

Just Say The Word-Chapter 1: You're Amazing

Title: Just Say The Word

Author:HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Due to the sheer awesomeness of the beta team, look what you all get to enjoy?! A few special thanks before we begin the journey. To Alex, whose awesome "what if" provoked an idea that started as a five chapter ficlet and grew, and grew (and grew) into this. To be completely fair, the main idea was sparked by another story over at another site. I have not read that story, but Alex assures me this idea and that one are different enough that I don't have to worry. I know I wrote the name of the story down somewhere, but my notes have escaped me today.

To Ella (and the kids) who demanded scene after scene and kept me motivated, talking through everything until it made sense. Writing this long of a story in such a short time was only possible because you kept me going. El. I appreciate it. Even the swearing and name calling. ;)

To Daron and Mel who drove their figurative beta trucks through it and forced me to write what needed to be there, instead of leaving some great material only lingering in my head. Thank you, ladies, it's so much better now.

And, finally, to Deb, who wrangled all excess grammar issues---in two days!! You always know how to make it shine.

The story title and a few of the chapter titles are inspired by Josh Kelley songs. I'll try to remember to point them out when I see them.

We're back to a much lighter style of writing here--no mysterious plots or outside forces pulling people apart--well... Anyway. I enjoyed the break from extreme tension and back to just relationship angst. lol

As always, call out any mistakes or issues, please. You all are my guinea pigs, which I know none of you mind being. I hope you all enjoy. Andi

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Chapter 1: You're Amazing

It was strange to see the stands deserted; the cheering fans all gone and everything completely quiet. The pitch seemed...greener somehow. But perhaps that was just because Ginny was walking on it, rather than flying over it.

She'd been here a thousand times before in the two years she'd been a Harpy, but had never really fully appreciated it. On a whim, she sat in the thick grass, running her hands through the blades, feeling them tickle her palms and the space between her fingers.

There was a possibility that she might not be coming back here, and the thought was a little scary. Two years of playing professional Quidditch had been wild, and fun, and...the stuff made of dreams. But only now when she was possibly leaving did she fully appreciate what she had.

Her contract to play with the Harpies was over. Gwenog Jones had signed her for two years and they hadn't offered an extension or a new contract yet. Officially, in a few hours anyway, Ginny would be able to change teams if a new offer came in, retire, or even play for England—which is what she truly wanted.

"Weasley for England," she impulsively cheered, throwing her hands in the air and listening to the sound of the imaginary crowd roaring in her ears. A silly smile spread across her face and she lay back in the grass, imagining what it might be like to travel the world playing in the most intense games imaginable.

The sky was the perfect shade of robin's-egg blue and Ginny squinted up into it. Gwenog's words this morning, right before her last game, played over and over in her head. She'd mentioned with a knowing smile that the manager for England had been around more than once and had commented quite strongly on Ginny's playing style and how she might fit into the team. She didn't want to get Ginny's hopes up, but England was looking for a new Chaser.

She'd look good in the white and red robes worn by the national team, she decided, even if the green Harpies robes looked better with her hair.

It was all silliness anyway, she decided. There was no sense in getting herself worked up over it because the announcements were still days away and no one had contacted her yet. Any teams looking for Chasers would wait until England had first pick before making offers to available players. As long as she didn't end up with Chudley, she'd be fine.

Slightly annoyed, she dug her watch out of her pocket and stared down at the dial. It was almost four and she still hadn't heard from Harry. Ron and George had been able to come to the full match, and Bill had dropped in for the last hour, but Harry hadn't made an appearance. She knew he was busy at the Ministry—he always was—but this was possibly her last game with the Harpies.

That wasn't being fair, she knew. Harry was brilliant. He loved her and had been nothing but supportive of her career from the very beginning. He used to switch shifts and work extra hours just to be able to come to

every game—even the away ones. But Ginny could see the strain that put on him in the dark circles under his eyes, so she'd protested that he didn't need to make *every* game, just some of them.

That seemed to work much better, and he came as often as he could, leaving them more time together afterwards.

But lately, ever since his last promotion, Harry had gone back to working nearly impossible hours. He kept assuring her that it was only a temporary thing; they were swamped with cases right now and he was still training to be a supervisor, rather than just a plain Auror. Things would settle down soon, and they'd find their routine again.

Moving in with him this last year had helped because at least they slept in the same bed regularly and spent as much time together as they could. Her mother hadn't been too keen on the arrangement, but they were young and in love, and it was right for them.

Perhaps she should just go on to The Golden Dragon, where the rest of the Harpies were getting pissed to celebrate the end of another season. They hadn't won the League Cup this year, but it was in sight. If Gwenog drove next year's team like she had this year...Ginny knew they'd take the cup for sure. It was a little sad thinking that she might not be here for that, but if England called...

"Just go, Ginny. He'll catch up with you there."

Scolding herself worked, finally, and Ginny pried herself from the cool feel of the grass and into the changing room to gather her kit. Taking the nametag off her locker almost physically hurt to do, but in the end, she clutched it, vowing the shiny bit of gold with 'Weasley' etched in it would be stuck to another locker soon.

Tucking it away, Ginny Apparated to the flat she shared with Harry, sighed at the state of it—dishes piled up in the kitchen, clothing strewn about the same as it had been since this morning.

Midnight, the cat Harry had bought her for Christmas their first year together, wrapped around her legs, protesting his loneliness and frustration at having to wait for his dinner.

"Only have a minute," Ginny sighed, pulling out his food and filling his bowl with it. The persnickety cat sniffed at the food and then sat, staring up at Ginny. "I know I can't be in the room when you eat. I'm going!"

She rolled her eyes at the cat's peculiar habits and moved back through the living room, taking her broom off the sofa and resting it in the corner next to Harry's. She probably *should* stay and tidy things up. But it sounded much less fun than spending some time with her friends. There would be time later to deal with the mess, she decided, and Apparated to The Golden Dragon.

The pub was loud and obnoxiously crowded when Ginny arrived. Apparently the Harpies planned for a long night of celebration.

"About time you made it, Weasley," Gwenog commented when Ginny walked by a booth that was overflowing with more male attention than even Jones could probably handle—not that Ginny really wanted to think about that. "Where's Potter? I thought you were coming together." She looked around the crowd

behind Ginny, as if Harry Potter could have walked into the pub and been missed.

Her team had been great about understanding that she and Harry were together and that Harry didn't care to be made into some sort of spectacle. The girls definitely gave him a hard time on occasion, taking the piss when he would turn up bearing flowers for Ginny, or offer some other romantic gesture, but Harry took it all in stride.

"He'll be here later," Ginny dismissed, moving toward the bar. The tension in her shoulders rose right along with the sound level in the bar and Ginny decided a drink was definitely in order.

She ordered a Firewhiskey and then went in search of an interesting place to sit. While people seemed to be everywhere—even more pouring into the door—Ginny knew that she'd find a place to be. She was a Harpy, and Harpies always got preferential treatment at The Golden Dragon.

"Over here, Ginny!" Allison Moran, younger sister of Lynn Moran, Chaser on the Irish National Team, called out to Ginny. Allison was probably the best friend Ginny had on the team. She was several years older than Ginny, but similar in temperament and had a wicked sense of humor.

Ginny grinned as several people shifted in the booth to allow her to slide in. "Thanks," she murmured, and took a sip of her drink. The alcohol tingled on her tongue, burning as it slid down her throat.

"Where's your other half?" Allison asked, nudging a basket of chips toward Ginny, who attacked them gratefully. She hadn't realized how hungry she was until the glorious fried smell hit her nose.

"Somewhere," Ginny dismissed with a shrug of her shoulder, and a full mouth. "He's running late."

"As usual, yeah?" Allison commiserated. Ginny felt bad at the dry tone of Allison's words. It really wasn't fair to Harry that she complained about his bad work habits to her friends.

"He's got an important job," Ginny sighed, pulling apart a thick piece of chip and stuffing part of it in her mouth. "I can't really blame him for missing a game when he's out getting some dangerous wizard off the street, can I?"

"I guess not," Allison sighed. "But it would have been nice to have him there today."

Ginny shrugged a shoulder, forgetting that she agreed with Allison. "He'll be home later."

"Uh huh," Allison grinned, waggling her eyebrows. "And I'm sure you have plans for him when he does walk in."

Ginny snorted out a laugh. While she didn't share details of their sex life in public, or in private, really, the rumors that ran through the Harpies changing room were enough to make the witches think Harry was some sort of Sex God. Not that he was bad, at all, Ginny mused silently. In fact, he was extremely talented in various ways, Ginny thought.

"I might," she admitted, feeling a bit bold today. "It's been two whole days, Allison!"

Her friend snorted. "I wondered why you were off your game today."

Ginny rolled her eyes and took a larger swallow of her drink. "I played fine."

"Yes, you did," Rebecca Southwick cheered, holding up her glass, which of course signaled the whole area around them to cheer loudly and take drinks. Rebecca was new to the team this year; a Beater who had worked her way up through the reserve ranks and was making quite the sensation when she teamed with Gwenog. The two worked seamlessly together.

"England would be fools to pass you over," Allison patted her arm and Ginny laughed at her enthusiasm.

"How is your sister doing?" Ginny asked out of the blue.

"Ready to pop any day now," Allison giggled. The announcement of Lynn Moran's retirement, due to a secret marriage to Irish Keeper Barry Ryan, and her impending birth of their first child, had rocked the Quidditch world. Even Allison hadn't known they were actually married, just seeing each other secretly. "Barry is sure it's a boy, but Lynn thinks it's a girl. They're talking about naming him Brogan—maybe even if it's a girl."

"Brogan?" Ginny asked. "Like Brogan Quinlan?"

Allison laughed. "Yep, just like that. I guess he's a friend of Barry's somehow. He plays for France now."

"And, he's absolutely gorgeous," Rebecca chimed in.

Ginny agreed with that. Quinlan, an International Quidditch star, was very muscular and rugged; if the posters tacked to several lockers in the Harpies changing rooms were to be believed. "Brogan would be a good name for their child. It's nice and Irish, isn't it?" Ginny agreed, not really caring either way.

"Nothing like a child born and bred to play Quidditch," Marcus, one of the team trainers offered. He and Allison had an on-again, off-again type of relationship that Ginny never could quite figure out. It looked as if they might be on-again tonight, because Ginny could see his hand sliding up and down Allison's thigh.

"Ginny would know all about that," Allison grinned evilly. "Once she and Harry finally decide to procreate, they'll probably have an entire team."

Ginny choked on her drink and kicked Allison under the table. Marcus swore loudly and Ginny felt her cheeks turn red.

"Sorry, Marcus," she laughed. "I was trying to get Allison."

"Has he proposed?" Rebecca asked, leaning forward with interest.

Ginny's face began to flame now and she shook her head. "We've talked about it, but..."

"He will," Allison said firmly. "This year."

The conversation got diverted as another player came over, followed by her entourage of Quidditch groupies, and began talking about today's game.

Ginny continued to sip at her drink, thinking about Allison's firm statement. Ginny and Harry *had* talked about marriage, but it was in rather loose terms, 'when we do', 'when it's time', never solidly stated that anything was imminent. And Ginny was fine with that. She was comfortable in the relationship they had, and confident that Harry was as well. Marriage was rather a given in their future.

