

Harry Potter

**Dusk & Summer**

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# Dusk & Summer

**Fandom:** Harry Potter.

**Author:** hgfan1111.

**Genre:** Fluff.

**Characters:** Ginny Weasley. Harry Potter.

**Pairing:** Ginny/Harry.

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**Summary:** After the war, Harry and Ginny are both going through the motions, lost as they try to find their way in a world that they don't really recognize.

*"Remember, we all stumble, every one of us. That's why it's a comfort to go hand in hand."*

- Emily Kimbrough

*"Summer is the time when one sheds one's tensions with one's clothes, and the right kind of day is jeweled balm for the battered spirit. A few of those days and you can become drunk with the belief that all's right with the world."*

- Ada Louise Huxtable

"I never thought I'd say it," Ron grumbled as he lay in a prone position on his bed, "but I miss the Dementors."

The statement took a moment to sink into Harry's consciousness, slowly inching past the exhaustion and irritability to dawn on him exactly what Ron said.

"Are you barmy?" Harry raised his head from his camp bed and glared at the fuzzy form of his friend.

Ron shifted slightly and sighed loudly. "Not, you know, the whole soul sucking bit, but at least when they were breeding it was cooler."

The whole situation struck Harry as funny and he couldn't hold in a laugh. It broke free and melted against the wall of heat that surrounded them like a sticky blanket. Ron's laughter mingled with it and Harry let his amusement take over, laughing until his stomach hurt and his head swam in a delirious, pleasant fog.

"I was going to ask... what McGonagall had you doing... that made you lose your mind," he managed to choke out once most of their laughs had faded. Occasionally one of them would chortle again and set the other off, but they were beginning to be capable of speech once more.

Ron groaned. "Levitating stones, actually. Swish and flick!" Ron did an exaggerated impersonation of Hermione and waved his arm around as if it were a wand. "'Member that, Harry?"

"Of course I remember it." Harry sighed and smiled fondly. He really should get up and do something productive, but his whole body ached from working at Hogwarts today. Every other day he and Ron, as well as a whole host of other witches and wizards, Apparated to Hogwarts to help with the rebuilding process. Slowly, it was beginning to look like the castle he'd come to love and think of as home.

"And the whole time, McGonagall is there over my shoulder, pointing to just where she wants each particular stone, and arguing for us—you and me—to come back this fall."

The idea wasn't new and Harry had to admit he was half-tempted to do just that. Spending a year at Hogwarts finishing his education without some madman plotting to kill him was appealing. He also knew it wasn't going to happen; too much had gone on in the last year to allow him to simply pick up the pieces of his life as if nothing had changed. It was time to move forward.

"... and no matter how many times I told her that we weren't going to come back... d'you know I even brought up George and..." Ron faltered in his amused rant and Harry felt the acute pain of loss like a dagger to his stomach. The once-light air in the orange room was heavy with heat and grief, and it was hard to breathe.

"She said I shouldn't use them as an example," Ron finally finished after a long pause. "That they were the exception to the rule."

Harry wasn't sure what to say to make things better. The strangeness of the moment—jovial laughter butted up against sheering pain—was too familiar lately. Everything was out of sorts, like the entire world was limping along, still in pain but not sure how to fix itself.

An apology—one of countless thousands—perched on the end of Harry's tongue but he wisely held it back. Ron would scoff at Harry's notion that he had anything to apologize for anyway. He always did.

"I'll be glad to get back to the shop tomorrow." Ron's words were stiff but he was trying, and Harry let out a shaky breath. Crisis averted for the moment. They wouldn't have to talk about Fred, or death, or anything like that right now. Harry was too drained and hot to think rationally, anyway. He'd probably break down in tears and end up blubbering about.

"I've got to go in to the Ministry." Harry stared at the cracked ceiling and let his mind drift. The oppressive heat of the moment—why were they all the way in the top of the Burrow where the heat pooled incessantly, again?—made any directed thought hard to hold.

"How's that going?" Ron asked, even though he knew the answer. They'd talked in circles the past few weeks. It was easier than admitting things they didn't want to talk about. Not right now, anyway.

"Good." Harry's answer was rarely different. Honestly, he didn't quite know what to make of the Ministry. Working with Kingsley was great, but there were some aspects that still made Harry feel like he was a child walking into an adult's world.

"He... he wants me to be an Auror." Harry's confession hung in the air and he waited for Ron's response. It took so long that Harry wondered if his friend had fallen asleep.

"That's what you want anyway, isn't it?" Ron heaved himself off the bed and sat up. Harry slowly righted himself as well and put his glasses on. "You always talked about being an Auror."

A drip of sweat tickled down the back of his head and ran down Harry's neck. He swiped lazily at it and gave a shrug. "Yeah, but it's different. It's... it's hard to describe. Sometimes I feel like I'm still eleven, staring at this world with no idea how I fit in or what I'm supposed to do next." It sounded weak, even to him, and he wondered if Ron was going to laugh at him for it.

"Yeah." Ron's response startled Harry and he peered at his friend, wondering if the same insecurities plagued all of them. "It seems strange to be out of school and actually... actually thinking about doing something. Like we're staring at the rest of our lives and still have no idea what we're doing."

Harry let out a sigh of relief mingled with frustration. At least someone was feeling the same way he was.

A slow smile spread over Ron's face. "But it feels good, too, doesn't it? I mean, you're going to be an *Auror*."

A flash of pride shivered through Harry and he couldn't help but smile. "A part of me wanted to go and find Umbridge at Azkaban just after Kingsley asked me to join. I wanted to see her face when I told her."

Ron let out a weak chuckle. "You should tell McGonagall next time we're there. Then maybe she'll leave us both alone about going back."

Harry was just about to respond when the back door slammed below them. The sound drifted in through the open window and both boys shifted so they could see who had exited.

Ginny was making her way across the garden toward her father's shed. She swerved slightly, dipping down to grab a gnome from the ground and held it aloft. The little bugger wiggled and squawked at her before she flung it far over the fence. Harry watched, entranced with the simple grace the movement had.

"She's gotten better at that," Ron commented absently. "She used to have pity on the poor things and not fling them as far, but that was when she was really little."

Harry couldn't tear his eyes from her and felt his face heat even further, if possible, when he realized how appreciative he was of how much leg her shorts revealed, or the fact that he could see a bit of pale skin between her shirt and the waistband of the same shorts.

"What's up with you two?"

Ron's question startled Harry and he blinked at his friend, hoping he hadn't voiced his admiration vocally or done something horribly sappy like sigh with longing.

"Er... nothing."

"That's a bit... pathetic." Ron snorted and Harry turned back to look out the open window. "I thought the two of you were all right."

Harry gave a shrug with one shoulder and bit the inside of his lip. In truth, he had no idea what was going on between him and Ginny. He knew he wanted to be with her, wanted to spend time with her, but they were both so busy, and Ginny seemed so... distant.

In a way, he couldn't blame her. There was just so much going on, so much to deal with mentally, that the idea of jumping back into their relationship was too much to consider. They still did things together—Quidditch when it wasn't too hot, mealtimes, they'd even played a game of chess the other day—but neither of them had talked about what they had before or what they might have now.

"We are," Harry answered lamely. "I just... she's just lost her brother, Ron, and we've gone through

so much. I don't want to make her uncomfortable if she doesn't want to be back together like that again."

Ron made a face and snorted with disgust. He got up and began rummaging around on the side of his bed, tossing dirty socks, t-shirts and bits of scrap parchment around. Harry's watched intently for a moment before turning to look at Mr. Weasley's shed once more. Ginny had gone inside. He stared at the open door, hoping to get a glimpse of her, hoping that today would be the day he might see the *look* on her face and know that she was going to be okay, that she wanted to be with him again.

There were times when he thought he might see that longing mirrored in her expression. But they were always so busy, so distracted by piecing the world back together again that the next time he looked, she'd have replaced it with determination, or that horribly vacant, sad look.

And Harry had no idea what to do, what to say to make it all better. He actually had no solid idea whether she wanted to be with him as much as he longed to be with her, in fact. There were just those brief moments where she would smile at him, or when she would touch him in some soft way—her hand trailing along his shoulders as she walked behind him at the dinner table, the way she leaned on him during Fred's funeral, her playful nudges when one of them was taking the piss out of Ron. All of it made him want to pursue what they once shared together even more.

