moved into the forest. I didn't realize it then, but I think something was drawing me there. I reached the clearing just after Harry destroyed Voldemort. Things were still on fire and a horrid smoke was in the air. I found Ginny holding Harry's body off a bit from the center." She glanced up when Molly's sobs began. Several of the other women were crying as well and the men had very hard looks on their faces.

"I thought he was already dead," she said and then looked up again. "But I was wrong. Ginny knew he hadn't left yet. I think he was just unconscious, or something. Anyway, Ginny and I talked for a minute or two. I was trying to convince her to let go, that Harry was dead. In the middle of all of this, Harry woke up, or came back, or..." She breathed out deeply and stared down at her clasped hands.

"Ginny was crying and he told her that he hadn't died. That he'd seen the other side and that death wasn't really what we all thought it was; that it was like another life over there. He mentioned something about Albus being right." Tonks took a quick sip of her tea and waited for the calm to fill her again.

"He was horribly pale and he coughed up blood and he looked like he'd already died..." Tonks shook her head and continued. "He told Ginny he was dying, that the curse he'd been hit with was killing him." She smiled a bit here. "Ginny begged him to take her with him, but Harry said that she still had work to do here."

"Ginny had been hit with the curse also, but not fully as Harry had. She'd just entered the clearing when it hit Harry." Molly's wail pierced her thoughts and she stopped for a moment as Arthur comforted his wife. It was then that she realized that Bill and Fleur's children were not there. She

was grateful, as they would have understood much more than she would have wanted them to know.

"You told the Ministry that you and Ginny had found Harry already dead," Ron accused. Tonks looked into his eyes and could see the hurt there. She knew he regretted not being there for his best friend, and would carry that burden around with him forever.

She nodded. "We lied." Ron opened his mouth to ask another question but Hermione's hand on his shoulder stopped him. The two exchanged glances and Tonks was grateful that they were willing to hear her story out. When Molly's crying subsided, Tonks continued.

"Harry told Ginny that her time would come, and it wouldn't be long, but that she had things that she needed to do." She took a deep breath before looking up directly at Arthur who was still holding his wife. "Ginny was pregnant when Harry died."

Tonks had expected outbursts and angry words at her admission, but none came. Arthur seemed to search her face for a moment before he set his jaw and nodded jerkily. She was suddenly struck by how much Ginny had looked like her father. Charlie backed away from the table and moved over the lean on the fireplace, his hands pressing on the mantel. Bill turned to his wife who whispered something in French. Ron and Hermione exchanged glances and, somehow, Tonks thought maybe they had suspected something, or knew more than they too had let on. Fred and Alicia seemed lost in their own thoughts.

"If Ginny was hit with the curse," Hermione started in a small voice, "then the baby..."

Tonks nodded grimly. "Harry told her it would be a son and that he would only live a little while." Molly sobbed into her husband's shoulder loudly but Tonks continued. "He told her that she had to be strong and that their son was needed on the other side; there was something important for him to do." Tonks glanced over at the sun streaming in the window.

"It was then that I knew that Ginny understood him... really understood what he was saying. She was so calm and... accepting; like she'd known it would happen deep down." She shook herself a bit and then continued.

"Harry told her a few more things... personal, private things. Then he called me over and asked me to help Ginny." She made eye contact with Arthur again, feeling like he was the one who would lead this family to understand her story. "I made an Unbreakable Vow with him. I promised to protect Ginny and their son, and to do anything Ginny asked of me until she released me."

"That's why you lied," Ron said quietly, as if it had finally made sense to him.

Tonks nodded. "That's why I've done almost everything I have over the past two years: to protect them all. We stayed there in the clearing until Harry left. It was the most... beautiful and reverent feeling I've ever felt in my life. In the end, we'd been there for twelve hours or more. Kingsley was the first to find us and I convinced him to have the hospital seal the medical files. We obliviated all of the Healers and nurses. No one could know about the baby, and no one could know about the curse. I'd heard of the things that were tried to treat it, but I didn't want Ginny going through that. And she didn't either."