She wondered if the publicity such an announcement would cause held Harry back from just asking, or if it was more. Perhaps she should press the issue; she was a strong, modern witch. Her mother would simply have a fit if she found out it was Ginny who did the asking, not the other way around. The thought made Ginny smirk. Maybe it would be worth it just to see everyone's faces.

With changes looming in the future for her career, and the changes Harry was striving for, it was nice to know that their relationship didn't have to change. It was one thing she could count on being solidly there in her life.

Playing for England would definitely mean more time apart, but Ginny was confident they could handle it. They'd been apart for her final year at Hogwarts, and, while hard, they'd come out at the end a solid, strong couple, completely in love with each other.

Even if Allison's spotty divination skills turned out to be true, and Harry did propose, they could have a long engagement while she played for England. And he could come to as many games as he could, cheering her on as he always had. And, perhaps, one day her robes would say Potter instead of Weasley.

The picture taking shape in her head was a pleasant one and Ginny shivered a bit in anticipation. Perhaps it was time to talk to Harry about changing their relationship.

"There he is," Allison grinned. The brightness in her tone shook Ginny from her musing as Harry slid into the booth next to her, melting into the seat, the warmth from his shoulder bleeding into Ginny.

Harry swore softly as the door to his office opened and he surreptitiously twisted his wand, turning the volume of the wireless hidden underneath his desk down to nothing.

"These jus' come in, sir," his efficient receptionist, Martha, laid a stack of files down on the corner of his desk. "Minister Shacklebolt says 'e needs the Williams papers by two, Robards set your meeting back one 'our to three, Collins wants a word when you 'ave a minute, and you've received three messages in the last 'our. One from Andromeda, lettin' you know Teddy fell and cut 'is 'ead, but she took 'im to St. Mungo's and they sealed it right back up. And two from Ron saying, and I quote, 'get your arse out of the office, 'arry! You're missing a ruddy good game!' The other was entirely too vulgar for me to quote, sir."

Harry's shoulders slumped as he looked around at his overburdened desk and the hours of work he still had ahead of him. Perhaps this promotion hadn't been a good thing after all, especially if he was stuck inside on such a wonderful Spring day, missing what was possibly Ginny's last game as a Harpy.

"Er..."

"And don't think I can't see tha' wireless 'idden beneath your desk," Martha chided with a small smirk.

Harry's face turned red and he shrugged one shoulder. She always knew when he was up to something, the

old bat. It was a good thing he liked her so much.

“What’s the score?” she asked just as she ducked out the door.

He couldn’t help but chuckle and shake his head. “Hundred and ten to thirty.” Ginny had been on fire today, scoring time after time. Harry had almost placed a silencing charm on his office because he’d cheered out loud so often.

“Good for the ‘arpies,” Martha nodded firmly and closed his door once more.

The wireless was immediately turned up and Harry grimaced, realizing he’d missed another of Ginny’s wild scoring drives in the thirty seconds he’d been away.

“I’m never going to get out of here,” he whined. What he wouldn’t give right now to have Hermione show up and help him through all of this mess. He’d even take her scolding with no argument if she would just help him organize his time a bit better.

Keeping one ear on the match, Harry dove back into his paperwork, his quill scratching away. By the time the Williams file was ready to ship off to Kingsley, Harry’s hand was cramping up. The ink stains that had decorated his hands during his Hogwarts years, but had become a thing of the past with his field work, were now back. Harry swore at them and tried valiantly to rub them off using only spit and the hem of his robes before his meeting with Director Robards. But they didn’t come off. They never did.

Robert Collins, a whiny Auror Trainee with a spotty complexion wasted thirty precious minutes of Harry’s time complaining over fellow trainees. This seemed to be a weekly occurrence and nothing Harry did to try and appease the man worked. He was already on his last thread of patience when the man started into his long list of grievances.

“Then quit,” Harry finally shrugged, catching the man off guard.

“Excuse me, sir?” Collins’ asked, blinking furiously, his jaw hanging open.

“You heard me, Collins. Quit. You hate it here so much, everyone is out to get you...you know where the door is, man!” Harry felt slightly bad, since it was his job to try and accommodate the Aurors and help them get along, but not bad enough to hold his tongue.

“Every week, without fail, you slump into my office groaning and complaining about your grievances. If there’s so much wrong with the way I’m doing things, or the way the Department is run, or the Wizarding world in general, all you have to do is walk away.”

“That’s not... Sir, I...”

But Harry’s rant had begun and he couldn’t hold it back. The fact that he was most likely missing the end of his girlfriend’s best game only pushed him further.

“I’m tired of child minding you, Collins. How you made it through training is beyond me! You don’t see any other Auror or Trainee in here bothering me with all this codswallop, do you? This is the end of it. If you come in here again, nattering on about nothing, I’ll pass you on to Robards himself. I honestly can’t be arsed

over your problems right now!"

Collins' face went completely white at the threat of talking to the Director, whose lack of patience with Auror Trainees was legendary.

"Unless you have anything further to say," Harry continued, "I'd suggest you get your skinny arse down to the training room before I kick it there myself."

Collins almost ran out of the office, leaving the door wide in his haste to escape Harry's wrath.

Harry growled loudly and snapped on the wireless; maybe he could at least catch the last few minutes of the game. But only music was playing. He swore and nearly swiped the wireless right off his desk.

"Martha!" he yelled, stuffing his files in his desk drawer, not caring if they were a mess, and slamming it shut.

"You bellowed?" his receptionist asked from the doorway, a rather amused smirk on her face.

Harry deflated a little; he probably looked, and sounded, like a complete prat. "Did they at least win?"

"I 'eard they did," she shrugged, a knowing smile replacing her amusement.

He sighed. "I should take flowers." It was half question, half comment and Harry raised his eyebrow at Martha.

"You're getting' it figured out," she nodded with a pleased expression. Between all the women in his life, Harry might just learn how to behave one of these days, despite himself. "Would you like me to order some?"

His first instinct was to say 'yes', but he held back. "I'll get them myself," he shook his head. She nodded to him, something he took to mean he was winning points all the way around. "Ginny may still be at the pitch."

"I'd run, if I was you," Martha commented as she walked away.

Harry shook his head, placed a locking charm on his files and rubbed under his glasses. 'You'll get it down soon,' he promised himself. And he knew he would, it was just taking time to get used to a new office and new responsibilities. And Ginny had been wonderfully understanding about it all. She definitely deserved more than he'd been able to give right now. He was going to make it up to her, he decided, somehow.

Gathering up his things, he told Martha he'd see her tomorrow and then hurried out of the Auror offices. He almost made it to the Apparition point before being stopped. *Almost.*

"Potter!"

Harry swore quietly and turned on his heel, trying to keep the annoyed look off his face; this was Director Robards, after all.

"I'm sorry to catch you," Robards said, panting from the exertion he'd just put his short, rather rotund body through, "but there's been a break in the Williams case. Travis and Edwards were finally able to track that stolen goods trader and are bringing him in now."

Harry grimaced, knowing all plans for tonight were now evaporating before him. This was *his* case.

Slowly, he nodded. "How long?" He tugged on the watch in his pocket, opening the dented case and wincing at the time; half past four. Ginny was going to have his hide.

"Twenty minutes at most."

Harry bit the inside of his lip. "Have them start processing him. I'll be back in no more than thirty."

Robards looked as if he was going to argue, but then a knowing look came over his face. "Last game of the season, isn't it?"

"Was," Harry nodded dejectedly. "I missed the whole thing."

Robards grunted. "Be back in thirty," he shrugged. "Wouldn't want your love life to suffer."

Harry wasn't sure if that was meant to be a joke or not, it was hard to tell with Robards, who was seldom funny. But Harry smiled and nodded, trotting the last few steps to the point he could Apparate from.

Stopping to get flowers probably wasn't the best idea, Harry decided, now that he had only a few minutes to find Ginny and then to apologize for not only missing her game, but for having to leave again. He was fairly sure she'd understand, even if she'd be disappointed. But there wasn't anything to be done for it; it wasn't like he could walk away from a huge development in his case.

The Harpies pitch was completely deserted and Harry swore, pressing his forehead against the wall of the changing room and trying to think of where Ginny might be. It could be the Burrow, or their flat, or... anywhere, really.

He'd have to just start looking and then send a message if he ran out of time.

"The Golden Dragon," he proclaimed, pushing away from the wall as the idea entered his mind. That sounded like the best place to start, anyway.

The pub was loud and packed when he arrived, but Harry saw several of Ginny's teammates prowling around, confirming that it was a possibility Ginny was inside. How he'd manage to find her and talk to her, however...

Inside was even louder and he stood up on his toes, searching for Ginny's distinctive hair in the mix.

"She's at a booth with Allison and Rebecca," Gwenog said, nudging Harry's shoulder. He hadn't even seen her come up to him. Some Auror he was.

"Thanks," he mumbled, nodding his head. Sure enough, once he found Rebecca's smiling face, he found Ginny sitting across from her, half hidden by the booth the group was sitting in. He sighed in relief; at least he'd have a few minutes to talk to her before he had to leave again.

"Sorry I'm late," he murmured, more to Ginny than to anyone.

Ginny was prepared to be annoyed with him but the tightness of his smile and the weariness she could see in his shoulders made that feeling evaporate. His hair stood on end, like it always did when he was frustrated with work and had been running his hands through it.

"It's okay," she dismissed.

"No, it's not," Harry shook his head. His eyes darted around the pub and Ginny wondered if he were uncomfortable because of something going on, or just because of the noise and eyes watching. "I feel like a complete git for missing your game, Gin. I really tried to get out of there."

Ginny smiled tightly and offered the rest of her drink to him. His hand hovered over it before he shook his head. "I can't...I only have a minute before I need to get back, actually."

"You have to go back?" Ginny couldn't help the whine that leaked into her voice. The thought of having some quiet time tonight to talk was wasted now and she felt disappointment and frustration with the situation ebb in.

Harry made a face and glanced around the table to her friends who were valiantly trying to ignore them. "Yeah. There was a last second development in the case."

"Oh," Ginny busied herself with running her finger along the edge of her glass, pushing a bead of moisture around it. "If you need to go..."

"I'm sorry," he apologized again. "I wish..."

"It's really okay," Ginny said, looking up and trying to smile. "It's not like you forgot, or anything. You were doing something important. If you'd been out drinking with your mates or had fallen asleep on the sofa, I'd probably be mad."

Harry's fake smile, which he wore for those around them, finally turned genuine. "I'd expect nothing less than bat bogeys," he nodded solemnly. "But it still doesn't make it right."

"You did the best you could," Ginny sighed, cuddling into his side as his arm wrapped around her shoulders. "Do you have any idea what time you might be home?"

Harry bit his lip, looking down at her. She could feel his warm breath on her forehead and smell the warm, inviting smell that was uniquely Harry. "Could be late," he mumbled, leaning down just a bit.

"Mind if I stay here?" she asked, lifting her face closer, until their lips were just centimeters away from brushing.

"Not at all," he smiled. "Stay and celebrate. I'll even make you a Portkey so you don't have to worry about splinching while you're pissed."

Ginny chuckled and kissed him fully then, not caring about the whistles and cheering they were getting.

Harry tensed for a moment but finally relaxed into the kiss.

"I need to go," he moaned, pulling away finally. His eyes were dark behind his crooked and smudged glasses and Ginny gave him one final kiss before nodding.

"If it's not too late, and I'm not completely soused..." She let the promise die and Harry groaned low in his throat.