Somewhere deep inside him, Harry thought he might be in love with Ginny. It was a strange sensation to realize it—happy and thrilling and confusing at the same time—and it left his head reeling.

"Ah ha!" Ron stood up triumphantly and waved a battered book in Harry's direction. His hair was matted to his forehead with sweat and Harry blew out a breath. It was horribly hot up here in this tiny little room, but the effort leaving required was beyond Harry right now. He was just too exhausted.

"This is what you need. In fact, you should go to Diagon Alley and get your own since you can't find your copy. I think George may have one, as well. Fred is..." Ron trailed off and stared at the wall for a moment. His jaw locked and Harry swore he could hear his teeth grinding before Ron tossed the book to him. "Fred was always going on about it," Ron finished.

Harry caught the book and turned it over, only to snort at the familiar cover. "Twelve Failsafe Ways—"

"Don't mock it until you've actually read it!" Ron defended. "It works, mate. How'ja think I got on with Lavender, or even Hermione? I'm rubbish with girls, Harry, but that book helps."

Harry tried to bite back a snort but it escaped partially and he could tell Ron was annoyed with him. "Yeah? You really needed charm to get Lavender's attention? I figured all you needed was a set of lips and a healthy dose of suction."

Ron opened his mouth to protest but it died in a wave of amusement that washed over his face. "Suppose you're right." He shrugged and looked out the window. "But I had to have something going for me since she stuck around so long."

The book sat in Harry's lap but he couldn't make himself do more than stare at it. Somehow he didn't think anything he learned from a book would help the situation right now. Surely it wouldn't give advice on how to deal with a girl who was still grieving, or how to get past all that had happened during their year apart.

"I don't need a book," Harry said softly. "I just need time. And to spend some time with her, you know. We're both just... so busy. We're at Hogwarts at least every other day, or I'm at the Ministry, or helping George with the shop. And Ginny's..." He blew out a deep breath and nearly growled in frustration. "She's doing her best to keep the Burrow running. And your mum never lets her out of her sight for long."

"I know." Ron nodded in commiseration. "She'll... she'll get better, mate. Mum's always been like this when something bad happens. She wants to know where all of us are all the time and she worries."

"I do understand, but it makes it hard to spend time with Ginny when she's running about doing things. I know she's been talking about going to the Lovegood's and helping to rebuild it."

Ron's eyebrows lifted and he contemplated that. "Sodding old bugger," he finally mumbled, but the words had a softness to them that took away the edge. Harry held the same feelings toward Xenophilius Lovegood. The old man was borderline insane and had nearly gotten them all killed, but Harry couldn't help feeling sorry for him. He'd only been trying to get his daughter back, after all.

Harry rubbed the cover of the book with his hand, smoothing down the edges that were curled and worn with use. "Thanks, though. I think I'll just try... waiting a bit more."

Ron gave a jerky nod. "Want to go flying?"

Even though the sun outside would be brutal and Harry's idea of relaxing had nothing to do with heaving himself down all the necessary steps to get there, he nodded. "Sure. Sounds good."

How could he turn down flying? Besides, he hadn't been on his broom more than a few short times since replacing his beloved Firebolt. The new broom was nice, even if it was only a Cleansweep. At least if he were flying the wind might allow him an opportunity to cool down.

\* \* \*

Ginny gave a half-hearted knock on the worn door to her father's shed. The hinges squeaked loudly and a fleck of paint fell off, fluttering to the ground when she opened it.

Her father smiled, a slow movement that was genuine.

"Ginny-girl! You finally escaped the house, did you?"

Ginny stepped into the shade of the building, grateful that it was a few degrees cooler inside than it had been out in the sun-soaked garden.

"Mum shooed me out, actually," she said. She trailed her finger along the workbench, nudging his little projects—wires and plugs, batteries and odd things that made little sense to Ginny. "She said

I'd been inside long enough and needed a little fresh air."

He gave a small chuckle and went back to fiddling with something in front of him. To Ginny, it looked like a mass of rainbow wires, all leading to a strange, rectangular tower.

"But," she said slowly as she peered over his shoulder where he sat staring at the mess, "if you ask me, I think she wanted to escape for a kip."

"It's possible." He nodded and his jaw went tight for a minute. Ginny looked away rather than contemplate what they both knew: her mother secreted herself away several times a day when the emotions got to be too much. Everyone called it a nap, and that was fine.

Ginny found herself sad and melancholy at times too, but usually preferred to work through it, rather than let the sadness consume her. Her father was the same—which is why he disappeared out here into his shed and fiddled with his Muggle projects. Ginny was a lot like her father.

"What are you working on?"

"Muggles call it a contraptor," he said with authority and awe. "It's a machine that keeps all sorts of information inside it and then you have to look through it to find what you want."

Ginny peered at the configuration and shook her head in confusion. "Why don't they just look in a book? It seems like such a hassle to have to go through all that mess just to find something."

They both chuckled and Ginny pulled a stool up next to her father. One of the legs was wobbly and prone to falling off at odd times, so you had to balance just right or end up on your behind. To Ginny, that was all part of the thrill of spending long hours in here with her father. The unpredictability of it all was exciting.

"You should be out flying," her father said after they spent long minutes in silence. "Or with one of your friends."

"I thought about going flying," Ginny admitted with a sigh. "It's too hot."

His eyes, encased in creased, pale skin, appraised her and then crinkled at the corners. "It's hot in here, as well."

Ginny felt a prickle of annoyance and frustration but pushed it away. Frustration was an old friend of Ginny's. She'd lived with it for so long that it almost felt normal to feel it creep into her life again. Then again, Ginny did hate the feeling. She dreaded waking up each morning and knowing that there were things she couldn't change, things she was going to have to endure until they ended and something else came along.

"I'm avoiding everyone." The admission seemed strange and it leapt from her before Ginny even registered it had escaped. "I just... I don't feel like myself right now. I wouldn't be good company, anyway."

"Isn't that up to your friends to decide?" Her father asked. His tone was a bit too concerned to be casual, but it didn't bother her like her mother's nagging, or her brothers' teasing. He was usually

allowed to get away with far more than anyone else in the family because Ginny had a soft spot for her father.

A dozen other excuses flew through her head but Ginny didn't give them voice. Instead, she thought about the truth for a minute before saying it aloud.

"Sometimes I feel so broken."

His hands froze and she could see them tremble as they held apart a bundle of wires. The hesitation was momentary, but she could feel the tension rise between them, soaking into the heat and making it feel even stickier as the air pressed around them.

Everything felt like it was on hold right now. The world was slowly creeping forward outside the Burrow, but Ginny saw little evidence of it. She spent most of her time at her mother's side, steadfastly learning household charms and spending precious moments with her mother. Not that Ginny cared to learn how to get stains out of laundry, or the proper way to fold towels so they fit in the cramped cupboards at the Burrow, but it was the time that mattered most. It was the look of satisfaction on her mother's face when mother and daughter completed some household task. It was the quiet moments when her mother would talk of her fears during the last year, cry on Ginny's shoulder over Fred, tell an amusing story of when she was growing up, or simply chat about nothing and everything.

Slowly, Ginny was sharing stories too, although she always censored them for her mother's sake. There was no sense in making her fret over things that were already past.

"I feel like I'm made of glass, and I've shattered into a million pieces that I just don't know how to put together again."

Finally, a sigh escaped her father. He nudged the contraptor away from him slightly and turned to look at her. He looked older—like he'd aged a hundred years in the space of only a few weeks. He slowly pulled his glasses off his face and let them dangle on one finger as he rubbed his sweaty forehead.

"You're not alone, you know?"

"I know," Ginny answered quickly. She rocked her stool slightly and leaned against his workbench. "I think everyone might feel that way."

"I do," he admitted softly. "I do when I see how much some of you are struggling, when your mother takes her naps, when I see Ron and Harry come home covered in dust and looking so tired they might just fall over."

Ginny's stomach gave a lurch at Harry's name, but she tamped it down. That felt broken too, although she couldn't quite decide how.

Harry. Precisely where Ginny's mind would have ended up sooner or later. It was a comfortable, familiar place to land, even though just the simple name brought frustration, as well.