She sighed again and drank from her teacup. "After the whole mess of the funeral and all, Ginny had to leave. She was almost three months along by that time and was beginning to show. I found a house in Wales, not far from Godric's Hollow. I placed the Fidelius Charm and moved Ginny there."

"She didn't really go to a Mind Healer," Bill nodded thoughtfully.

Tonks snorted slightly. "She didn't need one. She was still grieving, yes, but I've never seen someone understand and accept their fate more fully. She was very calm and collected about the entire thing. The pregnancy wasn't easy either. She was so sick that I had to take a leave of absence from the Ministry so I could be with her."

"Why?!" Molly finally broke through. Tonks had a hard time looking into her red, watery eyes. "Why didn't she come to us? None of us would have judged her, and we could have helped."

"I can only tell you what I know, Molly. Honestly, I asked Ginny several times but she would only say that she had her reasons." Molly studied her with tear-filled eyes before looking away. "I think she wanted to spare you from seeing her like that."

"The birth was... horrific. She went into labor six weeks early and we couldn't stop it. I finally had to get help. I brought a Healer who helped her. I thought at the time, and Ginny confirmed it later, that Harry was there in spirit form. There was this... presence in the room. As soon as it entered, Ginny calmed and the birth progressed easier."

"James Arthur Potter was born at just after Midnight on January 15th." Tonks smiled sadly. "Jamie was a beautiful baby, but so tiny. He weighed less than five pounds. He was all Potter, though: thick black hair and so like Harry. I never got to see his eyes closely, but Ginny said they were green."

She glanced up to see everyone in the room wiping tears away.

"He lived until mid-morning. Ginny was able to hold him and to even nurse him once before his little spirit slipped away. We all felt Harry very strongly then... and maybe others too." Tonks shivered just a bit thinking that she might be feeling them all now.

"We buried him next to his father in Godric's Hollow."

"But we've all been there," Fred protested. "There were no other graves."

Tonks turned to look at him. "You remember when Ginny insisted on the charms to hide Harry's resting place?" Recognition took place in his eyes and Tonks knew that he understood her point.

"Ginny had a hard time after that. I think she thought she would go with Jamie. She didn't want to live anymore. It took a week or so for her to come around and to start to feel again. During that time, she came up with plans for the different Foundations to handle the money that Harry had left her. She told me that Harry would have approved, and that it should benefit as many people as it could."

"So she went to work," Tonks said plainly with a proud smile. "She gathered herself and did what she needed to do."

"What about the curse?" Hermione asked. "Surely you both researched it and..."

"We did, while we were in the house and Ginny was confined to bed rest," Tonks interrupted with a smile at Hermione's predictability. "Adfero morbus," she added softly. Bill, Arthur and Hermione all gasped. "It's a very old curse that literally causes disease, specifically a form of cancer, to invade another's body. There is no counter curse and no cure. The only treatment is a series of potions that attempt to kill off diseased cells in the body. It's truly morbid what they put these patients through," she said with a sad shake of her head. "The potions are almost worse than the disease. No, we realized that nothing could be done. Ginny didn't want anything done. She didn't know how much time she had but she didn't want to spend it in St. Mungo's, or have people hovering over her."

"But she looked so healthy," Ron shook his head, "right up until the end when she just looked rather thin."

"She was always gifted at Charms," Bill said thoughtfully. He turned to Tonks. "That's how she did it, wasn't it? Charms of illusion?"

Tonks nodded. "She was an artist at it. Anyone looking at her would never know. I was the only one who saw her without them on."

"Was she in pain?"

Tonks considered Arthur's question and decided to answer truthfully. "At the end there was quite a bit. We both got very good at brewing numbing and pain relieving potions."

"And little Jamie?" Molly choked out. "Was he... did he have..."

Tonks smiled sadly at the thought of the tiny life. "The Healer said he wasn't in any visible pain. I personally think that Harry came and took him before the pain could start. He never looked the way Harry did," she looked down at her hands again, "or Ginny at the end." There seemed to be a collective sigh around the table.

"Ginny did alright until this last January when it all hit her again. I checked on her and told her we'd take her back to the house if she needed. She refused, saying that she'd never set foot there again. That was a rough week."

"Did she..." Fred shrugged and Tonks guessed at what he was asking.