"Sometimes I hate my job," he mumbled. He shook his head once and snatched a beer mat off the table and made it glow blue for a moment with a Portkey spell. "The usual trigger," he said, kissing her one last time. "I'll do my best—"

"You always do," Ginny said, clutching the Portkey to her and watching as he threw himself back into the crowd, letting it swallow him up.

"If the two of you make it a year..." Allison trailed off, shaking her head.

Ginny felt her face heat and waggled the beer mat in her fingers. "Ladies, I have official permission to get completely pissed—not that I needed it."

They all laughed and Ginny tried to shove her disappointment down deep. She tucked the mat away to be used later, touched by Harry's thoughtfulness, and ordered another round for the table. If Harry was going to be at work all night, there was no sense in her sitting around the deserted, and entirely too quiet, flat. Midnight would definitely be put out if she interrupted his eating one more time; he'd probably pout all night. She might as well be here, having fun with her mates and dreaming of the future.

It was close to midnight when Harry finally trudged back to his office. Thankfully, the case had been blown wide open with the capture of this man, who seemed willing to sell his own grandmother if it meant he didn't spend time in Azkaban. Harry's hours spent here hadn't been a complete waste, even if his mind kept wandering to where he really wanted to be: celebrating at the pub with Ginny, or better yet, a private celebration at their flat—a fact that Robards seemed to find particularly annoying, but amused Kingsley to no end. Harry had finally snorted in laughter himself as the Minister nudged his foot to wake him up from a particularly vivid fantasy of Harry coming home to find Ginny waiting for him, more than a little tipsy, but very interested in—

"I heard Ginny had a brilliant game today," Kingsley said from where he leaned against the door to Harry's office.

Harry flushed at being caught daydreaming again and shrugged. "I heard it was good, and she seemed happy for the few minutes I was able to talk to her tonight."

Kingsley sighed. "It's not easy finding the balance, is it? I know my wife nearly left me twice while I was in training. But we managed to get over it, and we're stronger now."

"That's good to hear," Harry said, rolling his shoulders, hearing them both crack with stiffness. "That means there's hope on the horizon."

Kingsley's face spread into a tired grin. "Of course, Michelle wasn't gone nearly as much as Ginny is."

"It'll get worse if she gets the spot on the national team," Harry mused, still unsure of how he felt about the whole idea. "She'll be traveling almost six months out of the year."

"I heard she's all but been announced," Kingsley said with an impressed nod. "That's quite an accomplishment for someone with only two years of playing professionally."

"It is," Harry said, a slow smile spreading. He was very proud of Ginny, and he wanted nothing more than for her to be happy. If that meant struggling through a few months so that she could achieve her dreams, Harry would keep quiet about his concerns and do everything in his power to support her. She'd certainly earned that after putting up with his training schedule these past few years. "She keeps telling me not to get my hopes up," he chuckled. "But I think she's already stocking up on red and white banners."

Kingsley chuckled and shook his head slowly. "Good for her. She's worked hard enough for it."

"That she has."

"Be sure to let us know when they'll make an announcement. Maybe you and Ginny can come to the house and Michelle will make us one of her famous dinners."

Michelle Shackbolt was widely known as one of the best chefs around. During the war, when things had gotten very intense, Kingsley had sent her to stay with relatives in France, trying to keep her out of everything as much as he could. To pass the time, she'd enrolled in a Muggle culinary school. Kingsley had definitely put on a few pounds since she'd been back—a fact that Harry loved to take the mickey about.

"Sounds wonderful," Harry said, yawning.

"You'd best get home to her," Kingsley said, nodding his head back toward the hall. "Try and convince her that we don't mean to keep you 'round the clock, yeah?"

"I'll do my best," Harry smiled. "Don't be surprised if you get a Howler."

Kingsley shivered just a bit and then his face went slack, all humor gone from it. "She wouldn't, would she?"

Harry chuckled and slapped his friend on the shoulder as they began to walk toward the Atrium. "Don't forget who she is, mate."

Kingsley shuddered once more. "Sending a Howler to the Minister of Magic." He shook his head as if it were unbelievable.

"Hers are scarier than Molly's," Harry admitted. While Mrs. Weasley's temper had always been formidable, and something that Harry strived to stay away from, Ginny's temper was... Well, at least when Molly was upset at him, he still got to go home to Ginny. If Ginny was angry...he spent the night at Ron's flat. It had only happened once and Harry could now admit that he'd been a prat and deserved to have a lonely night in an unfamiliar bed. They'd both apologized the next morning and it had never been that bad again.

"I can only imagine," Kingsley said, laughing. "You've got yourself a firecracker there, Harry."

"No need to remind me," Harry shook his head wryly. Ginny hadn't been angry with him in a while and Harry, just for a minute, wondered if he shouldn't try and pick a small fight soon. Just the thought of her face heating up and her body shaking with frustration... Well, it got him all worked up too. But, then again, there were other, more pleasurable ways, to push Ginny's buttons.

"It's amazing how we ever survived without them, isn't it?" Kingsley said, chuckling deeply. The sound echoed in the deserted Ministry.

"I don't ever want to go back to that place," Harry said truthfully. "Have a good night."

Kingsley stared at him a minute, his head cocked to the side. "Harry, I'm giving you official permission to take tomorrow off. In fact, if I see your skinny arse in here, I'm going to make Robards assign Collins to you permanently."

Harry swore and shook his head, a laugh bubbling up inside him. "It's a deal," he shrugged, yawning once more.

Closing his eyes, Harry focused on the living room in the flat, relieved when it appeared around him and all his parts made it completely. His appearance startled Midnight, who hurriedly jumped off the sofa he wasn't supposed to be on, but always was. The cat stretched luxuriously and sauntered off for parts unknown.

The flat was dark and Harry wondered if Ginny was even home yet, or if she was still out with the team, crawling from one pub to another.

He chuckled at the mental picture and tugged his tie completely free of his collar, discarding it along the back of the sofa.

He nearly tripped over Ginny's shoes, lying forgotten in the middle of the hallway. At least she'd made it home, he decided, nudging them toward the wall. Parts and pieces of her clothing were strewn about and Harry chuckled, removing his own robes, shirt and undoing his trousers as he came into the bedroom.

Ginny was lying draped over the bed in just her tank top and knickers. She hadn't even made it fully onto the bed before falling asleep, Harry noted. Her leg hung over one side and her face was pressed into the mattress, just below her pillow. A loud snore made him laugh, and Ginny shifted, mumbling something about 'shoving the Quaffle.'

Shaking his head, Harry levitated her more onto her side of the bed and tucked her in, pressing a kiss to her forehead. She smelled like she'd had a good time, at least. Or possibly bathed in her pint.

"I'll make it up to you tomorrow, love," he promised, climbing into bed behind her and spooning against her back. "We'll spend the whole day together."

Just Say The Word-Chapter 2: Torn

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

*Author's Note: It has been brought to my attention that, once again, I've mucked up the whole sports issue. Since not everyone reads the review responses I'll post my explanation here. I went with the limited information there is on Quidditch and made my best guess. Being American, I haven't completely grasped every nuance of British life, so my best guess was quite far off. Sorry. *shrugs* I promise it won't matter for too long.*

Chapter 2: Torn

It wasn't bright when she opened her eyes, and Ginny was slightly confused. The thick feeling in her head didn't help clear anything up and she groaned into her pillow, pressing her face down into the bulk of it and trying to focus on contacting each of her body parts, making sure all were present and accounted for.

Everything wiggled like it should and she stretched, arching her back and smiling when it came into contact with Harry's warm body, stretched out right next to hers. His hand was on her hip and his rhythmic breathing puffed against her hair.

She rolled toward him, laying her head, which wasn't throbbing as much as she expected it to, against his chest and Harry's arm pulled her closer as he sighed in his sleep. The deep breathing started again and Ginny took just a moment to enjoy the way their bodies fit together so perfectly—intimately, and in perfect moments like this.

Last night had been fun, drinking, and laughing, and dancing with her friends. But all along, she kept scanning the crowd for Harry, knowing he wouldn't be there, missing him all the same.

They really needed to find some time just for them. Soon. It had been several weeks since they'd spent a simple day together, lounging around the flat in pyjamas, or sometimes no clothing at all, and just...being.

She sighed in contentment and pressed a quick kiss to his chest, silently thanking Gwenog, as well, for handing out hangover potions last night. Taking them before sleep did wonders to minimize the hangover effects. They didn't erase everything, but enough that Ginny was only mildly annoyed by the headache and nasty aftertaste in her mouth.

The rise and fall of Harry's chest, and the soft sounds of his breathing helped lull her back to sleep.

When she woke again, Harry's side of the bed was cold, but there was a note on his pillow.

Stay right there. I'm bringing you breakfast.

A small, lopsided heart was penned at the bottom: Harry's way of signing his little notes to her. Ron had seen one of them once and had taken the mickey for a long time, but Harry persisted in signing them that way. And it meant the world to Ginny; a quiet affirmation that he did love her.

She could hear him now, pattering around in the small kitchen, humming some song or another as he fixed them something to eat. The clock at the side of the bed showed the time as well past eight, and Ginny marveled that Harry wasn't off to work already.

Had he taken the day off?

Hope shot through her, making her tingle all over and she wiggled in the bed, pulling herself up to nestle in the pillows against the headboard. Harry's soft tones, horribly off key but endearing, continued to drift through the wall.

He seemed surprised when he came back into the room, a tray of food levitating in front of him. His eyes lit up and Ginny grinned at his horribly ruffled state. His t-shirt and boxers were wrinkled from being slept in, and his hair stood completely up on one side.

"You're awake."

"Just obeying orders," Ginny shrugged, holding up the note he'd left her.

Harry climbed into bed and directed his wand to settle the tray between them, tea slopping over the edges of both cups.

"It's not much," he dismissed, trying to soak up the spill with the edge of the sheet. "Just tea and toast. I wasn't sure how much your stomach could handle."

"This is perfect," Ginny said through a mouth full with toast. The butter and jelly melted into the thick bread perfectly and Harry watched as she devoured two pieces before resting back against the pillows. "I didn't think I was hungry at all."

Harry chuckled and sipped at his tea. "Did you have a good time last night?"

Ginny's face split into a smile. "I did. It was fun to just...let go, you know. Not to worry about practice today or whether I'd be able to stay on a broom with a pounding headache."

Harry chuckled and lifted the tray out of the way, melting into her side. "I'm sorry I missed it." He wove their fingers together and Ginny sighed in contentment.

"Next time," she promised. "Things went well on your case?" she asked, knowing he couldn't give details.

Harry nodded. "I hoped we'd get out of the Ministry sooner, but once we got started questioning the suspect..."

Ginny perked up. "You actually got a suspect?"

"Yeah," Harry shrugged. "That's part of the reason I'm off today. Kingsley thought I deserved a day off."

She grinned and wrapped her arms around his neck, kissing him lightly. "I agree. You work too much as it is."

Harry laughed and tugged at one long piece of her hair. "I do. Entirely too much."

"So, what are we going to do today?" Ginny challenged, laying her head back along the pillows. "Have any grand plans?"

"Just spending the day with you, actually," Harry shrugged. "Whatever you'd like to do."

Ginny wagged her eyebrows. "I can think of a few things, but I do think we should get out of the flat for a bit, do something with just the two of us."

"Perfect," Harry nodded. "No pressure, just you and I."

"I wish you could take a few days. We could find someplace to disappear."