There was a longing there that Ginny couldn't deny. She wanted what they had once shared, even if

it might be an impossible dream right now. So much had happened in the past year, more than Ginny was sure she wanted to even know about. Perhaps ignorance was bliss. Could she handle knowing all that Harry had been through over the past year? Could he handle all that she'd been through?

So much had changed in a year. So much had stayed the same.

Ginny's feelings for Harry hadn't remained unchanged. Instead of the intense, urgent need to be near him when they were first together, there was a relaxed, accepting feel to their friendship. They were both dealing with a lot right now, so jumping into some whirlwind romance wasn't very practical.

Still, Ginny did wish some days that he would give some hint that he wanted more from her. In time, she kept telling herself. In time, they'd spend days together doing everything and nothing. In time, they'd be able to steal five minutes away from the world to do something just for the two of them and not have to race off to Hogwarts, or the Ministry, or help some family member with something.

"But it does get better."

"When?" Ginny demanded. Her face flushed when she realized how she must sound to her father; like an impatient school girl demanding to know everything about the world right then.

He chuckled and slid his glasses back on. "I'd like to say that one morning you'll wake up and everything will be fine, but that's a lie. I *can* tell you that one morning you'll wake up and things will look just the smallest bit brighter. Then the next morning it will be the smallest bit brighter again."

Ginny let out a shaky breath. There were days she felt like the world might be spinning correctly again, but then something would happen to make it wobble once more.

"But you know the best part of it all?"

She waited for him to continue, holding her breath in the stiflingly hot little area that was filled with dust and the tangy taste of electrical things.

"We don't have to do it alone." His whispered words felt like a splash of cool water when they washed over her. She actually trembled and gave a jerky nod.

"When we stumble—and we all do—there's someone there to reach down, lift us back up and hold our hand as we go."

A bubble of emotion filled Ginny from inside and she had to swallow the tightness of her throat away. She wouldn't give into the tears right now. Not in the daylight.

They sat in silence for a moment before Ginny turned to look at the clutter on his bench. "What else do you have around here?"

"Looking to get your hands dirty?" The smile was back on her father's face, the somber moment

banished for something lighter right now.

"Sure." Ginny nodded firmly and let her eyes slide over everything until she found something huddled in the back, peeking from among a tangle of colored wires. She had a vague idea of what it was, but this one was smaller and different from the others she'd seen.

Her thin hand delved into the wire-jungle and extracted the small black box. "It's a camera."

"Mmmhmmm," her father agreed. "Muggle." He said it with such pride that Ginny had to smile.

"Does it still work?" Ginny inspected the buttons, pressing down on them and turning the knob on the top. It gave a satisfying click-click-click.

"I think so." Her father scowled thoughtfully and brushed his finger along the edge of it, removing a thin layer of dust from the black casing. "Perkins brought it in. Someone had charmed it to blind the person looking at the flash."

Ginny clucked her tongue. "Horrible people."

"We removed the curse, but the wizard who had it didn't want it back. I've had it out here forever. I was thinking about taking it apart."

Ginny's fingers closed tighter on the camera, as if she could protect it from the gutting it might receive if she left it here alone. Her eyes darted toward the contraptor which was spilling its insides everywhere.

"Do you... do you mind if I work on it?"

He looked torn for a moment before a soft look came over his face. "It might take some repair to turn out some good pictures. And I have no idea how to develop them."

"I do." Ginny perked up and remembered the acrid smell of the potions that Colin that mixed up to make his photographs appear. "It might be good to have a project."

"It's all yours."

\* \* \*

It was nearly midnight and the temperature was finally low enough that the Weasleys had clambered their way up to bedrooms. Harry, however, was sitting in the deserted living room in the dark, listening to the wireless on low. He honestly had no idea what was playing—some older, mellow music—and wasn't even really paying attention to it. The background noise was a nice distraction, though.

Despite being exhausted, Harry couldn't sleep. It wasn't the heat, as Ron had given in hours ago and cast copious numbers of cooling charms on the room in the highest part of the Burrow. Harry's mind simply wouldn't shut down enough to allow him peace.

If he wasn't thinking about the Ministry tomorrow, he was thinking about helping Professor Flitwick return the portraits back onto the walls at Hogwarts today. The work wouldn't have been so bad,

except that they first had to charm several blood stains off the stones. They also had to calm many of the occupants of the portraits and convince them to stay in their frames. It wasn't that the work was tedious, but it made Harry think far more than was comfortable. He preferred when he was given some task that kept him too busy to think of why the portraits were cowering in the corners of their frames, or had disappeared completely.

One of these days he was going to have to deal with all of the shadows left from the war, and Harry was dreading it. He'd rather just move forward and not think about everything that had happened. It was over now, did it really matter?

A brief flash of Hermione's horrified face flashed in his mind and Harry's lips lifted in a fond smile. 'Of course it would matter,' she would say, 'everything we've gone through shapes us into who we are. We need to talk about it to sort it all out in our minds.'

He could even hear her voice right now, as if she was sitting on the sofa next to him, rather than half a world away, arranging to bring her parents home from Australia.

Harry blew out a frustrated breath and closed his eyes. The music changed into a slow, lazy ballad, something about stirring a cauldron of love. Harry vaguely remembered hearing the song before and wondered if it was one Mrs. Weasley used to sing during the summers when he would visit the Burrow. Everything was so different now. She never sang anymore. She rarely smiled, and it worried Harry.

Mrs. Weasley was the iron backbone of the Weasley family. Harry felt helpless watching the sad, drawn look on her face as she went about her daily chores. And he saw the same frustration on Ginny's face as she followed her mother around and pretended to be interested in cleaning the dishes just so, and the proper way to charm the washer to get the stains out of clothing.

Ginny was another worry. She hadn't come to dinner tonight, even. Mr. Weasley scolded his wife when she fretted about the empty spot at the table, and told her that Ginny was working on a project. She'd be in when she came in, he said firmly, ending any building argument.

The clock on the mantel chimed midnight softly and Harry listened to the low sound of the song it played mingled with the song on the wireless. He really should go up to bed; morning was going to be hard if he waited up much longer. He yawned widely but couldn't bring himself to move. Secretly, he'd been waiting for Ginny to come in from the shed ever since dinner ended. When the Weasleys went off to bed one by one, Harry thought maybe he'd finally gotten lucky enough to find some time for just the two of them alone.

He'd been sitting in the dark thinking of what to say, but hadn't made it past greeting her and stammering about nonsense things.

The creak of the floorboards in the kitchen startled Harry from his imagined conversations and he pulled his wand, more out of habit than alarm. The Burrow was secure; he knew that.

Ginny came into the living room a second later and startled at seeing someone still awake. Her hair was escaping the disheveled ponytail and bits of it clung to her forehead, stuck there with moisture from the hot night.

“Hi.” Harry felt his face heat when every cool, suave thing he’d planned to say managed to disappear, and the simple greeting slipped from his mouth instead.

She blinked at him and then her lips twisted into a small smile. “Hi. Didn’t expect anyone to be up still.”

Harry shrugged and shifted on the sofa. He wanted to invite her to sit down, but maybe she was tired. Maybe she wanted nothing more than to go up to her bed and sleep.

“Yeah, er... too hot to sleep.”

She smiled again and took a step toward him. Harry rested his hand on the sofa, hesitating in his invitation for her to join him.

“I know. I... I got carried away out there. Even forgot to come in for dinner.”

Harry latched onto the train of thought. While the conversation started out awkward, it seemed to be getting easier. “Your Mum saved you a plate. It’s in the kitchen, kept under a charm.”

“Oh.” She seemed surprised and looked back over her shoulder toward the kitchen door. “Honestly, I don’t think I could eat anything now, anyway. This heat saps all the energy from everything.”

“It does,” Harry agreed. They slipped into silence and Harry debated what to tell her next. Ginny shifted in place and glanced at the stairs before taking a further step into the living room.

Harry let out a shuddering breath and prayed that he was reading her hesitation right. She’d just chosen to stay here and talk with him rather than going to bed. Right? He cursed internally and wished they could get back to the easy-to-understand, light relationship they’d once had. Before everything had gone pear-shaped they could talk for hours about everything and nothing.