"She thought about it, she may have even been really close a time or two. But something happened; I think Harry appeared in a dream to her." Tonks shrugged. "She wrote about it in her journal, but I didn't feel entitled to do more than skim over it."

"I remember that she seemed to have a renewed sense of purpose," Hermione mused aloud.

"She did her best and most wide-stretching work in the last six months," Tonks agreed.

"And is she..." Arthur didn't stop the tear that escaped and coursed down his cheek.

"Five days ago," Tonks said softly. "She passed in peace, lying on Harry and Jamie's graves." She had already vowed to herself that she would never admit that Ginny had been alone when she died. "I completed the things she asked me to do; buried her in Godric's Hollow, packed and cleaned the flat she and Harry shared, and came here to tell you."

Immediately, the burden of what she had just divulged came crashing down on her shoulders. She felt immensely relieved, but also thought maybe that she was allowing two years of grief to finally hit her.

"I'm sorry," she choked. "I never wanted to lie to you. But I loved them, so much that I couldn't not do what they asked. They needed me and... I needed what they had to give. The only reason I've stayed as sane as I have is because little Jamie and Ginny needed me."

"I wouldn't blame any of you if you never spoke to me again. I know I hate myself, surely you should too," she said softly as she retrieved the slightly tattered letters and journal from her pocket and placed them on the table, waved her wand and reinstated them to their original size. There was silence in the room and Tonks winced, taking it for the worst possible sign.

"We don't hate you."

It was Charlie, speaking for the first time all morning. His back was still toward her and Tonks stared at the broad expanse of his shoulders. They had always been friends in school.

"You should."

"But we don't," he said firmly as he turned around. His cheeks were wet and his eyes were red when he looked at her. "And you shouldn't be so hard on yourself. You made a vow."

"You protected our Ginny and our... grandson," Arthur said with a thick voice. "For that we will be forever grateful."

Tonks could feel her lip start to tremble and she clenched her jaw tightly. She could only nod in answer.

"Can you take us there?" Molly asked through tears.

Tonks nodded. "I can. It's beautiful right now, the trees are full and the grass is fresh and crisp."

"Did you... did you take any pictures?" Molly asked again a slightly hopeful yet doubtful look on her face. "Of Jamie?" Tonks felt a well of sympathy for the woman who would never see her grandchild.

"No, I'm sorry. We thought it best if no one knew of him. Ginny said he looked just like Harry's baby pictures."

"But... the Healer," Ron interjected. "You said you used a Healer."

Tonks could feel herself blush and she shrugged one shoulder.

Charlie snorted out a bit of dry laughter. "You obliterated your own mother?" For just a moment, the tension was broken as awed eyes watched her with a bit of amusement. Only the Weasleys, she

thought with a wry internal smile.

"Had to, didn't I?" she asked. "It's not the first time, and she knows that something happened. She's alright with it."

"Wow," Fred breathed. "Just... wow."

"Don't get any ideas," Alicia growled at him as she bumped his shoulder with hers.

"I think," Arthur began and then stopped, running a hand over his face. "I think we'd like you to take us there, Tonks. We need to have... some sort of memorial, for the two of them."

Tonks nodded in understanding. "As long as it's private."

Arthur nodded. "We'll have to release some sort of statement, Ginny was a rather public figure."

"Let me handle that, Dad," Bill said softly. "I'm sure Hermione could help me put together something... lingering injuries from the Final Battle or some such thing." Hermione nodded her acceptance. Another heavy silence settled on the group.

"Tomorrow then," Arthur agreed. "Can you all make arrangements for work, like you did this morning?" Everyone nodded and he continued. "We can release the statement in a few days when we've done our own grieving."

"It's just so... final," Ron complained. "So hollow."

"I don't know which way would have been better," Fred said. "I would have wanted to say goodbye..."

"But you wouldn't have wanted to see her that way," Tonks added knowingly. "And that's the way she wanted it. She wanted your memories of her to be the feisty girl who nicked brooms out of the cupboard at night to teach herself to fly, not of her looking... like she did, so sick and pale."