"Sounds wonderful. When do you find out about the teams?"

Ginny sighed and furrowed her brow in thought. "They want to meet me in a couple of days, to talk over the offer and decide how things are going to work."

"It'll be brilliant," Harry said, kissing her forehead. "You know, I've decided I don't mind being famous, as long as everyone knows me as Ginny Weasley's boyfriend."

Ginny laughed and poked her fingers into his sides, making Harry squirm away from her. They tussled on the bed for a few minutes before Harry kissed her.

"Come on, let's get showered and on with the day, before I'm tempted to have us stay here forever."

Ginny fidgeted nervously, looking around the rather cramped office of the British and Irish Quidditch Leagues, staring at the posters of various teams and players. Some of them were old and yellowing, with the players modeling old style uniforms and brooms which were now considered antiques.

Her knee bounced up and down rhythmically and she chewed on her lip (a horrible habit) while she waited. The receptionist across the room, which was really only a few steps, was dictating softly to her quill, which made a horribly annoying scratching sound.

Nervousness wasn't something Ginny battled with often, but this was different. Today she was meeting with

the Coach and Captain of the English National Team. The prospect of her joining and finally seeing her name on one of those red and white uniforms was close enough to taste and Ginny had to admit she wanted it badly.

A pale yellow airplane fluttered in through a window near the top of the door, making several loops in the air before diving onto the receptionist's desk.

"They'll see you now, Miss Weasley."

Ginny shot up out of the chair and felt her face heat at her over-enthusiasm. "Thank you," she murmured to the woman before taking a deep breath and opening the door. She really *shouldn't* be nervous, her Quidditch career, although short so far, stood by itself. And they wouldn't have asked her here if they weren't interested.

Taking courage from that, Ginny took a deep breath and walked into a corridor lined with doors. There was only one open, so Ginny took a chance, sticking her head inside.

Harry nudged Ron's shoulder as they sat on a pair of stools, looking over a map that had small blinking dots all over it.

"I think we'll start here," Harry said, taping his wand on one spot and drawing a circle with the tip, extending outward and creating a perimeter. "We'll use some of George's products here...and here," he said indicating the places.

Ron smirked. "They won't know what hit them."

"You're just lucky I've already tested your group on this," Harry chuckled.

"It's much more fun to be on this side of it," Ron gestured toward the map. "I honestly don't know how we made it out of what you put us into the center of."

Harry laughed and began to roll the map up. "You did fine," he protested. "Unlike Collins, you kept your head and didn't run around screaming."

"I wanted to when you had that Acromantula come flying out at us."

"It was only an illusion," Harry scoffed.

"Still..." Ron shuddered before slipping off his stool. "What're you and Ginny doing tonight? Hermione asked me to invite you for dinner. She's been testing out this new cottage pie recipe and thinks she has it perfected."

Harry's eyebrow rose slowly. "Does she?"

Ron laughed. "I figure you two should suffer right along with me, mate."

"I think we'll pass thanks. Ginny's got her interview today," Harry shrugged. "If it goes well..."

“Brilliant,” Ron cheered. “Although I think she’d still be better off here, playing for the Cannons.”

Harry grimaced. Saying that in front of Ginny would be a horrible idea. In fact, the only other offer from a British League team had come from the Cannons—something that did not inspire Ginny at all. Gwenog protested, saying that all the teams were convinced that Ginny was going to play for England. She wouldn’t come right out and say that the teams had been contacted not to offer a spot...but it had been implied.

“Please don’t tell her that,” Harry shook his head. “Besides, you know she’s wanted to play for England forever.” They were now standing in front of Harry’s office, Ron leaning against the door frame.

“She’ll be great,” Ron nodded firmly. “And if they don’t take her, the Cannons will always be waiting.”

Harry nearly scoffed, but he nodded instead. “Tell Hermione thanks for the offer, but I’ll probably take Ginny out tonight for a bit of a celebration.”

“I’d join you,” Ron said, looking extremely put out, “but then I’d probably have to kip on your sofa.”

Harry laughed and banished the map into the corner of the room. “No worries. When they make the official announcement, we’ll have a party or something.”

“Sounds good,” Ron nodded. “Let me know what she says.”

“I will,” Harry said, smiling. He sank into his chair, thankful that today had been more relaxed than not. Martha was gone today, visiting her sister...somewhere—Harry couldn’t remember where she said, exactly—and Collins had yet to make his weekly appearance. Perhaps last week’s threat to turn him over to Robards had really paid off.

Determined to be finished with his work when Ginny finally came up from the Department of Magical Sports and Games, Harry dove into the small stack of files on his desk, signing his name with relish and making corrections where needed.

“Hi.”

He looked up thirty minutes later, grinning when he saw Ginny leaning against the door.

“Is this the place where I should come to confess all my sins and turn myself over to the Aurors?”

Harry laughed and closed the file, darting out of his chair and across to her in one smooth move.

“You’ve come to the right place,” he said just before he kissed her. Several whistles and cat-calls sounded from the hallway as they snogged obliviously. Harry backed into the office slowly, pulling Ginny with him and slamming the door.

“I take it the meeting went well?” he finally asked after a breathless few minutes of kissing and caressing.

“It went brilliantly,” Ginny grinned, resting her head back against the door. Harry was afraid her face might split from smiling so widely. “They’re talking to one other player, but...they really liked me, Harry.”

He laughed. "Of course they did, love," he chided her. "Everyone thinks you're brilliant."

"Even you?" she teased, reaching up to rub a spot of her lipstick off the corner of his mouth.

"Especially me; although I'm completely biased."

She laughed and hugged him tightly once more, almost crushing him in her intensity. "This is real, Harry. I could...I could really make it."

"When will we know?" he asked, getting caught up completely in her excitement.

"By the end of the week, actually," Ginny said. "I can't believe this is happening." She rubbed at her forehead and blinked up at him.

"It's going to be amazing, Gin," he said, kissing her again.

"You need to get back to work," she said, sounding incredibly put out about the whole situation. "I just couldn't wait to tell you."

"I'm glad you didn't," Harry shook his head. "Give me five more minutes and I'll be ready to go."

"Really?"

"Yeah," he smiled, giving her an affectionate peck on the nose. "Go across the hall and tell Ron. I'll be done by the time you get back."

"He'll be crushed that I have to turn the Cannons down," Ginny laughed, sounding incredibly gleeful about the whole idea.

"He'll live," Harry assured her. "One of these days you'll convince him to give up that boundless hope he has in that team."

Ginny laughed and opened the door. "Then what would I have to do to annoy him?"

"Don't let him talk you into going to their house," Harry cautioned as Ginny walked across the hall. "I'm taking you out tonight."

Ginny's pacing was about to send Harry around the twist, but he couldn't say anything. She was tense enough as it was and didn't need him pointing it out right now.

"Honestly, how long can one simple announcement take?" she huffed, stopping in her circuit of the living room to stare at him.

"As long as it takes, I suppose," Harry sighed, moving forward to rub her shoulders softly. "I know it's hard to wait."

"Bloody awful," Ginny scowled. "And why do they have to go through this big production? Wouldn't it be

easier to just...pop through the floo and ask me what size I wear? Instead, I'm kept waiting for some special announcement to come."

Harry laughed at her impatience and dug his thumbs into her rigid muscles, happy when she relaxed against him.

"You worry too much," he scolded softly.

"You did the same thing when you applied to the Academy," she pointed out.

Harry wasn't put off by her biting tone, he understood it wasn't meant toward him, but out of frustration for the entire situation.

"I did," he agreed. "Let's go to the Burrow to wait. Either way, the owl will find you."

"You don't think it'll miss me?" Ginny asked, looking at the window in their flat. "What if..."

Harry sighed, trying to keep calm and do his part to get her to the Burrow. He'd be so disappointed if he had to ruin the surprise just to get her there. "Ginny," he cautioned. "Waiting around the flat isn't going to get you any closer. Let's go have lunch at the Burrow like your mother offered. At least it will help you relax a little."

Ginny stopped fretting and leaned into him. "Okay, let's go. I could use a nice relaxing afternoon."

Harry winced, hoping she didn't want it to be too relaxed. Ron and George had been planning the surprise party. Relaxing probably wasn't on the itinerary for the day.

They arrived behind the Burrow and Ginny lifted her head at the noise. Harry chuckled at her stunned look as she realized the entire back garden was full of her family and friends—an amazing orange wave taking up one whole section of the area.

"You!" she swatted Harry's chest making him flinch and laugh. "You did all this just to get me here? Did my mother even floo this morning, or were you taking the piss?"

Harry laughed gleefully. "She floored, but it wasn't for what I told you." Molly's head had appeared in the fire this morning asking if Harry thought he'd be able to get Ginny to the Burrow or if one of them needed to intervene and kidnap her.

Ginny stared at him for a minute before kissing him, ignoring the laughter and protests of her brothers. "You're amazing, do you know that?"

Harry felt his cheeks heat and, for just a moment, wished they were back at their flat. "It wasn't all me," he confessed. "Ron and George did most of it."

"Still..." Ginny looked around and Harry could tell she was touched by everyone coming to surprise her like this. "Harry, we don't know if—"

"Shh," Harry said, pressing his finger to her lips. "You're going to make it, love. So stop worrying and enjoy

the party.”

Ginny kissed him one last time and grinned as she darted off to greet her friends from the Harpies. Allison and Rebecca greeted her with girlish squeals of delight. Harry sighed, waved to a few people and made his way toward the group of redheads.

“How is she holding up?” Arthur asked, standing from his seat when Harry joined them.

“As well as can be expected,” Harry shrugged.

“Curse anyone yet?” Bill asked with a chuckle.

Harry grinned and shook his head. “Not yet. But it wasn’t far off before we left.”

“And you’re sure the announcement will come today,” Hermione asked, shifting to hand Teddy off to Harry.

“I’m sure,” Harry assured her as he tussled with Teddy. “You worry as much as she does,” he scolded when Teddy finally succeeded in pulling Harry’s glasses off his face. Harry had replaced two pair when Teddy first started this game, but he was old enough now to be a bit gentler. But Harry still usually had to repair them after a good round.

The afternoon wore on and Harry enjoyed watching Ginny mill about the guests, talking with everyone and laughing. Ron and George unfurled a banner with Ginny’s picture and ‘Weasley for England’ writing in flashing red letters on the white banner. Molly made sure everyone had eaten until they were miserable. There was a minor disturbance when George succeeded in slipping both Neville and Percy a Canary Crème at the same time. Apparently, that joke never got old.

Someone brought out the old wireless and Harry and Ginny were slow dancing in the middle of the garden, simply enjoying being together when someone pointed out an inbound owl. Ginny’s eyes grew wide and she took a deep breath, shaking in his arms.

“It’s your moment,” Harry whispered, kissing her on the forehead. He held out his arm and the plain brown barn owl landed there, holding out his foot with the envelope decorated with the National Team crest was tied.

“Go on, Ginny, open it,” Neville prodded her.

Ginny stared at the envelope and then, with shaking hands, removed it.

“I’m not sure I can read it,” she admitted, her voice sounding breathy.

Harry prompted the owl to take off and rested his hands on her shoulders. “Want me to read it?”

“Yeah,” she nodded.

“I’ll do it,” Ron offered, plucking the envelope away and clearing his throat.

“The Department of Magical Sports and Games,” he read, his voice rang over the garden, “is pleased to

announce this year's National Quidditch Team." Ron bowed theatrically, raising laughter and cheers from everyone surrounding them.