Ginny didn’t sit down, but moved across the room to study the wall where various framed photographs of the family hung. Some of the frames were empty—the pictures had been damaged or ruined completely when the Death Eaters called and found the Weasleys had gone into hiding during the war. Just like the portraits at Hogwarts.

She moved to stand in front of the wall and lifted her fingers to trace one of the empty frames. “This one used to be my favorite. Mum’s had the same ones here forever.”

Harry stood awkwardly and moved to stand behind her—close enough that he was awash in the scent and heat of her, but not quite touching her. “What was it of?”

His closeness seemed to startle Ginny, but she didn’t move away, just looked over her shoulder at his face.

“I was three. Ron, George and... and Fred took me down to the pond to catch frogs. They had me convinced if I caught one and kissed it...” She trailed off and Harry chuckled.

“Searching for your prince, were you?”

Her gaze steeled into something much hotter than the air around them, yet it made Harry shiver.

"Something like that," she answered with a smile. "Mum came out and caught us all covered in mud. I thought she was going to yell, but then she ran back in and came out with an old camera that Dad had fixed up. She made us all line up and show off our frogs."

Harry chuckled and tried to remember if he'd ever paid attention to the picture before. How he wished he could see it; see the look of triumph on their mud-covered faces as they held up treasures for their mother to be proud of.

"Mine was the biggest," Ginny said proudly.

"What about this one?" Harry leaned around Ginny and touched an empty frame. It rocked slightly on its nail, showing off a bit of pale wall behind it that was covered in fresh paint.

"Hmmm." Ginny tilted her head to the side and shifted her weight on one hip, moving closer to him. Harry's heart thumped loudly in his chest and he wondered if he had enough courage to take her hand in his. "I'm pretty sure that one was of Bill and Charlie trying to goad baby Percy into eating cooked carrots. They were all quite small."

Harry's arm brushed Ginny's when he touched the next frame. "And this one?"

Ginny hesitated and looked at him before answering. "Mum and Dad's wedding photo. The only one they had."

His breath caught in his throat and Harry swallowed the emotion away. So many memories ruined by idiocy; ruined by people who didn't care about the occupants of the photograph, who only cared about a means to an end.

"Mum has it up in her room. She thinks it might be able to be repaired."

"That's good," Harry said softly. His hand fumbled for hers and her fingers folded into his as if they'd never been apart. In this moment, there was no year lost between them; there were no shadows and pain to leap over to achieve this outcome. There was just the two of them.

"I wish there was a way to replace them." Ginny's voice sounded tired and Harry felt guilty for standing in the middle of the Burrow after midnight, keeping Ginny from her sleep.

"Maybe we can find a way." It sounded like a hollow promise, but Harry wanted to try. He wanted to do anything he could to make Ginny smile again like she had tonight, even if it was only for a minute.

Slowly, they turned to look at each other. Harry's hand reached up and tugged lightly on a piece of hair that hung down by the side of her face.

"I probably look a fright," she said and lifted her hand to rest it alongside her head.

"You look fine to me," he protested quietly.

She smiled once more and Harry felt his heart might climb out of his chest by way of his throat. Maybe it was as easy as taking her hand, saying a few words, and leaning over to kiss her. Maybe all

of the mess between them, around them, didn't have to get in the way.

Maybe...

Harry leaned closer and let his finger trace the edge of her jaw, catching un-gracefully on her sticky skin. They both smiled and he leaned in. Their lips just barely brushed when someone clomped down the stairs, yawning loudly.

They jumped apart as if they'd been burned and Harry swore softly when Ron, his dressing gown half-hanging from his shoulder on one side, appeared.

"You all right, mate? I thought you'd come to bed earlier."

The urge to tell Ron to piss off and kiss Ginny anyway was great, but she'd moved far enough away from him that Harry couldn't reach her without moving himself.

"Yeah," Harry sighed. "We were just talking."

Ron's eyes widened when he realized Ginny was there and a sly smile spread over his sleepy face. "Sorry. Didn't mean to interrupt."

"Yes, you did," Ginny scolded. She rolled her eyes and gave a frustrated huff of annoyance. "I'm tired anyway."

Harry's jaw clenched when she gave him a long look over her shoulder, and then brushed past Ron on the stairs. He had to laugh in appreciation when she did something to make Ron yelp and jump away from her as she passed.

"I'll *talk* to you later, Harry."

"Yeah." Harry nodded and waited until he heard the sound of her door closing before turning to glare at Ron. "Thanks for that, *mate*."

Ron's face spread into a grin and he shrugged unrepentantly. "I really didn't mean to interrupt, you know."

"Wanker," Harry hissed. He flicked his wand at the wireless and the song died out. "You owe me."

"Yeah? I thought you were just talking," Ron challenged. He nudged Harry in the ribs when Harry tried to pass him on the stairs.

Harry pushed back and they scuffled lightly, wrestling back and forth before the effort became too much in the confined space and dark of night.

"Talking, my ass," Ron scoffed. "You two were snogging."

"Not yet, thanks to you," Harry grumbled. The idea of snogging Ginny again made a shiver of pleasure run through him.

"That's really smooth, Harry, snogging your girlfriend in the living room of her parents' house with

her brothers right upstairs.”

Harry bit his lip rather than respond and moved faster up the stairs, ignoring Ron when he followed.

“I told you that book would be useful.”

“I didn’t use the book, you git,” Harry finally growled. “I don’t need a book.”

Ron snorted and tried to trip Harry by grabbing his ankle. “Do so,” he argued and laughed far too loudly for how late it was. “Otherwise you’d find a better place to—”

“Oi, shut it, Ron,” Harry said and kicked away from Ron’s grip. Despite his irritation at being interrupted, he couldn’t help but be amused by his friend’s teasing. He reached their shared room and tried to close the door before Ron could enter.

Ron growled through the opening. “Prat.”

“Bastard,” Harry retorted back with a laugh. He braced his foot on the floor and tried to hold the door, but Ron outweighed him and it was no contest.

Ron finally forced his way in and pushed Harry onto his camp bed. “Ruddy plonker. You’re going to wake the whole house and then I’ll have to tell them I caught you snogging Ginny in a dark room downstairs. Might even mention that I couldn’t tell where your hands were.”

Harry rolled his eyes up at the ceiling and pulled himself up onto the bed fully. “Piss off,” he demanded, fighting back a chuckle.

They lay in the too-warm room and listened to the night sounds drifting in the open window.

Harry tucked his hands behind his head and closed his eyes, replaying the moment downstairs and cheerfully emitting Ron’s interruption from his mind. His dark mood from before was forgotten completely as he imagined kissing Ginny until both of their heads spun and they forgot all about anything else in the world.

“Harry...”

Harry lifted his head and looked up at Ron, who was lying on his bed, staring up at the ceiling.

“I’m happy for both of you.”

“You still owe me,” Harry said softly. “Git.”

Ron snorted and rolled over in the narrow bed, making the old springs groan and protest under his weight.

\* \* \*

“You’ve got it all back together now?”

Ginny stared at the camera in her hands and blinked at it. “I suppose. It still doesn’t work right.”

Her father reached for it and fiddled with the knobs, pressing buttons and peering at every surface. "I'm not sure what to tell you."

"I think... I think I may need to find some sort of manual for it, or a book or something," Ginny said. "Otherwise it's going to be a lost cause."

He handed the camera back to her and patted her shoulder gently. "You've spent a lot of time on that. It would be a shame to write it off now."

A slow smile spread over Ginny's face. "I think I'll go into Diagon Alley tomorrow and see what I can find."

Her father gave a pained look and sucked in a breath. Ginny waited for him to argue but was relieved when he didn't squash the idea completely.

"It's something you'll have to clear with your mother."

Ginny bristled and thought about pointing out that she was nearly of age, but turned to look at her camera instead. They worked in silence for a long time while Ginny let her thoughts roam.

Getting permission to go to Diagon Alley by herself wasn't going to be an easy thing to convince her mother of. Perhaps if she'd gone today, while Ron and George were doing repairs on the shop, she might have stood a chance. But it really wasn't Diagon Alley that she needed to visit. Mentioning Muggle London was sure to send her mother into fits. Ginny could just imagine the gasp and the way she would clutch her chest and grope for the table to hold herself up. It was all overly dramatic, but Ginny understood the sentiment behind it, even if she hated being treated like a child still.