She sighed lazily, feeling the lack of sleep catching up with her. "In a way, she died on that battlefield. In her case, it just took two years for it to take effect. She wasn't the same after Harry died, not even when Jamie was born. She loved him, but seeing her holding that baby and rocking him... that wasn't the Ginny that any of you knew." They all seemed to need some time to ponder this. Tonks finished her cold tea and stood.

"I need to get some rest. I've been up since... well, since she died, really."

"You should stay here," Molly said firmly, wiping her tears quickly and adopting the no-nonsense approach that had made her well known.

"I have a flat, Molly."

"It's a bit of a mess, Tonks," Fred smirked.

"Yeah," Ron agreed with half a smile, "How anyone can live like that..."

Tonks narrowed her eyes. "When have you been in my flat?" Three sets of very guilty eyes met hers. "I see; took it upon yourselves to break in, did you?" They all shrugged and she sighed loudly. "Fine, it is a disaster. Are you sure you really want me here?" Tonks asked Molly.

"Positive," Molly responded. She smiled for the first time that day.

"I'll come with you to gather a few things," Charlie suggested and motioned to the back door. Tonks studied him for a minute, and then decided not to argue with him; she really didn't have the energy.

"Where did you get the Veritaserum?" Charlie whispered conspiratorially.

"Nicked it from the Department of Mysteries," Tonks said with a smirk.

# Chapter 8: I'll Carry You Home

Tonks lay in Ginny's old bed in her childhood room, staring at the faded wallpaper that had never been Ginny's style. When Ginny lived here, the small pink and purple flowers were covered by Quidditch posters, photographs of family and friends and a few aging letters. Now the room seemed in mourning. All the colorful, vibrant evidences that a wonderful and feisty young woman had lived here were gone. Only white lace curtains and chipped white furniture remained.

She wondered how many tears Ginny shed in this room; how many times had she cursed Harry's name in one breath and then praised him in the next? How many dreams had she dreamed of a future that wasn't meant to be... at least in this life?

Passages from Ginny's journal haunted Tonks. They'd been simply written, yet so profound in their beauty that she had struggled to understand them. Ginny wrote that Harry visited her while she was pregnant with Jamie, and especially during the birth. She said the peace of his presence had overwhelmed her, washing over her like rain on a summer day. She could even smell the scent that accompanied him; the scent that was uniquely Harry. He'd held her while she birthed their son.

Tonks remembered the calm and almost serene attitude that came over Ginny just before Jamie was born. It was definitely a stark contrast to what had been only hours before.

But Tonks didn't know that feeling. No one had ever come for her. She resented that a bit. She wondered if it was only Harry who was able to do that for the woman he loved. Maybe it had to do with the prophecy, or destiny, or whatever it was that Harry had gone on to do.

The Burrow was quiet now, except for the creaking of the old walls in the slight breeze outside. It was well past midnight. Tonks had returned with Charlie after gathering some of her own clothes and toiletries. She'd taken care to gather the new dress robes she'd bought the other day and smirked at her foresight to have bought them at all. Charlie had raised an eyebrow at them but hadn't said anything. In fact, he'd only grunted a few replies to her questions all day. Besides Molly, he'd been the most adamant that she eat and take care of herself, placing full plates of food before her and glaring across the table when she wasn't taking a bite.

She wasn't sure how to take this. She and Charlie had always been friends in school; some would have even said they were best friends. And while she had once felt a mild attraction to him, he'd never shown that he felt anything more than friendship for her. Now he seemed overly concerned, and it was just... unnerving.

She closed her eyes, listening to the way the late June breeze rustled the willows near the pond and made the rosebush scrape the side of the house just below Ginny's bedroom window. Sleep claimed her as she thought of pale pink wallpaper and the family grieving around her.

\* \* \*

The meadow was warm, even though the breeze on her skin made goose pimples shoot out all over her arms. There was not a cloud in the sky and Tonks felt the silliest urge to fling her arms out to the sides and spin around and around in a circle like she'd done when she was a little girl. Feeling

just a bit foolish, she glanced around, but couldn't see anyone.

She began walking instead, toward some trees at the far end of the long, wavy grass, but, somehow, the trees got further and further away. A bit annoyed, Tonks glanced over her shoulder at the grey and gloomy area behind her. It looked like a huge storm was coming. Black clouds billowed and rolled through the sky, casting shadows on the edge of the meadow.