Harry chuckled but could feel the tension in Ginny's shoulders.

"Get on with it," George whined, winking at Ginny. "I made special confetti for today," George leaned over and whispered to Harry. "It'll turn everyone's hair ginger for an hour."

Harry snorted and was elbowed in the ribs by Hermione, who scowled at him.

"Keeper and Team Captain, Kennedy Paxton."

Applause surrounded them and Harry clapped politely, remembering Ginny talk about meeting the burly man who was particularly quiet.

"Beaters, Devlin Blair and Owen Hywell, and Chasers, Christine Petra and Maude Bell. Seeker, Jamie Roy."

"And now," Ron paused dramatically, "Our final Chaser and newest addition to the team..."

But his face went slack and Harry felt a horrible weight fall to the bottom of his belly.

"Ron!" Hermione scolded, probably thinking Ron was taking the mickey.

"Er..." Ron's eyes met Harry's over the top of Ginny's head and Harry's fear was confirmed. It wasn't Ginny's name in the final position.

Harry moved to take the letter, but Ginny was faster. She snatched it from Ron's limp grip and her eyes scanned back and forth.

"Rydderch Morgan."

The entire garden full of people was quiet, staring as if they hadn't completely understood the words that were said.

"They've chosen...Rydderch Morgan," Ginny repeated. She looked down and Harry's heart broke, wanting nothing more than to gather her in his arms and ease away what hurt he could. But there was nothing he could do.

"That's it then," Ginny said, the letter hanging limp in her hand as she tried to force a smile. "Good for him. He...he flew well." Her eyes filled with tears and she turned away, running off toward the house.

"Go to her, Harry," Molly urged, tears streaming down her face.

Harry didn't need any more encouragement as he darted after her, ducking between the stunned party guests.

Stunned wasn't quite the word for how she felt. Numb? Was that an accurate description?

Or maybe it was simply anger that was building inside her, threatening to burst out in either action or tears. She wasn't sure which would be worse right now.

Ginny wandered into the kitchen of the Burrow, moving mechanically.

The idea that they could *not* pick her hadn't even entered her head. She knew she was being stupid; she should have considered it, made other plans. But...it felt as if the whole interview and announcement was really a formality. Her practice sessions with the team couldn't have gone better. Ginny, Christine and Maude had all commented that they felt as if they'd played together for years, while the witches told Ginny that Morgan would take some getting used to.

And now Ginny's chances at playing Quidditch at all, unless it was with the Cannons, were gone. Even the Cannons had probably filled their spot since everyone had been sure Ginny was going to make the team.

She sank slowly into one of the chairs at the table and stared down at her fingers, which grew blurry from the tears that welled in her eyes.

The tears only made her angrier, though, and Ginny swiped at them.

Harry's arms were around her a minute later, rocking her back and forth.

"I'm so sorry, Gin," he whispered. "I...I wish there was something more I could say."

But Ginny couldn't respond, she could only nod against him and hold onto his robes.

"They're making a huge mistake," Harry said, his throat thick with emotion. "They'll regret it when Morgan falls on his arse. They don't know how much they lost by passing on you, Ginny." He lifted her face and kissed away her tears while Ginny blinked and tried to smile.

"I hate crying," she said. "I cry ugly."

Harry rolled his eyes and forced a laugh. "You look fine."

"I'm trying to be brave," she mumbled. "But I'm just so angry."

"You have every right to be."

They both started as Kennedy Paxton slid into the kitchen, closing the door behind him. He looked as if he wanted to melt into the wall—which would be quite the feat, considering how big he actually was.

"I'm sorry, Ginny," he said, screwing up his face. "I tried to beat the letter here when I found out. If it helps, the team wanted you."

"Then why didn't I make it?" Ginny asked, using a tissue Harry had conjured to swipe at her eyes and nose.

Paxton's eyes slid to Harry and then to the floor.

“Me?” Harry growled. “They didn’t choose her because of me?”

“Harry has nothing to do with how I play,” Ginny defended. Her tears dried up completely in the face of this new information. She was no longer feeling sorry for herself, but mad as hell.

“Ginny,” Paxton said, leaning forward and holding his hands out. “I know that. Hell, we all know that. But it’s the management who makes the final decision. They were worried about your staying power.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Ginny said, coming right up to the man, who didn’t flinch in the face of her anger. Instead, he looked frustrated and tired.

“They want someone who is committed to giving the team a good solid five to ten years, Ginny. And they figure you’ll be...well, getting married and wanting to start a family soon.”

“Witches can play when they’re married,” Ginny challenged back. “They can even play after they’ve had children. Ireland has already announced Moran will have her spot back after she has her baby.”

“I know that,” Paxton sighed, running a hand through his hair. “But that’s what happened. Morgan committed to eight years, Ginny. Eight years! Can you honestly make that kind of commitment?”

“I was never asked,” Ginny challenged back. She knew it was a moot point; she hadn’t been asked, even though in her heart she knew she wouldn’t give that kind of commitment. Two years, maybe. Possibly three.

Harry’s hands closed over her shoulders gently and he stared at Paxton. “That’s sexism,” he said, his voice shaking. “If they didn’t ask her for the same commitment then they already had their minds made up before Ginny even talked to them.”

“I can’t deny that,” Paxton agreed. “The team is only allowed so much say in inviting new players. We give our opinion and then it’s up to the management to decide.”

“Damn bureaucrats,” Harry growled. “Mark my words; there will be an official Auror investigation into this, Paxton. And if I find corruption, I’ll do every damned thing I can to bring every person involved down.”

“I welcome it,” Paxton nodded. “It’s time someone took this organization down a notch.”

Ginny sighed, feeling incredibly tired now. The whole few weeks had been exhausting and now that it was all finished, she felt the weight of it all pressing on her.

“If you really want to impress them,” Paxton said, now speaking to Ginny, “then find another team to be a part of. Make yourself a star there and show them what they’re really missing by taking on Morgan.”

“You said yourself he’s got an eight year contract,” Ginny said, shaking her head. She rubbed her face harshly.

“Only if he’s an asset to the team,” Paxton corrected. “If he can’t prove himself, then they have an option to get rid of him.”

“How would I do that?” Ginny scoffed. “Thanks to those bastards and their scheming, I don’t have a place on any team. Even the bloody Cannons have probably filled their spot. If I’m lucky, I *may* find a reserve position

as a Seeker open somewhere. But I'm not likely to even find that this late in the year."

"There are other teams," Paxton shrugged. "You're a damned good player, Weasley. Any International Team would be lucky to have you."

"International," Ginny scoffed. "That means I'd have to live somewhere else. You have to have residency to qualify." The idea of leaving England was...unfeasible, really. This was where her life was. This was where her family was. And Harry. She looked over at him to see him studying Paxton carefully.

"I know that," Paxton nodded, looking slightly uncomfortable under the weight of Harry's stare. "The French are looking. And the Romanians. You might even have a shot at Lithuania."

"No thanks," Ginny huffed. "I'd rather play for the bloody Cannons." She shouldered past Paxton, opening the back door with a loud sound.

"Tell the bastards they'll be hearing from me," Harry barked out, moving after Ginny and wrapping his arm over her shoulders.

He opened his mouth to speak and Ginny shook her head. "I really don't want to talk right now, Harry."

He nodded instead and pulled her to a stop. "Okay. I'll take you home."

"Perfect," she muttered, clinging to him.

The Cannons had indeed filled their open Chaser spot and Ginny felt horrible for even having to ask about it. It was definitely the bottom of the barrel, as far as she was concerned.

Harry kept trying to encourage her, but she knew even his patience was wearing thin with her moods. He was wonderful, he really was, but Ginny felt completely...let down and unfulfilled.

Quidditch was her life and not having that... She'd never seen herself as the stay-at home type of person. In fact, that type of life would probably send her over the edge. Even the Department of Magical Sports and Games didn't have any sort of position open—other than a file clerk, which they'd probably fill with someone just out of Hogwarts anyway. Ginny was 'over-qualified' they'd told her.

She'd received owls from both Christine Petra and Maude Belle with notes of outrage and sympathy, but they were only useless thoughts, in reality. The decision had been made and despite the fact that none of the team, barring Morgan himself, seemed to be happy with it, the management obviously was.

Just as Paxton had predicted, the offers of spots on foreign teams started to arrive. Ginny tore up the first one from Romania. She couldn't live that far away. Yes, Charlie was there, but only seeing him once or twice a year attested to how hard it was to arrange Portkeys from that distance.

She wasn't sure what made her keep the French one, and the Italian one, but they were tucked away in her bedside table. She hadn't even showed them to Harry, even though she was fairly sure he knew about them. Harry seemed to know things without her needing to tell him.

He had kept his opinion of the offers quiet and Ginny was grateful. Then again, maybe she needed someone to talk to about all of this.

If she wanted to play Quidditch again, there were only two viable options in front of her.

The letters in the bedside table were like a beacon, drawing her attention all day while she bustled about the flat, doing the laundry and cleaning. She rested her broom in the corner of the bedroom and stared at her Quidditch uniform—the green and gold of the Harpies—for a long time before finally taking the letters out.

Miss Ginevra Weasley,

The French National Team is pleased to offer you a position on our team as a starting Chaser.

The words seemed to jump off the page and etch themselves into her brain. It made her feel...wanted, needed, even...and that was saying something right now, when she was at her lowest.

...require a one year contract...other National teams look favorably on a player who has succeeded abroad...live in France...accommodations provided...

It was all overwhelming and Ginny folded the letter back up, stuffing it in the envelope and tucking it away in the drawer.

It was absurd.

She couldn't possibly leave England right now. There was...her family to consider. Little Teddy was just starting to learn his letters, and had had his first real burst of accidental magic just the other day.

And Harry. They'd spent so much time apart already. Could they really survive a year apart while she lived in a different country? She just couldn't do that to him.

But the idea of setting her dream aside hurt. It pressed on her chest until she found herself sitting on the sofa, Midnight curled in her lap, purring away as she absently stroked him. The flat grew hazy-grey around her as the evening wore on, and, finally, Harry came home.

He paused and looked at her, seated on the sofa, but didn't say anything. He moved about, putting his cloak away, lighting a lamp in the corner, and then joined her on the sofa. Midnight protested when Harry lifted him out of Ginny's lap and set him on the floor. He walked away, tail held high and Ginny watched him go. She was in Harry's arms the next second.

"Tell me what I can say," Harry said, resting his forehead against the side of her head. "Tell me what I can do to make you feel...better or..."

She swallowed thickly and leaned into his embrace, feeling horrible for acting this way. Harry didn't deserve to be put up with her sadness and uselessness.

"Tell me about your day," she said softly, praying a distraction would help to drive the foggy from her mind. All day long her mind kept returning to those letters; she even played out a situation in her head where

she accepted the offer and everything was wonderful. But she just didn't know.

Harry sighed and ruffled his hair. "I finished testing the last group of trainees today," he started in a thick voice. "There were several that I'm afraid I won't be able to pass; they just didn't make the cut. I was too busy to go to lunch, so Ron brought some food to me. He told me that Hannah Abbott—you remember her?—she's bought the Leaky from old Tom. Anyway, Ron ran into her and Susan Bones and talked to them for a while."

Ginny watched his face, pleased when a small smile broke out on his face.

"You won't believe...Hannah's dating Neville! I was shocked. Nev never said anything, and we went out for a pint a few weeks ago."