Once she'd cleaned every bit of the outside case for the camera with the worn flannel that she'd found by rummaging on her father's workbench, Ginny stared at the project. It looked perfect and she was disappointed that it didn't work yet. It was probably messed up inside somehow. All the pieces inside looked right, but Ginny had to admit she'd never seen the inside of a camera before.

If only she could owl Colin and...

A pang of sadness shuddered through her and her hand shook. She set the camera on the wooden table and stared at it through blurry vision. She refused to let tears fall—now wasn't the time—and blinked them furiously away.

She couldn't ask Colin because he was gone. Just as Fred was. And Tonks. And Remus. And so many others.

The conversation she had with her father just yesterday drifted into her mind. 'It gets better.' He'd said that but Ginny wasn't sure she could believe it. There were moments when she thought it might be getting better—like last night when Harry had been so close she could hear his heartbeat and feel the prickle of his heat on her skin. Everything had been almost perfect then.

But it wasn't. And Ginny knew that. She'd wanted to talk to him, to touch his skin and feel his breath on her face. She'd dreamed of kissing him for weeks now—for the past year, if she was honest with herself—but something deep inside her whispered that it was too fast. It wasn't right to

fall back into what they'd once had.

So much was different.

One kiss wouldn't wipe away all that was between them, and all that surrounded them. It wouldn't make the pang of loss any duller. It wouldn't erase the worry from her mother's face. It wouldn't ease the awkward silence when Harry and Ron came home from Hogwarts with their faces lined in dust and weariness. And it wouldn't erase the memories of the things Ginny had experienced.

One kiss just wasn't magical enough.

"I think maybe it's broken."

She was staring at the camera but not talking about it. Her father made a sound in the back of his throat and came to stand behind her once more. "Do you think it can be fixed?"

Ginny took in a shaky breath and let her mind wander back through the moments of last night. Harry's hand had been warm and familiar in hers. She still craved his touch and wanted to see him smile. "I want to fix it."

"I think all it takes is a little effort."

She nodded and leaned her temple into his lips when he pressed a kiss there. "And you don't have to do it alone. I'm sure you can find someone to help you."

Even though they were speaking about very different things, Ginny thought it was ironic that the advice still applied.

If she wanted to repair—or, really, just rebuild—what she and Harry had, they were going to have to work on it together. And it was going to take effort, and time. Not simply a stolen kiss in the middle of the night.

"You let me know if you need a few galleons to buy parts and whatnot." Ginny looked up as her father paused at the door to his shed.

She gave a distracted nod and kept looking at the camera, not really seeing the plastic and metal and glass, but the parts of herself that needed to be put back together to equal a whole Ginny again.

\* \* \*

Ron was already up when Harry rolled over in bed. Mrs. Weasley had offered him another bedroom in the house rather than have him use the old camp bed in Ron's room, but the Burrow had been teeming with people those first few weeks after the Battle. Charlie had come and stayed for several weeks to help. Members of the Order were in and out, often staying over when their meetings ran late. Harry sometimes sat in on the meetings, but grew tired of listening to the same things being rehashed time and time again. Kingsley kept him well apprised of any situations that needed his attention.

It seemed strange that now that Harry was of age and allowed to be involved in the Order, he wasn't nearly as interested. There was still a desire in him to put things right, to help where he could, but for the first time in a very long time the urgency wasn't there. He had time.

He stared at the faded, peeling orange paint on the wall just above his head and sighed. He needed to get up and moving for the day. They were due at Hogwarts soon and he would need a good breakfast in him to last through whatever tasks Professor McGonagall had set aside for them today.

Slowly, the old castle was being pieced back together. It was a deliberate, tedious process, but one that Harry felt he needed to be involved in. Each bit that went back together—each stone levitated in, each wall rebuilt, each statue or portrait back in place—seemed to heal Harry the tiniest bit. There was still a very long way to go, but at least he was accomplishing something.

Once cleaned up, Harry went downstairs where he could hear Ron talking. The table was full and Harry fought the urge to blush when everyone turned his way.

"Had a lie in, did you?" George smiled.

Harry shrugged a shoulder and glanced at Ginny who smirked at him. He ran a hand over his hair self-consciously and sank into his seat. "I didn't realize how tired I was, apparently."

"It's no bother," Mrs. Weasley soothed. She slid a plate of eggs and bacon in front of him and ruffled his hair, messing up any progress he had achieved in getting it to lay flat. "You've earned a bit of a rest, I'd say. Working at Hogwarts and the Ministry... and don't forget all you do around here."

"We deserve a holiday," Ron mumbled with a faint smile.

Harry poured a glass of pumpkin juice and started into his breakfast.

"Right, well, I'm off." George stood and Harry had to catch his juice glass to keep it from spilling all over his plate. Ginny raised an eyebrow and mouthed 'nice catch' before she stuck her foot out into the space where George was just going to step. He either saw her movement or anticipated the motion because he gave a little hop over her leg.

"Nice try," he quipped before pressing a kiss to his mother's cheek. "I'll be back late. Some of the blokes were going to get together at the pub..."

"You should try and meet a nice girl, George." Mrs. Weasley wiped the corner of George's mouth with her thumb and managed to clean off the spot of bacon grease, even when George tried to pull away and grumbled loudly.

Ron and Ginny both snickered and Mr. Weasley ruffled his paper. Harry thought he could see the Weasley Patriarch's shoulder shake in silent laughter. A wave of affection and normality filled the air and Harry clung to it for just a moment.

"Geroff, Mum!" George batted her hand away and scrubbed at his cheek moodily. "I'm sure some of the girls will show up too, but I'm not interested."

“Angelina certainly seemed interested in you last time she was here.”

Harry glanced up to see George’s ears flame bright red as he grabbed a handful of floo powder. He grumbled something before tossing it in the grate and disappearing into Diagon Alley.

Mrs. Weasley began to gather up the plates and dishes, directing them with her wand to float toward the sink. Harry quickly scraped his remaining eggs and bacon onto his toast before his plate disappeared.

“And you two are off to Hogwarts soon, I suppose. It’ll be just you and me again today, Ginny.”

“Actually...” Ginny hesitated and cast a glance past Harry to her father. The dishes hovered in air rather than progressing as Mrs. Weasley turned to look at her daughter. “I... I was sort of hoping to go into Diagon Alley today, Mum. I have something I’m working on and... and I need a few things.”

Harry winced when something sharp collided with his shin. He rubbed the sore spot and glared at Ron, who was angling his head toward Ginny. Meaning... what? Was he indicating that Ginny had kicked Harry?

“Oh.” Mrs. Weasley faltered for a moment and Harry could see the indecision on her face. “I don’t know if that’s a good idea, Ginny. Diagon Alley isn’t safe—”

Ginny bristled instantly and Harry watched the interplay between mother and daughter with trepidation. He hadn’t seen them argue in a long time; probably since the day of the Battle when Mrs. Weasley insisted that Ginny stay in the Room of Requirement.

“Its fine, Mum!” Ginny sighed. “George is there almost every day. And Ron, too.”

“But it’s different for you, Ginny.” Mrs. Weasley’s wand flicked swiftly and the dishes began vigorously washing in the sink, clanking together loudly enough that Harry thought there might be a few new chips next time he saw them. “You’re a young lady and you shouldn’t be prancing around—”

“Prancing around?” Ginny rose out of her chair and Harry was struck at how beautiful she was when she was angry. Perhaps it was simply because her ire was directed somewhere else—not at him—but her cheeks held more color than he’d seen in a long time and her eyes blazed brightly. “I wouldn’t be—”

Ron kicked Harry once more and made a more obvious nod toward Ginny.

Harry hissed and choked on the bite of toast he’d just taken. When he didn’t respond, Ron cleared his throat.

“Harry could go with her.”

The argument between the two witches died out and they both turned on Ron, who was grinning widely.

Harry gaped at his best friend and tried to figure out why he was being drawn into the fray. “Er...”

"But Harry's going to Hogwarts," Mrs. Weasley protested. "They need him there."

Harry cleared the food out of his mouth, his mind whirling at the situation. Instantly, he knew what he wanted to do, but should he really go with Ginny? After all, he was doing something important at Hogwarts.