Tonks kept walking, somehow knowing that she had to escape that darkness. Her pace picked up a bit as a rolling sound chased her and lightning flashed behind her.

The trees finally seemed to come closer and she could hear the birds calling out to each other. The babble of a stream echoed somewhere in the distance. Upon reaching the trees, Tonks looked over her shoulder again at the storm. It seemed to stall a bit as it sat on the edge of the green grass; not moving forward, but building in intensity.

It was then that Tonks heard voices. Acting on Auror's instincts, she swung around, reaching to pull her wand, realizing a moment too late that her wand wasn't in its usual holster. She was slightly horrified to find herself dressed in a simple pale purple sundress and white leather sandals. She didn't wear dresses often and this particular one had been binned just after the Final Battle. It held too many memories of Remus.

The voices sounded again and Tonks went on alert. All around her were tall, thick trees, low undergrowth and various splashes of color in the form of wildflowers. A well worn path cut through the foliage. The sound of laughter and happiness made her take a step forward, holding out her hand in an almost hopeful gesture. Although she knew it might be stupid, she couldn't help herself from moving along the path. The voices were so close that she could almost make out what they were saying.

A number of steps later found her deeper in the wood than she had originally wanted to go. Curiously, the further in she went, the lighter it became until she had to hold her hand in front of her face to see where she was going. The voices grew from a few to a handful and then to a rather large crowd. Tonks wondered what she was walking into, but couldn't stop herself no matter how she tried. All thoughts of the building storm fled once she entered the trees and now she couldn't see any evidence of it at all.

When she finally stopped walking, she had to brace herself on a small tree to keep upright. A large host of people stood in a bright clearing. In the center was Harry, his arms held open wide as Ginny ran to him. They embraced and Harry swung her around. Those watching clapped, and laughed, and cried as the lovers were reunited. Tonks felt tears well in her eyes. The two embraced and kissed repeatedly, seemingly oblivious to those around them.

A sob welled up in her chest watching the exchange. Tonks tore her eyes away, only to fall to her knees. Faces she'd only seen in pictures surrounded them. A man who looked too much like Harry to be anyone other than James Potter clapped his hands and wolf-whistled. He looked older and more distinguished than in the photographs she'd seen; there was even a bit of graying at his temples.

Next to him a gorgeous woman with long auburn tresses elbowed James, although she smiled largely at him. This must be Lily, Tonks' mind registered. A very young looking Sirius stood on James' other

side. Tonks hadn't ever seen him this cleaned up. When he'd lived at Grimmauld Place, his hair was long and rather unkempt and he'd go days without shaving. The thin, haggard appearance of his face had disappeared now as well.

He and James shared a mischievous look and Lily mumbled something to them both that Tonks couldn't hear. It must have reined them in for they stopped in any forward motion and glanced sheepishly at her.

Time seemed to stand still as Tonks gazed around the circle of people. She'd not seen many of these faces in years. Several that she had worked in the Order with but had never really known were there. Near the back, Tonks saw a figure she was amazed she hadn't seen before. Holding a huge polka-dotted handkerchief to his nose was a larger than life Hagrid. A small man sat on his shoulder and Tonks wondered if it was Hagrid's father. He'd shown Tonks a photograph of the man once when Tonks was in school.

Two heads of red hair caught her attention and she started to see Percy and George Weasley on the far side of where Harry was still greeting Ginny enthusiastically. Percy frowned a bit at the public display of affection, but George was grinning ear to ear and clapped his older brother on the shoulder, causing Percy to step forward to keep his balance. Percy turned to scowl at George, but it didn't last long as the two were soon smiling at whatever George had said. Tonks thought George might have caught her eye for a moment, but her attention was drawn back to the center as a small boy ran from the crowd and wrapped his arms around Harry's legs.

Tonks' breath caught in her throat as the toddler turned his face upward and grinned at Harry. Harry returned the smile and stooped low, swinging the boy up into his arms and turning him toward Ginny.