"Maybe it's a new thing," Ginny shrugged. She couldn't help but smile at the idea. Neville was a good friend, and if he was happy...that was wonderful.

"According to Ron, Susan let it slip that they've been seeing each other for months, and just didn't want to make a big fuss." Harry laughed at the idea and shook his head. "Good for them, you know. I'm happy for them."

"Me too," Ginny answered, and snuggled back into his embrace. Talking with Harry was the right idea.

"I wish I had more to tell you," he finally said after recounting a humorous exchange with Martha. "Ron said your family wants to see you. They've floored countless times, Gin."

"I know," she said, reality slamming back into her. "I know they want to help, but I can't listen to that many of them shower sympathy down on me. Bill will be outraged, but tell me that that's how the world works. Percy...well, I have no clue how he'd react or what he'd say. He'd probably just hand me a dozen different applications for entry-level positions at the Ministry."

Harry chuckled and rubbed lightly on her scalp.

"George is, no doubt, plotting some sort of revenge that will have to be stopped at the last second, before he lands himself in Azkaban."

"I wouldn't arrest him," Harry growled softly. "I'd warn him and he could run to...to Spain."

Ginny smiled wryly. "Ron will tell me I should have taken the spot on the Cannons, rather than mucked around with the National Team. And then he'll proceed to give me the stats on every player for England, and that will melt into his useless knowledge of Cannons trivia, and I'll be forced to kill him with my bare hands."

Harry laughed loudly and squeezed her to him.

"I wouldn't arrest *you*, either."

"Hermione will have a dozen cases to cite where I can take legal action against the bastards for discrimination, except that the damned Ministry protects them and doesn't allow that sort of thing."

"Damn shame."

"Mum and Dad..." Ginny shook her head, pushing away a swell of frustration and hopelessness. "They'll just *look* at me. Mum will cry and make me feel worse. Dad will either be completely quiet, or he'll try to give me one of those 'you'll feel better in no time' speeches that never works."

She sighed, exhausted again.

"What about me?" Harry asked. "What will I say?"

Ginny pulled back and looked up at him, her belly fluttering with attraction, and comfort, and love.

"You'll say that you love me, no matter if I'm a Quidditch player, or decide to take up owl grooming."

"You're right," he said. "Although I might have an issue with owl grooming."

Ginny snorted and then stilled, lifting her hand along his cheek. "I love you."

"I love you too, my little owl groomer."

They kissed softly for several minutes before Harry sighed. "I wish there was something I could do to help you, Gin. I just...I want to see you smile again. I want to hear you laugh and know that you're going to be okay."

Ginny pressed her eyes closed and tried to think of a way. There was only one thing that could make her feel like that again.

"I got offers from Italy and France," she blurted out.

Harry was quiet for a long minute, his fingers still playing in the long ends of her hair. "Are you taking one of them?"

"No," she denied. "I...I don't know. I hate the whole idea."

"You'd have to live there?"

"Yeah. Residency is required to qualify. And a one year contract."

"One year," he mused, sounding tired all of a sudden. She supposed he probably was; he'd been working all day and then come home to find her sulking again. It was enough to drain the life out of anyone.

"One year," she repeated. Suddenly, it didn't sound like such a long time. The months would pass quickly because she'd be busy training and flying. "We've been apart a year before."

"Two," he corrected. "I hated those years. Being without you..."

"But we would still see each other."

"Are you...are you really considering this?" he asked. His body went rigid under hers and she studied his

tight face.

"I don't know," she finally sighed. "I just...I'm searching for anything that will give me my identity back, Harry. I liked the person I was and I feel like that was stolen from me. I want it back."

He nodded jerkily.

"Quidditch gave me that. I certainly don't like the idea of being apart from you, but there are Portkeys and, if I took the offer in France, its close enough for both of us to travel back and forth. We could think of them as little holidays."

He didn't look convinced and chewed on his lip before shrugging. "Weekends sometimes and the occasional stolen day?"

"It would work," she nodded.

"You living in France," Harry smirked, shaking his head. "You'd be talking like bloody Fleur before long, flouncing around wearing designer robes and worried about breaking a nail."

His attempt at humor made her laugh. "You know me *so* well, love. I've been looking for an excuse to act like a frilly little French witch for years." She finally broke out laughing and Harry joined her.

"We're strong," Ginny protested, clutching the lapels of his robes. "You and I...we're strong together. We could survive it and come out better, like we did before."

"We could fall apart too," Harry cautioned, his voice cracking.

"Wouldn't happen," Ginny denied vehemently. "I'm in love with you, Harry."

They sat in silence for a long time. Ginny rolled the idea over and over in her head, trying to see it from all angles.

"Let's go to bed," Harry finally suggested. "I'm not hungry at all."

"Neither am I," Ginny said, shifting off his lap and helping him to stand. They walked, hand in hand, down the hallway after putting out the light.

Harry wrapped fully around her when they were in bed, holding her as if she might slip away in the night.

"I haven't decided yet, Harry," she said, wiggling back into him. "I honestly don't know what I'll do."

"I hate the idea," Harry admitted. "But...I also want you to be happy, Gin."

She nodded and tucked her hand under her cheek. "I have time to think about it." Her eyes fluttered closed and she relaxed into the warmth of their bed.

This chapter has no title. It desperately needs one. That's where you come in. Think up your best idea for a title and put it in your comments. I'll look through them and decide which one I like best, the winner will get a scene or one-shot of

*their request. (Some rules on that--if you're here, you know what I write best. I'll **try** a different ship at times, but I make no promises. Also, you probably know my squicks so...when in doubt, send me a private message and we'll talk. ;) *fingers tapping while I wait for your title suggestions**

Edit Note: Thanks for the title suggestions, everyone! This contest is now closed.

Chapter 3: To Remember

Just Say The Word-Chapter 3: To Remember

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: The winner of Chapter 2's naming game is Kelly,  [kismatt](#), with "Torn". There were lots of great suggestions and three that I took all day yesterday to ponder over before deciding. We'll have another contest coming up in a few chapters, so don't wander too far. ;) Kelly, I'll be waiting for your request whenever you're ready.

*Okay, on with the show...remember that proverbial shoe you've all been waiting to drop?? lol Yeah, here it is. *slightly evil laugh**

Chapter 3: To Remember

Ginny rolled over in bed, trying to get comfortable. A sharp, searing pain shot all through her side and she gasped awake, struggling to hold back an intense cry of pain.

"Oh, Ginny, don't move."

The room was bright and Ginny blinked as dark spots swam in her vision. Somewhere in the back of her mind, Ginny recognized her mother's voice, but it was faint over the pounding of her head, the throbbing all along her left side and back and the waves of dizziness washing over her.

"I knew they should have used a binding charm."

"Perhaps we should get a nurse."

Finally, lying still—forcing herself to stay completely immobile—stopped the spinning and Ginny took a deep breath. Her parent's voices faded in and out, debating the need to get medical help for her.

"I'm okay," she finally slurred, trying to steady her breathing. Her side still ached horribly; sharp pain at her shoulder and shooting sensations down her side. Her left arm—which she realized was held to her side with some sort of binding—was completely numb.

"Oh, she's awake."

Taking a deep breath, Ginny blinked one eye open, and then the other. The spots in them faded to grey as she stared up at the lights above her head. The ceiling was strange and she tried to focus on it before her mother's face darted into her vision. But the picture was all wrong. Her eyes must not be working right yet, because it looked like her mother, and sounded like her mother; but a different version of her mother—more ...squidgy around the edges and just...different.

“Don't move, Ginny, dear. The Healers said you need to lie still. At least, we think that's what he was trying to tell us. I couldn't quite make it out through the accent.”

“Give her some space, Molly.” Her father's voice floated from somewhere near her feet and Ginny wanted more than anything to look at him, for her eyes to work properly, but her shoulder throbbed again when she tried to lift her head and she groaned in pain.

“Arthur, you go and get that Healer. I knew they weren't giving her enough pain potion.”

Her mother fluttered her hand in the air in the direction of where her father's voice came from and Ginny heard hurried steps out of the room.

She closed her eyes and tried to keep her heart from pounding too loudly while her brain engaged.

Where was she? And why did she hurt this badly?

The last thing she remembered was falling asleep in Harry's arms...

Harry!

Even knowing it would hurt, Ginny reached for her mother's hand, jostling the bed and making her cry out. “Harry? Is he alright?”

Something must have happened last night—something horrible. Perhaps there had been some sort of attack, or a serious accident.

She could feel her mother's hand clutch hers tightly and the pause in the room made it hard to breathe.

Please don't let him be... No, please.

“I'm sure Harry's fine, dear. You must have hit your head harder than they suspected. It's no wonder, falling from so high up. I very nearly had a fit when the owl came telling us you'd been injured. And these foreign hospitals...”

Her voice kept going as she fussed with the scratchy blankets covering Ginny. But Ginny stopped listening. Nothing she was saying was making any sense at all. The words and phrases cluttered into her head, bouncing off each other and crowding into nothing that connected in her brain.

While she tried to grasp the meaning behind the words, she allowed herself to fully focus on her mother finally. The squidginess that she'd imagined earlier was thrown into sharp relief; hair that was no longer bright red, but mottled with dull grey. Her face was thinner than Ginny's brain said it should be, and much more wrinkled.

“...but soon we'll have you home and you can rest for as long as you need, dear.”

She smiled, blinking the same warm, brown eyes that Ginny remembered from her childhood. But they were all wrong too, encased in too many wrinkles and giving her the look of pity Ginny had always hated as a child.

“No,” Ginny moaned out, tears filling her eyes. “No, this is all wrong.” Her side protested when she struggled in the bed.

“Ginny—hold still! You're going to do more damage than you've already—”

“Harry should be here. He was here last night. But we weren't here...it was at home, at our flat!”

“Ginny—”

Ignoring the screaming pain that shot all through her, Ginny heaved herself out of the bed. The tile floor beneath her feet was like ice—cold and slippery—and Ginny gasped when her feet hit it.

“I need to go,” she panted out against the pain. “This is all wrong.”

“Arthur!” her mother called as she fussed around Ginny, trying to nudge her back into the bed without doing anymore damage. “I think you've hit your head, Ginny.”

“I need to find Harry. He'll be able to tell me what happened.”

“Harry's not here, Ginny,” her mother scolded in a tone that made Ginny blink at her. “He's back in England, where he's supposed to be. You're in Spain, where you live. Do you really not remember—”

The words made no sense as Ginny's head spun. Her knees hit the floor painfully and she collapsed against the side of the bed, growling at the pain in her shoulder and back. Her mother's arms came around her, trying to lift her up again, and tears spilled out of Ginny's eyes, dripping onto the thin cotton gown she was draped in. It had pin-straight lines of pale pink all through the blue fabric, and the wet spots stood out brightly against it; tiny circles made by her tears.

“This is wrong, it's all wrong,” she shook her head.

Her mother was crying now too, Ginny could hear her sniffing and feel the hitches in her chest as she leaned around her daughter.

“I'm so sorry, Ginny. Please let's...let's get you back into bed. You're injured and...”

The door to the room swung open and three pairs of shoes came in, bringing her father and two others speaking rapidly in a language Ginny didn't understand, but assumed was Spanish. Her mother moved from around her and Ginny thought her father probably lifted her away, pulling his wife into his embrace.