"It's a good idea, Molly." Mr. Weasley spoke for the first time that morning. He lowered his paper and looked at Harry appraisingly. "And Ginny's been cooped up long enough, I think."

"Well, Harry?" Ron slapped Harry on the back and he slid to the front of his seat in response.

"Er... I suppose I could... I guess I don't have to..." He fumbled for the right thing to say and looked up at Ginny. The answer came with definite clarity when he saw the look of hope in her eyes. "Yeah. Yeah, I can go."

"Brilliant," Ron said cheerfully. "I'll explain to McGonagall. We'll be fine without you today, mate. Plenty of help." He popped the last of his toast in his mouth.

Mrs. Weasley still seemed apprehensive and held a silent conversation with Mr. Weasley—something Harry noticed they did quite often. She finally sighed and played with the edge of her apron. "I suppose it would be all right, if Harry went along."

Ginny ruffled slightly but finally nodded. She stood and gathered her plate before leaving the table.

Harry finished the last of his breakfast and watched Ginny's back. She'd taken over charming the dishes, saving them from clanking loudly together.

Mrs. Weasley left the kitchen with a basket on her arm, out to collect the eggs for the day from the chickens.

"Now I don't owe you," Ron whispered. He cast a furtive glance at his sister. "You two can find somewhere else to... talk." He gave a smug smile and left the kitchen with a skip in his step. Harry cursed him fondly.

*What a wonderful, meddling git.*

"You don't have to come, you know."

Harry started when Ginny spoke to him. He glanced at Mr. Weasley who was gathering up his newspaper and smiling to himself. Ginny looked over her shoulder at him and Harry swallowed his bite before gathering the few remaining dishes on the table.

"I want to," he insisted as he came to stand next to her. Their shoulders brushed and Harry felt a thrill just standing next to her. Their eyes met and Harry's body shivered with anticipation. "I really do."

Slowly, a smile stretched across her face. "All right."

"I need to change, though," Harry said. He gestured down at his dusty jeans and worn t-shirt. "I'd planned on Hogwarts today."

"You really don't have to come," Ginny said once more. Harry wondered if there was a reason she didn't want him to come, she was being so adamant. "Despite what my mother thinks, I'm perfectly capable—"

"Of course, I want to spend the day with you," Harry answered quickly. "And I'm not going as some sort of... minder, or anything."

She seemed mollified and smiled again. "Okay, then. I'll wait for you."

\* \* \*

Diagon Alley looked almost the same as it always had. Ginny's eyes could pick out the new and repaired bits, though. Madam Malkin's had a new sign, and Flourish & Blotts had new paint around the windows. Olivanders was shabbily put together, but she could see that the little sign in the window said 'open'. Some store windows were still dark and there was scaffolding up around Gringotts where the goblins were working on charming it. Harry flinched when she pointed it out and she wondered just what had happened on the reported escape from the Wizarding bank.

So far all that Ginny knew had been reported in the papers. Neither Harry or his sidekicks had said anything about it to her.

They wandered down Diagon Alley after searching Flourish & Blotts unsuccessfully for a repair book for the camera. Several times Ginny thought Harry might take her hand; he brushed hers, but he didn't initiate anything.

"I think we may have to go out into Muggle London," she finally said, doing her best to make it sound casual.

Harry glanced down the alley before looking at her. A crooked smile stretched his face. "Ah, now the real story comes out. And just how did you plan to navigate London on your own today, Miss Weasley?"

Ginny felt her face heat but gave him a determined look. "The same way I do everything, Mr. Potter. Remember what I've told you about nerve?"

He smiled and finally slipped his hand into hers. "Good thing I decided to come along, then, I can only imagine how far your *nerve* would get you on the Tube."

Despite her misgivings about having Harry childmind today, Ginny felt better and better about his presence as they spent more time together. It wasn't like being with one of her overly protective brothers as she'd feared. Harry teased her for being so naïve about London, but he didn't forbid her to go like her mother would, or get that crease between his eyebrows like Ron would, or even smirk knowingly like George would. He trusted that she'd go into London with or without him.

And he was right.

Granted, having him along was a bonus that Ginny hadn't been hopeful to count on.

Once they were through the Leaky Cauldron—protesting Tom's insistence that they have a

Butterbeer on him and dodging one reporter who kept snapping pictures of them together—Harry turned to her and gestured to the road ahead of them.

“Where to, Ginny?”

She blinked and studied the shop fronts around them. “I...” Her nerve and courage took a blow in the face of the enormity of it all. “I don’t know,” she finally admitted.

Instead of laughing at her, or rolling his eyes, Harry simply nodded. “Then I suppose we’ll find out together.” He took her hand again and they ambled down the sidewalk, peering into windows now and again. Harry was a wealth of information once she got him started talking. He told her about the coffee shops where you could get a hundred different varieties of drink, and how the Tube worked, and the things he’d seen when the Dursleys had come into London. It was the most she’d heard him talk in more than a year, and Ginny relished it.

“There’s an idea.” He pointed to a bookstore across the road. “Want to give it a go?”

“Yes,” Ginny said with relief. As much as she was enjoying spending time with Harry, she did want to find a book that showed how her camera worked and might give her an idea how to fix it.

Harry explained the pelican crossing and warned her not to dally on the stripes. In London, especially, it seemed to be the goal of every driver to mow down pedestrians when the opportunity arose. When Ginny muttered about that, Harry laughed and agreed.

The bookstore was a monstrosity several floors tall. Ginny stared up at it with wide eyes and decided that if anyone should have a book, this place should.

Harry led her through the aisles, winding them deeper and deeper. They got lost twice and had to ask the people that worked there for directions. In the end, they simply followed the little signs that directed them toward the photography section.

“Hermione would never leave this place,” Ginny said as she looked around. Harry got a thoughtful look on his face before he chuckled.

“Do you miss her?” Ginny asked casually. She tried to watch his expression while looking like she was simply browsing the books. “I know the two of you spent a lot of time together this last year.”

“I suppose.” Harry shrugged non-committally. “Haven’t really thought about it much, to be honest.” He pulled a book from the shelf and flipped through the pages. “I guess it’s because I know she’ll be back soon.”

When Ron had admitted to his family that he’d abandoned Harry and Hermione before Christmas, Ginny hadn’t spoken to him for days. The admission was a guilty slip, though, and she’d been forced to examine what her own reaction to the pressure might have been if she’d been with them rather than dealing with things at Hogwarts. There was much more to the story, she knew, because all three of them got red-faced when she asked about it.

Honestly, all the secrecy was driving her insane, but she did understand it. Ginny had secrets of her own, after all.

"I missed all of you last year." It was the closest she'd come to talking about her Hogwarts experience, and Ginny felt herself hesitate about even mentioning that much.

Harry's face tightened and he opened his mouth several times to respond before closing it and rethinking his words. "I can only imagine."

Ginny noticed that Harry hadn't changed the subject like he normally did. Maybe they were beginning to make progress. She didn't need a grand confession of every minute they'd spent apart during the last twelve months, but there was so much that lay unspoken between them. It felt like an impenetrable wall looming huge.

"At times it was dead boring."

Harry actually laughed and put his book back on the shelf. He came over to stand next to her as she looked through book after book, not finding what she needed in any of them. "Yeah, leading a rebellion and breaking into Snape's office is definitely something that puts you to sleep."

It was the first time he'd acknowledged that he knew something that she'd gotten up to. There was a tone about his words, but he wasn't scolding, and Ginny had to smirk.

"Well, it certainly wasn't infiltrating the Ministry or stealing dragons, but someone has to do the menial tasks."

He flinched but finally managed a quirk of his lips. "I was terrified half the time last year." His admission was small, but honest. It caused goosebumps to rise on Ginny's arms and she quickly looked away. "Are you finding anything helpful?"

Ginny cleared her throat, knowing that Harry had reached his limit with the subject for the time being. "Not at all."

"Let's try somewhere else then." Harry shifted uncomfortably and glanced at the two young women who were staring at him. Ginny glared in their direction and took Harry's hand in hers as they left the stacks of books. "Maybe a camera shop."

"Wherever," Ginny said with a shrug. The urgency of her project had faded with the prospect of spending time with Harry. Perhaps if they didn't find what she was looking for today he might come with her again. She could prolong the project indefinitely, if needed.