Jamie had grown up. He was a beautiful boy with a thick head of black hair and a crooked smile just like his father. The boy stuck a pudgy finger in his mouth as he considered Ginny for a moment before turning to search Harry's face. It seemed as if he'd figured it all out as he opened his arms to his mother and Ginny gathered her son in to her body once more.

Tonks laughed through her tears as Hagrid's loud cries echoed around the clearing. She was startled to see a thin white hand hold out another handkerchief to Hagrid. The man it belonged to had always stood out in a crowd, but next to the half-giant, he had gone virtually unnoticed.

Albus Dumbledore looked younger than Tonks had ever seen him, which wasn't saying much as he still sported the long white hair and beard. He watched the reunion of the small family with a very satisfied smile on his face and that reassured Tonks more than almost anything could have. She was startled when the clear blue eyes settled on her for a moment. He nodded in acknowledgement and Tonks could only return it.

Her eyes drifted toward the Potters again and she was stunned to find almost everyone in the clearing looking directly at her. Try as she might, though, she couldn't get her legs to move her forward.

Jamie was back in his father's arms again, finger in his mouth, watching her with a look of detached curiosity. Harry said something to the boy softly as Ginny wrapped an arm around his waist and

Jamie glanced at his parents before holding up his hand softly and pointing to where she stood.

Ginny wiped at her own tears and nodded before the boy broke out in a huge smile, showing off the few white teeth he had in his mouth.

Tonks felt the tears run down her cheeks but didn't stop them as she lifted her hand in greeting. Once again, time seemed to stand still and the others faded away a bit, leaving only Harry, Ginny and Jamie in a hazy sort of distance.

Harry met her eye and an understanding surpassing any words lodged itself in Tonks' heart before he wrapped an arm around Ginny's shoulders and the three moved off into what remained of the crowd.

One by one, others seemed to fade out until only one remained. Standing completely alone, his hands stuffed deeply into the pockets on his worn jeans, stood Remus Lupin. He seemed to fidget a bit and glanced over his shoulder where Tonks could just make out the outlines of James and Sirius. They each clapped their friend on the shoulder and faded completely. Remus stayed where he was but looked directly at her now; his eyes seeming to pierce her soul.

She'd desperately missed that look over the past two years. Only Remus looked at her that way; as if he knew exactly what she was feeling, even when she wanted to hide or deny it.

Tonks wanted to greet him, but words seemed excessive. He was here. And she was here. And... she understood.

He loved her, and he always would. She loved him, and she would never stop.

He was all right. And she would be one day soon.

She wanted to join him but he shook his head and glanced down at the forest floor before meeting her eyes again. It was the same look Harry gave Ginny when she'd begged to go with him; the look that meant Ginny still had work to do.

Remus was telling her that her work was not yet finished, even if she believed it was.

They stared at each other for what seemed like hours, neither moving although the tension and frustration was building for them both. Finally, a pale shadow placed a hand on Remus' shoulder and Harry came into view again. He and Remus exchanged words that she couldn't hear before Remus nodded once and gave one parting look at her.

Harry stayed and watched the older man fade away. Finally, he turned back toward her and his voice echoed through the trees. It was strange, because his mouth never opened.

"You did everything I asked and I can never say thank you enough."

"You don't have to," Tonks replied in a soft voice, somehow knowing that Harry would hear her.

"He'll always be with you." Tonks nodded and swiped at the tears on her face. "He loves you."

"I know. I love him," she whispered.

"You have other things to do, Dora." Harry looked off into the woods. "It's not your time yet."

Tonks once again felt a well of frustration. "There's nothing left for me here."

"You'll know when you've found the right thing," Harry's voice said and he smiled.

"Damn you," she whispered harshly and could have sworn he laughed.

"He'll be with you," he said again as he began to fade. "And it's alright to move on, you know."

"Tell him not to take too long," Tonks growled and Harry's laughter echoed as he faded away. The birds began singing again.

She found herself walking back through the meadow, the bright green grass tickling her bare calves and catching in her sandals. The dark clouds that she'd run from originally were moving away. They were still visible, but their fierceness had lessened and Tonks wasn't afraid of them anymore.