A man with black hair and dark olive skin intruded on her view, folding down on himself to crouch in front of her. “You must return to bed, miss. You are not ready to be moving about.”

Had Ginny not been so tired, had her side not felt like it was torn open, she might have fought harder to be out of the bed. But she was soon levitating back onto the thin mattress, wincing when she settled on her back.

An efficient nurse tucked her in and fussed about, speaking in clipped and rapid phrases to the Healer. Her wand lit several times over the top of Ginny, but Ginny ignored it.

"When is it?" she asked, her head spinning. The question didn't really make sense, but it was all she could manage to force out of her mouth.

"It is June," the Healer answered, probing at her shoulder with his wand. "June twentieth."

Ginny blinked at the fuzzy outline of her parents next to her, focusing on their hands entwined. What she was being told swam before her, nothing making sense.

She was injured, and in hospital.

She was in Spain.

And Harry was back in England.

Time had passed, if the way her parents now looked was any indication.

"What year?" she forced out.

All movement in the room stopped and the Healer cleared his throat. "Two thousand nine," he said in his heavily accented voice.

Her mother began crying and Ginny swore softly. Her father's hand, the only thing that seemed solid in the world right now, reached for Ginny's hand, clasping it in his. Ginny closed her eyes and held on while the room spun around her, growing darker until it was black.

The overwhelming feeling of 'this cannot be happening' was causing an aching numbness in her whole body. Sadly, the only thing Ginny was aware of was the pain in her side that the potions only mildly took the edge off.

Since waking, Ginny had spoken to three different Healers and had her head examined twice. None of the Healers could give concrete evidence as to why her memory of the past eight years was missing.

Ginny was exhausted, both mentally and physically. The third round of questioning, along with the probing and flashes of light directly in her eyes had been the last of what she could take. Her parents, sensing her unease, had quickly shooed the Healers away, saying they could come back later.

Now her mother was asleep across the room, snoring lightly against the chair she was slouching in.

Ginny's father sat next to her bed, holding her hand, his forehead a mass of wrinkles.

"How could this happen?" Ginny whispered, mostly to herself.

He started and blinked at her from behind his glasses. "I wish I could tell you, Ginny. They think the jar from your fall—"

"I meant...I meant...how is this my life?" Ginny clarified. "I don't understand any of it. The last thing I remember is going to bed with Harry. I had the offer from the French to play, but I hadn't decided yet."

Rather than arguing with her, like everyone had been doing all day, her father simply nodded, concern shining in his eyes. "I was surprised when you accepted. But you seemed so excited by the idea."

"I accepted?" she asked, her head spinning. "No, I...I hadn't decided. I...didn't know." She blinked at him.

"What did Harry think?" The question was out of her mouth before Ginny could call it back. No one had said anything directly, but the fact that she had been injured and he wasn't here, the distracted way her mother mentioned that he was in England...only added up to one thing in Ginny's mind. She and Harry were no longer together.

"He..." Her father sighed and rubbed his balding head. "He supported you, like we all did."

Ginny waited for the words to come, and prompted him when they didn't. "But..."

"But, being apart from someone you love is hard," her father conceded. "I'm sure both of you tried."

"We couldn't make it work." The idea was completely foreign—it didn't even make sense in a world where she and Harry were separated by so much. "And Harry...he's moved on?"

The wince in her father's face was enough to confirm it. Ginny ignored the pain in her shoulder and rolled onto her side, staring blankly at the cracked, plaster wall. The thought of Harry being with someone else...it ripped a hole in her heart, making it bleed everywhere.

"Both of you have," her father corrected. "As long as you're both happy..."

There was a small bit of doubt in his words and Ginny latched onto it. "Is he?" She looked over her shoulder at him, praying he would shout that Harry was miserable and in as much pain as she was.

"He seems to be," her father nodded after thinking about it. The doubt was still there, but it did nothing to ease Ginny's pain.

"I moved on," she said slowly, rolling the words in her mouth despite the distaste they left. Her eyes darted down to her finger, praying there would be no ring there. If there was, then where was her husband?

But there was no gold band there. No diamond. Not even a pale strip of flesh indicating that there might have once been a ring.

"I'm sure that these memories will come back soon enough," her father patted her hand awkwardly and his eyes darted about, probably trying to think up something safe to say.

"I've missed so much," Ginny lamented, curling her legs toward her chest, ignoring the way her back muscles stretched. "This can't be real."

The last was said in a whisper that made her father flinch. "You have a lot of family that are going to be glad to see you again." He tried for a smile, but the brightness of it never reached her eyes. "Bill almost came with us. And George...he's owed twice since we've been here. I'm waiting for him to send a Howler." The last was said with a chuckle and Ginny couldn't help but be slightly amused by it. Only George would send a Howler to his parents when they didn't give him information fast enough.

"Or he'll simply walk in. I'm sure Lee would be happy to cover the shop for a day."

"George is...he's okay?" Ginny asked, remembering how much he'd struggled after Fred's death. There were times during her last year at Hogwarts that Harry would write, telling her how he and Ron had tracked George down and dragged him out of one dodgy pub or another.

"He's doing well," her father nodded, a proud smile coming to his face. "I really wasn't sure about Angelina as a match for him, but they've really made it work. And the twins, Gideon and Fabian are just—"

Ginny gasped, biting into her lip as the idea settled in. George was married now. He and Angelina had been barely dating before...before all of *this* had happened. And he had *children!*

Her father froze in his words and gave a pained look. "I'm sorry. I just forgot."

"I don't mind," Ginny lied, shaking her head and then staring up at the ceiling above her. "It's something I'm either going to have to accept or... Well, I just need to get used to being surprised."

"You shouldn't have to," he apologized softly. "I wish..."

"All the wishing in the world won't make things like they should be," Ginny protested, her voice cracking in agony. "What about Ron and Hermione? Tell me about them."

Her father smiled tightly and nodded, patting her hand patiently. "They're well. Ron graduated the Auror Academy shortly after...after you left. Hermione is still in the Law Division."

The tightness in his voice and the careful way he chose his words spoke volumes to Ginny.

"They took his side, didn't they? In the breakup."

"There wasn't really a *side* to take," he protested.

Ginny's chest tightened painfully. "There's always a side," she said, a broken smile forcing its way out. "It's okay. I don't blame them." The words sounded just as hollow as they felt when they left her lips. "Harry needs them. They're his family."

"They're yours also," her father protested, squeezing her hand just a bit. "And they love you, Ginny. Enough to make you Rose's godmother."

Ginny nodded absently. She stored that bit of information away—she'd deal with being a godmother later. She closed her eyes and tried to picture an older Harry, one who wasn't a part of her life.

"Tell me about him...please?"

"Ginny, I don't—"

"I need to know," she protested. "I need to..." She shook her head when the right words wouldn't form in her mouth. It was torturing herself, she knew, but it felt right to know what Harry was doing with his life.

"I'm not the best person—"

"You never give yourself enough credit," Ginny shook her head. Her father looked so much older right now—much more than when they'd first started talking. For just a minute, she wondered whose side he had been on during the breakup. A very selfish part of her wondered which of them had called it off—Harry, or her—and if it really made a difference anyway.

"He's Head of the Aurors," her father said after staring at her for a long minute.

"That's good," Ginny nodded, feeling pride, and sadness, well inside her. "He was a good Auror."

"One of the best," her father nodded.

"Married?" The word was choked out and for a brief moment she thought about telling him to ignore it.

"No," he shook his head immediately. "He was seeing someone last year, we all thought that maybe... I never heard exactly what happened, but they're not together anymore."

Ginny bit back the bile that rose in her throat. The urge to roll over and cry was great, but there was also relief in there. He wasn't married. Could there be hope for them?

It was far too early to ask that question. Especially since Ginny had no way of knowing everything that had passed between them over the years. Perhaps the relationship was far too damaged to ever think about repairing.

"He and Teddy are over now and again." Her father's face lightened at the mention of Teddy and Ginny's heart tightened. She hadn't even thought about Teddy in all of this.

"I'll bet he's grown," Ginny said, regret filling her voice. She closed her eyes and tried to picture anything other than the spry little sprog that tore through her and Harry's flat, upending tables and chasing the cat.

"Midnight!" she cried out, realizing that she hadn't spared a thought for the cat at all. "I completely forgot about him."

Her father smiled fondly. "Harry brought him to the Burrow after... Well, he ended up coming back for him a few weeks later. As far as I know, he still has him."

The thought gave Ginny comfort at the same time it made her incredibly sad. "Why didn't I..." The question

died however when she really thought about what she was asking. Of course, a professional Quidditch player moving to another country wouldn't have time for a pet. She nodded and her father shrugged one shoulder. "I'm glad Harry took care of him."

They sat in silence for a minute, listening to the small puffs of air her mother was snoring out.

"I don't know what happened," Ginny said, staring down at her hands as they fidgeted in her lap. "But...I'm sorry, if I caused anything...any hurt, or...discomfort."

"It's in the past, Ginny," her father excused, smiling tightly. "Mistakes aren't mistakes if you learn from them."

Ginny winced, wondering if those words applied to her or not. It simply wasn't fair that she *hadn't* made the choice that seemed to lead to all of this. Yes, she'd been considering moving to France, but she *hadn't decided*.

Was there some magic that had forced her into this situation? Was someone—fate, or God, or someone else entirely—simply playing with the futures of others, carelessly skewing things to amuse themselves? Or was there real concern for her own mental stability because she couldn't remember the past eight years?

"What are you going to do now?"

The question echoed in the distance between them and Ginny stared blankly ahead, asking herself the question over and over again.

"I don't know," she admitted. "I don't want to play Quidditch." The realization leaked into her brain in the same way it leaked from her mouth. But it was true. With everything in her world turned upside down, twisted sideways, and standing on its head, Quidditch seemed the furthest thing from her mind.

"That's probably for the best," her father sighed in relief. "I'm not sure your mother and I could take another owl like this last one. We've had too many over the years. George actually has a chart in his office recording all your injuries, you know."

"Yeah?" Ginny couldn't help but snort at that idea. "I guess there were a lot of them over the years."

"You've had an impressive career, Ginny," he praised. "You always did give everything when you did something; why should Quidditch be different. You can always be proud of what you accomplished."

"But it wasn't the life you wanted me to have," she guessed, the corner of her mouth lifting in resignation and fondness. She could only imagine moments like these—long talks with her father about her life—had happened all too infrequently in this strange life she apparently led. "It wasn't what I wanted."

"When you're a parent," her father began, "you always have hopes and dreams for your children. And they don't always go the way you think they should, or even the way you expect them to go. All you can really hope is for them to find happiness."

"And a few grandkids, yeah?"

He chuckled softly at Ginny's suggestion. "The grandkids do help."

"I never wanted to disappoint you," Ginny said, tears burning the back of her eyes. "I wish I could remember all the horrible things I've ever done, so I could apologize for them. I don't even know if they were horrible... but I want to apologize for them anyway...just in case."

"No need, Ginny," he excused, leaning forward and pressing a kiss to her forehead.

"I want to come home," Ginny whispered finally. She knew it was the right decision the moment it was made. "I need to come home."

"You'll always have a place there," he assured her.

She nodded, swiping at the tears that escaped, dribbling down her face to the gown once more. If there was any place she could take time and figure out what was happening to her, the Burrow was that place.

Ron paced in the hallway for nearly ten minutes debating whether or not to go in.