As soon as the thought entered her mind, Ginny dismissed it. That wasn't fair. Harry was doing important things at the Ministry and Hogwarts. He didn't belong to her, just as she didn't belong to him.

"What are you going to take pictures of when you fix the camera?" Harry asked when they were back out on the street.

"Everything." Ginny grinned. "I just feel like... like life can be so fleeting. I want to capture it all. You know, I never understood why Colin was forever behind his camera, snapping away." Her voice faltered and Ginny swallowed past a lump in her throat at the thought of her absent friend. "Now... now I think I understand."

"Me too," said Harry. He squeezed her hand and they shared a smile. "I think I'd like to have had a picture of Hermione's face when we were on the dragon. Of course, we were all out of our minds right then. But her face..." He broke off and a full, genuine smile bloomed on his face.

Ginny picked up the cue. "Oh, I can only imagine. And dragons! Did you tell Charlie about it? He'd go barmy."

Harry hesitated before shaking his head. "No one besides Kingsley really knows all of it. Bill knew we were going into Gringotts."

Ginny nodded and held tightly to his arm as they wound their way toward the address the clerk at the bookstore had given them. "Mum would throw a wobbly if she knew half the things any of us did..." She trailed off and looked away. The shadows were close today, knocking to be let out. But here with Harry, Ginny felt as if there was just enough light that maybe she didn't have to be so frightened of them anymore.

"Probably best that she doesn't," Harry said. His voice was tight and his eyes dark.

"Oh, there it is!" The sign with a large camera on it came into view and Ginny was grateful for the reprieve. They'd had enough of the shadows for now.

\* \* \*

The shop turned out to be exactly what Ginny needed. The little old man with thick glasses that ran the place recognized Ginny's camera right away and even helped them to fix something he called the focus mount, and then the film advance. He sold them film and insisted on giving Ginny a book about how to develop the photographs.

Harry watched as the enthusiastic, curious Ginny he remembered made an appearance. It seemed today that she was determined to cling to the normal that they both craved, and Harry was thrilled to discover that he felt some of it seeping into him too.

Ginny was amazing. Even when their world had been torn apart, she managed to find some bit of sunshine to brighten everything.

"Thank you so much, Harry."

When they were outside the door, standing on the crowded sidewalk, Ginny threw herself into his arms and nearly choked him with her eagerness. Harry was forced to wrap his arms around her to keep them both upright.

"I can't thank you enough."

Her eyes were bright and crinkled at the corners when she pulled back. Harry swallowed thickly and couldn't stop himself from pressing his lips to hers. She responded slowly and the kiss was over far too soon for Harry. The carefree abandon that had decorated her face a moment before was gone when he pulled back and Harry cursed himself silently.

*Too fast.*

"Maybe we should get back," he said awkwardly.

Ginny nodded and put the bag she'd brought over her shoulder, but she did take his hand in hers as they walked.

"I think we should plan what pictures we're going to take."

Harry watched the traffic on the road. "I thought this was *your* project." He glanced at her and was happy to see that the discomfort from before seemed to be forgotten in her excitement.

"Oh, I seem to remember you diving willingly in this morning."

He smiled and swung their hands gently as they walked. "Ahh, well, if I'd known what I was getting myself into..."

"I see how you are," Ginny scoffed. "Give you an easy task and you're fine, but when the hard work begins you scarper."

Harry snorted. "Five years of school together should have convinced you of that already."

"Hermione did say you and Ron never did your homework, and copied from her every chance you got."

Harry wanted to argue with that but he really couldn't. "We both owe her any decent marks we got," he said fondly. He hadn't realized how much he missed his friend until Ginny had brought it up earlier today. "We're both going to struggle out in the real world."

Ginny wound her arm tightly into his and Harry's heart thumped happily. Maybe his earlier stolen kiss hadn't ruined everything like he'd worried. "You'll do fine. I'm just hoping she'll help me with N.E.W.T.'s this year."

"Just ask," said Harry. "I'm sure she'll be thrilled to have someone who actually wants to study."

"Lovely." Ginny groaned. "And since the two of you aren't coming back, I'll have her undivided attention." Her eyes went wide and Harry had to chuckle at the look.

"I'll give you the map and the cloak," he offered. "You can hide from her."

Ginny laughed and whole-heartedly accepted his offer. "At least I'll have Quidditch to bleed off the frustration." She sounded a bit wry about it and Harry peered at her.

"Do you still want to play when you leave school?"

She started and Harry wondered if she even remembered telling him about her dream. "Yeah," she finally answered slowly. "I do, but I'm not going to count on it."

"You'll be brilliant," he said. "If any of us had a shot at it, it was you."

"Any team would sign you in a heartbeat, Harry," Ginny argued.

Harry scowled. "Not for the right reasons."

Ginny was quiet until they stood looking at the grubby door that led to the Leaky Cauldron. "Does it bother you? The fame. The reporters. The witches." She added the last bit with a nasty smile and Harry bristled.

"Sometimes."

"You and I are going to be on the front page tomorrow, I guarantee it," Ginny said in a quiet voice.

Harry pondered that. He didn't want the whole world sticking their noses into his business, but being linked to Ginny wasn't the worst thing they could print, as long as she didn't mind.

"Does it bother *you*?" It was the closest Harry could bring himself to asking if she wanted to be with him again, but those words just wouldn't leave his mouth.

She was far too quiet and Harry's insides twisted horribly. *This is where she tells you that she just wants to be your friend.*

"It doesn't bother me at all." There was a spark in her eye when he turned to look that set Harry alight. Her almost constant, silent determination was back.

"Good." He took her hand in his and led her back into the Wizarding world.

Back at the Burrow, Ginny brought him into her father's shed and they sat on the wobbly stools while Ginny explained everything she'd done. Honestly, Harry didn't care about the camera in her hands, but he listened anyway. They were together, they were talking—even if it was rather one-sided and about nothing really—and Harry felt like they'd taken another step toward being back where they should be.

"I think it's all ready," she said finally. "Now we just have to take some photos."

"What do you want to take a picture of?"

Ginny thought about it for a minute before a smile spread across her face. "Let's go see what Mum is up to."

Harry laughed at her mischievous nature, but tagged along to see what she was going to do.

Mrs. Weasley was in the garden, plucking weeds from her orderly rows of vegetables. Ginny and Harry walked quietly and she didn't notice that they were even there. Ginny motioned for Harry to stay put and he nodded as she crept closer, readying the camera. Mrs. Weasley crawled forward a row and glanced up just as Ginny snapped the photograph, catching her with a wide streak of dirt down her face.

"Ginevra Weasley!"

"Sorry, Mum!" Ginny laughed gaily. She snapped another picture when her mother put her hands on her hips and scowled.

"I can't believe you would waste a photograph on such a silly thing."

Ginny romped back to Harry and they quickly made themselves scarce.

"We should try and catch George at the shop," Ginny suggested. Harry went along with it, knowing that he'd do pretty much anything to spend more time with Ginny.

They caught George levitating a stack of huge boxes and startled him enough that the entire load tilted precariously. Ginny snapped the picture just as the tower wobbled and collapsed, covering George in WonderWitch products.

Their day continued just like that. They would scout their prey and take a photograph before Harry Apparated them to safety or they flooded away. Bill and Neville, Dean and Luna, even Ron when he had a mouth full of roast beef sandwich. One by one they captured their friends.

After catching Fleur with her hair wrapped in magical curlers and Mr. Weasley asleep on the sofa, they ended the day with a visit to Teddy.

"Here's something we need to take photos of," Harry said. Teddy grinned up at him and tried to stuff his toes into his mouth. Ginny watched fondly and took another photograph.

"I agree."

"Every time I come he's different," said Harry. "Before you know it he'll be walking and talking."

The flash went off again and Harry had the feeling that she'd taken a picture of him, not Teddy. He felt his cheeks heat and let Teddy wrap his spit-covered fingers around Harry's.

"Harry, today when you kissed me..." Ginny let the words die and Harry watched Teddy rather than look at her. He wasn't sure what he expected, other than to be rebuffed. The few times they'd been close enough to kiss, he'd initiated them and while Ginny hadn't protested, she didn't seem to enjoy it much.