\* \* \*

The pressing heat of mid-morning awakened her. Tonks was disoriented. She blinked several times and frowned at the sticky, sweaty feeling of being in bed too long and too late in the day. Sunshine poured in the warped window at the foot of the bed and Tonks stared a moment at the dust particles as they performed their customary dance in the bright light.

Now that she was fully awake, she wondered how she'd ever slept this long. The noise of the Burrow seeped in the closed door. Heavy footsteps pounded down the stairs and another hurried set thumped back up them. Pipes groaned in the bathroom down the hall. She heard the muffled cry of a baby—Ron and Hermione's, Tonks' mind registered after a moment.

The heavy scent of bacon, dark toast and sweet tea permeated the air. It was all so... normal... that Tonks felt she should pinch herself. Had it been a dream? Could she close her eyes and find more than two years had erased, and everyone she loved still alive? Maybe she could warn them all.

Crossing her fingers, Tonks pressed her eyes shut as tight as she could. After counting to ten she opened them and sighed heavily, feeling more than a bit foolish. She was over thirty years old, after all, not six.

Memories of the dream swirled in her brain and Tonks breathed deeply, wishing for the coolness of the summer clearing she'd visited. Was it only a dream?

It seemed too real, too poignant to let fade away completely. The bittersweet emotions left hiding in her heart were too similar to what Ginny had described in her journal. It must have been real. At least, that's what she decided to tell herself.

\* \* \*

Tonks perched herself against an ancient stone as far from the gathering as she could. Time had worn the writing away so that it was unreadable now. The headstones in this part of the graveyard were older than time, she thought.

The day was beautiful. Tonks rested her head back on her shoulders and squinted up at the bright sky. High above, making lazy circles around and around, she could see a white bird.

"Watch over them, Hedwig," she whispered to the air.

The Weasleys were grouped around the three black headstones. They'd requested that Tonks change Ginny's name on hers to Ginevra Molly Weasley Potter and she'd complied with a smile. She knew it wasn't for the press or the world, but because they all believed that was who she was. She'd always belonged with Harry.

Molly cried and fussed with flowers and then cried again the whole time the family was there. Ron and Hermione spent a few minutes kneeling by Sirius' and Remus' graves and then at James and Lily's. Tonks had been forced to turn away. She felt a bit like an outsider, although she knew it was silly. She had as much right as anyone to be there.

The graveyard was still, and more than a bit warm, and Tonks shifted in her heavy purple robes. She'd pulled her dull brown hair up for the day in a sign of respect and she could feel a trickle of sweat run down the back of her head and down into the collar of the robes. It looked as if the gathering was breaking up some.

Bill carried both of his boys, one on each arm, and headed out of the cemetery with Fleur behind him. He passed where Tonks was leaning against the headstone and stopped briefly.

"Thank you, for all that you did for them." His voice broke and a glance at his eyes showed them watery blue.

Tonks felt her face heat and she shook her head. "I didn't do all that much."

"You did," Fleur protested with a scowl.

Letting her eyes slip to the side, Tonks shrugged. "Any of you would have done the same. It was me because I happened to be there."

"No." Bill's tone was sure and strong. "It was you because you were strong enough."

There was a surety in his eyes that made Tonks feel like maybe what he'd said was true.

"You're all accepting this... I just didn't expect..."

"Its denial, or maybe shock," Bill denied, his eyes resting on his parents.

Tonks nodded, knowing what he said was true. The anger and questions would come soon. She took a deep breath. She would be ready, even if she didn't have all of the answers.

When she turned to answer him, Bill was gone, walking off down the path with his family. She turned back to watch the rest of the Weasleys.

Fred and Alicia were holding hands and Pandora was sleeping against her father's shoulder. Molly seemed to be saying her final goodbyes as she knelt by Ginny's tomb. Arthur had his hand on the tiny stone in between Harry and Ginny and Tonks felt a bit guilty at having met his grandson when

he never would in this life.

The round face of the toddler in her dream last night came to her and she once again felt it was more than a dream.

Slowly, she made her way around the obstacles of stone and over to where the rest of the family watched. Ron and Hermione met her a few steps away. Ron cradled their newborn and Tonks realized she hadn't even congratulated them yet.

She smiled sheepishly at them. "I never said... well, congratulations."

"It's alright," Ron returned her smile, although it didn't quite reach his eyes. "We understood."

"So, it was a girl after all."

Hermione and Ron both chuckled. "Yeah, I guess there's a time for everything," Ron said with a sideways glance at Hermione. "She was bound to do something wrong once in life, right?"

Tonks smiled as she looked down at the face with the ginger curls on top. She seemed so much larger than Jamie had been and Tonks was mesmerized for a moment.

"She's lovely."

"Thank you," Hermione said. "Tonks, we were wondering..." She trailed off for a minute as Molly broke down again after trying to walk away from her daughter's grave.

"Yes?"

"Well, we were planning on naming her Sarah Lily, after Harry's mother. We wanted a strong name and we've always heard these stories about how strong a woman Lily was."

Tonks couldn't help but let her eyes rest on the grey stone with the name on it. "I think that's lovely."

"We were," Ron said. "But since yesterday... we've changed our minds." Tonks raised an eyebrow in question.

"We were thinking of naming her Sarah Ginevra instead."

Tonks knew they were serious and it made it even harder to keep a straight face. "She'd hate that you know."

Ron smirked. "Maybe that's why I think it's perfect. She and I were always having a go at each other. I just get the last laugh."

Tonks smiled, mostly to herself. She had read enough in Ginny's journal to know that it was, in fact, Ginny who would get the last laugh as the family moved on with their lives. Each of their Gringotts' accounts would be overflowing with gold very soon. "Do you think that's the best reason to name your child after someone?"

"She was the strongest person we've ever known," Hermione said softly. "And we didn't even know it."

"That she was," Tonks agreed with a smile. "I think it's a good idea."

"And..." Ron's ears turned bright red and he looked away. "We were wondering if you'd be her godmother, Tonks."

Tonks was sure not much in this world could stun her anymore, but then she hadn't counted on being asked a question like that. Jamie hadn't lived long enough for them to consider anything of the sort and Ginny had never mentioned it.

"I... er, that is..."

"You don't have to answer right away," Hermione suggested. "Just think about it. We wanted someone who could teach her all about her Aunt Ginny and you knew her best of all of us."

Tonks nodded when she couldn't force her mouth to make words. She stared off into the distant trees and Ron and Hermione drifted away after the eldest Weasleys.

Now completely alone, Tonks took a few steps toward Remus' grave and knelt there.

"Is this what you had in mind, you conniving old man?" she asked with a smile through tears as she traced the deep letters. "This is the work I have to do?"

There was no answer; not that she had expected one. Harry had told her she would know when it came to her. Strangely, this felt right. Maybe it was because she'd been taking care of Ginny for so long, and Remus before that. Maybe she was—really, really deep down—the motherly type. She shuddered slightly at the thought. She couldn't ever see herself with children of her own. Then again, she wasn't sure she'd ever move past Remus.

"Alright," she finally whispered. "We'll give it a go, yeah? But don't think you've gotten the last word in this Remus Lupin." She was silent for a moment and then stood, brushing off the knees of her robes. The Weasleys were quietly moving down the road away from the cemetery and Tonks followed them at a considerable distance.

"He was a good man."

Charlie's deep voice caught her off guard and Tonks had her wand out and pointed to him before he could say anything more. He grinned and held up his hands in surrender.

"Sorry," she mumbled as she re-holstered her wand and continued to walk. Charlie fell into step beside her and tucked his hands deep into his jeans pockets. His dress robes were open at the front and it struck Tonks as amusing that he wore comfortable jeans under his nicest robes and to a funeral of all things. It was so typically Charlie that it was almost bittersweet.

"He was a good man," she agreed and they both walked together.

"Listen, I don't mean to sound... well," Charlie began and then rubbed the back of his neck. Tonks

felt a bit surprised when she glanced over at him and saw the Weasley red ears. "If you ever need to talk to someone, I wanted you to know I'm here."

Tonks grinned down at her shoes and then glanced back over her shoulder at the graveyard. She could still see Remus' headstone.

"Damn you, Remus," she said to herself, but she couldn't stop smiling. The old wolf always had to have the last word.