"I wanted to kiss you."

It wasn't what he expected her to say and he looked up, only to find a sad look on her face as she stared off into Andromeda's living room. "But..."

"I won't force you to do what you don't want, Ginny," he said. "Just because I want something—"

"Let me finish, Harry," she snapped and then sighed loudly. "I just... I want us to be together again, but we can't... we can't just pretend that nothing else has happened."

He nodded jerkily and studied Teddy. If he wasn't evidence of the passage of time, Harry didn't know what was.

"We can't pretend that we haven't changed," he agreed.

"Exactly." Ginny sounded relieved that he understood. "We're both dealing with a lot right now and jumping right back to where we think we might have been... it won't work."

Harry thought about that but didn't know what the answer to the problem was. While he had changed a lot over the year, his wishes and desires had stayed the same. He still wanted to be an Auror. He still wanted a family. And he still wanted to be with Ginny. He just wasn't sure how to explain that to her.

"I think... maybe we need to spend some time together, get to know each other again."

"Yeah," he said. "We've both been too busy."

"What we've been doing has been good," said Ginny, "but..."

"But we're important, as well."

"I... I want to fall in love with you, Harry, not just with the idea of you."

Her words startled him and Harry gaped at her. He hadn't ever thought of it that way, but now that she'd said it, he understood exactly what she meant.

"I... I thought of you. All the time." His beginning was halting and he wasn't even sure if now was the time to tell her this, or to tell her anything about their year apart. "I watched your dot on the map and wished there was some way to tell you, to let you know we were all right."

She scooted closer and let Teddy take her finger as well. "I used to pray for news each morning, and then dread when the owls would swoop in, knowing that nothing was always better news."

Harry contemplated telling her that he'd thought about her in the forest, when Voldemort uttered the killing curse, but he just couldn't, not quite yet.

"Is it enough right now to know that I want to be with you?" Ginny looked at him earnestly.

"Yeah," he answered right away. After thinking about it, he knew it was perfect. Neither of them was in the right place to jump into the middle of a relationship. There were still so many things to deal with. Not the least of which was Ginny's return to Hogwarts at the end of the summer.

"As long as we can fit in a little kissing now and again." He felt like a cheeky blighter saying that, but she snorted and bumped his shoulder with hers.

"There can be kissing."

"A lot of kissing," Harry reaffirmed. "We have months to make up for, after all."

Ginny laughed and leaned into him. "Git." She initiated the kiss and Harry felt himself fall into the pleasure of it. It was like the kiss on his birthday last year, full of desperation and promise.

Teddy cooed happily and they broke apart, cheeks flaming.

"A lot of kissing," Harry said.

"And a lot of pictures." She lifted the camera and snapped another one of Harry with his jaw hanging open.

Things weren't perfect. Harry knew that. There were still things that needed to be fixed, and some things that would never be fixed, no matter how much they fought and struggled.

But they felt a lot closer to perfect than Harry ever pictured they could be; especially right now, when he lay in the cool grass in the garden of the Burrow with Ginny beside him. Their shoulders rubbed lightly and their fingers were twined together so tightly that Harry couldn't feel the tips of his.

"I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Don't remind me," Harry said moodily. Maybe if he closed his eyes and refused to watch the dusk fade into night, tomorrow wouldn't come, and they would still be here, frozen in time.

Ginny sighed deeply and Harry turned his face to look at her. She was slightly fuzzy because he'd taken his glasses off earlier. She was staring up at the pink-orange sky, her eyes tracing the patterns of feathery clouds across the expanse.

"Look, the first star."

"That's an airplane," Harry said. He didn't even look at it to check, but said it simply to hear her argue with him about it. They'd done this often enough in the past few weeks and the familiarity of the moment was welcome and warm.

Ginny scoffed. "You're blind! Put your glasses back on and you'll clearly see it's—"

"A satellite," Harry quipped.

"Not only blind, but hopeless as well." Ginny sighed and turned her head to face him. "And you've got a sunburn."

Harry did notice his nose and cheeks were tender, but he didn't care. They'd been out flying all afternoon, practicing Ginny's new ideas for the Gryffindor team—she'd gotten the Captain's Badge just the other day in the owl post. He wouldn't trade those hours watching Ginny's sun-streaked form zoom around the pitch for anything.

"So do you," he said. He lifted a finger and let it trace along the bridge of her nose, down to the end where he gave it a small tap.

"Great," Ginny growled, "more freckles."

"They're not as bad as you think they are."

"Once again, we're reminded that you're blind."

Harry chuckled and shook his head. He was going to miss these repetitive little conversations. He'd gotten used to spending evenings with Ginny—it was like their own personal time when even Ron knew to leave them alone. Of course, now that Hermione was back from Australia Ron was much easier to distract.

For weeks, Harry and Ginny had stolen every minute they could. Much of their time was spent capturing moments in time with Ginny's camera. The wall in the Burrow's living room was teeming with new photographs that made Molly's eyes water. They'd taken so many, in fact, that Ginny had made a photo book to take back to Hogwarts and had added loads of new photos to Harry's album.

At first the project with the pictures was something that they could do together, something other than the things they'd gone through to talk about. Slowly, though, they began to find other things to discuss and the past slipped out. Some days it was a drabble at a time, a sentence pulled here or there, an observation made while they worked side by side pouring potion over the film to see the faces appear, and other days it spilled out of them, whole chunks at a time.

The shadows faded further, and Harry felt happier than he could remember being in a very long time. He'd even taken a chance last week and whispered to Ginny that he loved her. She seemed shocked when the words slipped from his mouth just before he kissed her, but pleased also. She said the words back and Harry felt the thrill of letting them soak into his summer-kissed skin.

"I can't believe we have to be apart again." Ginny's fingers brushed his overly-long hair away from his forehead and traced his eyebrows.

"It'll be different," Harry promised.

"No more hiding in tents for you." She laughed lightly.

And Harry realized that it *was* funny now. All that they'd gone through—although he agreed about the whole tent thing—wasn't as sharp now. It didn't hurt to simply think about. There were times when the grief of losing someone would hit him hard, but now he had Ginny to turn to, and she could cry on his shoulder also.

"No more leading rebellions," he scolded.

Ginny sighed. "It does take some of the excitement out of the year, but I'll do my best to comply."

Harry snorted. "Please, give us a dull year!" He called it up to the purple heavens and they both chuckled.

"All our letters are going to be horribly drab."

"Yours, maybe," Harry said. "Mine will be full of how many times I've walked in on Ron and Hermione snogging—"

"Or worse." Ginny laughed.

Harry scrunched up his face and rolled onto his back. Ginny curled into him and rested her head on his shoulder. Her leg lifted onto his and Harry's body hummed with attraction that he was too content to pursue. Besides, they *were* just in the garden, where anybody could wander through at any minute.

"I'll take loads of pictures for you," Ginny promised. "And you can come up and take some yourself."

"I'll take some of Teddy," Harry said. He'd already promised that, but he wanted to say it again. "And of your family."

They lay together in silence and Harry thought back to the many nights they'd been right here, in this same spot. Ginny's fingers would run through his hair as she told him about Hogwarts last year—not everything, because she couldn't bring herself to say it all. Harry wished he could change things for her, but he understood that everything she'd gone through had made her into this person that he was in love with.

And she held his hand and kissed away the worry lines near his mouth when he told her about being in the tent, and the dragon, and walking into the forest. She didn't say anything when he told her about seeing her face mingled with the green of the killing curse, but cried right along with him.

And Harry felt himself fall in love, truly, completely fall in love. It wasn't simply the idea of being with Ginny—someone just for him. It was loving the way her temper flared when he said something stupid, or loving the way that she was unsure of herself at times—just like he was.

He felt lost, in the best way possible.

"You're happy, aren't you?"

Ginny lifted her head and looked at him. A slow smile spread on her face. "Happier than I thought I'd ever be again. It's not perfect, but—"

"Perfection is overrated," Harry said.

"But I think this moment might be perfection." Ginny lay her head back down.

And right then Harry agreed with her. This moment was something he was going to cling to; a thread of a memory that wove the picture of who he and Ginny were. Here in the dusk and summer, together.

If he closed his eyes, maybe it would last. And last. And last.