"You gonna stand out 'ere all day, luv?" Martha, Harry's receptionist, asked from where she'd been watching him pace. "Whatever you 'ave to say... 'e's heard it all before."

Ron swore softly, jerking toward Harry's closed door. "He's in?"

Martha stared at him, her eyes going a bit wide behind her square spectacles. "'asn't left since you was 'ere, now 'as 'e?"

Ron shrugged in acknowledgement. She did have a point. "He hasn't heard this," he muttered, giving the door a rap with his knuckle.

"Should I secure anythin' down?" Martha quipped, gripping the edges of her desk.

Ron chuckled, but it died when Harry called for him to enter. This wasn't going to be easy, because Ron had no idea how Harry would take the news.

"Ron!" Harry grinned when Ron entered, closing the door behind him. Ron tried to smile just as widely as ever.

"Oi, do you ever see the top of your desk?" Ron asked, gaping at the piles of paperwork that Harry was hidden behind.

"Sometimes," Harry chuckled, nudging his glasses back up his nose with a finger. "Although it's a rare occasion."

"The bigger office isn't worth all this, mate," Ron shook his head and gestured to all the paper spread all over the office.

"Nah, soon as I'm done scrawling on all of this, I'll let Martha have a go at it. Two flicks of her wand and the

place will be like new. Don't know what I'd do without her."

"Don't let her hear that," Ron grinned. "She'll be after you for an increase."

Harry chuckled and pushed back from his desk, nodding toward the only empty seat in the room. "Come to take me to lunch?"

Ron folded himself into the fine leather chair and wiggled until he was comfortable. He may be here awhile. "You need to take me out," he laughed. "I'm the one with a bloody mortgage and expenses."

Harry laughed and leaned back in his chair, propping his feet on an open drawer in his desk. Ron was glad to see him smile open and freely. Moments like this had been few and far between in the past years. Harry had been...content was probably the best word to describe him. But Ron suspected, no matter how much Harry denied it, that he wasn't truly happy.

Over the past year, ever since his breakup with Susan, Harry had calmed down much more and seemed to find a place where he was much freer with his smile and laughter. It made Ron feel so much better about everything...until now. He just wasn't sure how Harry was going to take this.

"Are you really here for lunch?" Harry asked, one eyebrow rising behind his glasses. "Because I ate...hours ago," he said, glancing at his watch. It was the same watch that Ron's parents had given him on his seventeenth birthday and Ron knew that Harry kept it with him everyday.

"No, not here for lunch," Ron said. His fingers found the cuff of his robes and tugged lightly at a loose thread there. "Dad sent an owl."

Harry sat up, removing his legs from the drawer, and stared at him. "Everything alright?"

Ron shrugged. "They're in Spain."

"Oh."

The hesitant way Harry said it made Ron wince. They both knew what 'Spain' meant. It meant 'Ginny'.

"Ginny had another accident. Took a Bludger to the shoulder and fell."

Harry's mouth pulled into a thin line and his skin went white. "She's...she's okay, though?"

Ron nodded, remembering the exact phrasing that George had read aloud to him. George had been ecstatic at the news—not that Ginny was injured, but...the other. But Ron wasn't sure how to feel. He loved Ginny, really he did, but sometimes it seemed easier if she just stayed away.

"Yeah, she's okay," he answered finally. "Broken collarbone, torn tendons, broken ribs."

"That's good." Harry relaxed back into his chair and took his glasses off, polishing them on his robes. Hermione said Harry always did that when he wasn't sure what to say. "I mean, it's good that it wasn't more."

Ron nodded thoughtfully, watching for signs that Harry was going to get upset. He'd seen enough of them over the years to be able to predict. Those early months, after everything had ended, Harry had been a study in volcanic temper eruptions. George used to joke that Harry was in danger of sprouting Weasley-red hair back then just to match his temper. Then again, Ron thought he had every right to be upset.

"They think she hit her head too, Dad mentioned something about her memory."

Harry nodded and replaced his glasses. But now his mask was back on and Ron couldn't tell what his true feelings about it were.

"There's more."

Harry's eyes met his and for a minute, he looked so young—seventeen, at most—so very vulnerable as he gripped the arms of his chair.

"She's done with Quidditch. Quit the team."

Ron winced, hating to have to be the one to break the news to Harry. But George refused to, even after taking the ten galleons Ron offered for him to do it.

"She's moving back here."

The room ached with silence for a long minute while Ron waited for Harry to react. When he did, it wasn't what Ron expected at all.

Harry nodded and smiled slowly—a smile that seemed caught between acceptance and resignation. "Good for her."

Ron waited another whole minute, feeling each second count down. "You're not...mad, or...upset?"

"I'm fine, Ron," Harry smiled his easy smile. "She'll be closer to her family. Come on, let's go get a pint. I can sign the rest of these tomorrow."

He stood up abruptly, closing the drawers on his desk and bouncing on the balls of his feet, impatiently waving his arm for Ron to go out the door.

Ron scooted forward in the chair, hesitating on the edge and staring at his best mate of nearly eighteen years. "You...you're not..."

"I'm bloody thirsty," Harry growled, shaking his head at Ron's thickness. "Can we get on with it? Think George will close up early and meet us there?"

Harry *seemed* fine. His shoulders weren't set in that way that he had sometimes, and his jaw wasn't fixed. Actually, he seemed perfectly accepting.

Maybe Ron had been worried about nothing. When he'd pictured this moment over the last few hours that he'd known he needed to tell Harry about Ginny's return, he never even considered that Harry might actually *be* fine with it. He thought he'd run every scenario through his head: angry Harry, furious Harry, indifferent

Harry, crushed Harry. Accepting Harry wasn't anywhere in that list.

"Sure," Ron nodded jerkily, feeling more off kilter than he expected to be. "I'll bet we can talk him into it."

"Wish we could get Neville too," Harry said, closing the door behind him. "But he and Hannah are off to Africa before the school term begins."

Ron nodded, trying to keep up with Harry's pace as they marched through the Auror department.

"Take the rest of the day off, Martha," Harry grinned at the woman as they passed her. "I'll see you in tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," she answered back automatically, standing still behind her desk and blinking at Ron, who could only shrug.

"Hogwarts," Ron mused, his brain just now catching the comment about Neville. He jogged after Harry, barely keeping up with the energetic strides. "Isn't Teddy getting his letter soon?"

Harry laughed as he nodded to people in the hallway. Ron tried to keep up, absently greeting those who they were passing.

"I hope soon," Harry said, shaking his head. "He'll do us all in if it doesn't come soon. Every morning he waits by the window for the post owl. I've tried to tell him they don't usually come so early in the summer, but he won't listen."

"It's an exciting thing," Ron shrugged when they finally made it to the Atrium and prepared to disappear. "I remember waiting for mine."

Harry chuckled. "Didn't cause near the excitement mine did, I'll bet."

"Nothing could cause that much excitement," Ron laughed. "I remember when Ginny was waiting for hers..." His voice dropped off when he realized what he was saying, but Harry only tilted his head, as if eager for the rest of the story.

"Fred nicked it, told her it hadn't come." Ron started the story reluctantly, but seeing that Harry wasn't bothered, he relaxed. Maybe...

"I'll bet she loved that," Harry laughed, shaking his head fondly.

"Mum caught her with Percy's wand, trying to get back at Fred. She was restricted for a week."

"Did she ever get him?"

Ron couldn't help but chuckle. "Dad pretends he doesn't know, but she nicked his wand next, charmed all of Fred's trouser legs closed. George took the punishment for that when Mum found out. But he didn't mind."

"At least Teddy doesn't have to go through all of that," Harry conceded. "He just has to deal with his Gran yelling at him for letting all the bugs in the open windows."

“He’ll be off before you know it.”

This time, Harry did flinch, and his face showed a momentary pain that Ron understood all too much. Teddy was Harry’s life right now—had been for years. While Harry did date occasionally and even had a decent thing going with Susan Bones for a bit, Teddy still remained his number one priority. But perhaps that’s how it should be for him. They needed each other.

“They grow up too fast.”

“Too right,” Ron agreed, thinking of Rose at home with her mother. She was nearly two years old, and running all over like a crazy barbarian. But he wouldn’t trade a minute of that for anything.

“Come on, before George gets a better offer.”

Ron watched as Harry Apparated away and sighed. It might not have gone exactly as he expected it to, but it went...well, Ron thought. Perhaps time apart was what both Harry and Ginny needed to let their wounds heal and to be able to live in each other’s presence again. Perhaps.

Chapter 4: Just To Be Me

Just Say The Word-Chapter 4: Just To Be Me

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: I am, apparently, not posting this nearly fast enough for some people who refuse to read until I'm finished. My inbox is threatening to explode and there are ominous billows of colored smoke coming from it--I'm not going to take chances, I'll just post this chapter now to hopefully stave off more Howlers.

Chapter 4: Just To Be Me

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Spending the evening at the pub was the perfect thing for how Harry was feeling today. And having both Ron and George there was even better, because they wouldn't let him get all melancholy and depressed. Not that he *would*. Why should he, anyway? Everything was fine in his life.

He had a good job that he was damn good at. He had an amazing godson that he couldn't be prouder of if he were actually Teddy's father. If he wanted to, he could have a different date every day of the week. He had a nice flat. And a cat.

Things were definitely alright for Harry James Potter. He had his mates, too; mates who bought rounds and kept his pint full. Plus, they watched out for him.

"I can't be here too late," George protested, and then ordered another pint for himself. "This is the second time this week I've gone out with you blokes and Angelina's not going to be thrilled when I come home smelling like this place again."

Harry smiled wryly and shook his head. "That's why it's good not to have a woman."

Usually they cheered Harry's comments like that, but tonight they just gave tight smiles and exchanged looks that Harry didn't want to spend time figuring out. They were probably about him, and he didn't need to waste the energy on it. Sooner or later one of them would just come right out and say it.

"When was the last time you got any, Harry?" George asked bluntly, causing Ron to tip off his stool in laughter.

Harry scowled down at the table. It *had* been awhile. Since Susan last year. But... "My hand is just as good," Harry snorted, surreptitiously glancing around the pub, thankful that Ron had erected privacy wards. *This* wasn't something Harry needed splashed all over Witch Weekly.

Ron fell over again, but he wasn't laughing. In fact, it didn't look like he was really breathing. Harry stood up on his stool and peered over the edge of the table to where Ron was hanging on his stool.

"All right?"

Ron's shoulders heaved and he finally let loose a loud, braying sound that made Harry sit back. "Fine...just..."

"That long, eh?" George chuckled and shook his head.

Harry scowled at both of them and took a long drink from his pint. "I'm happy," he protested. It was a phrase he'd even practiced in front of the mirror in his flat, over and over again until he was starting to believe it himself.

George opened his mouth to say something, but then shook it away and watched as Ron climbed back onto his stool.

"Some news today, isn't it?" George asked, casting sidelong glances at Harry, who pretended not to really know what he was talking about.

"Some news," Harry agreed finally. Ron was staring at him now, like Hermione did sometimes, and Harry squirmed in his spot.

"I'll bet when you woke up this morning," George continued even after Ron made a hiss like an angry cat, "you never thought you'd be here, knowing that Ginny was coming back for good."

Harry bit his lip, not really wanting to answer that. In truth, he wasn't sure what to feel about the idea. Part of him was frustrated that just when he was getting everything together, she was going to come waltzing back in with her...

"She's not bringing The Wanker, is she?" he grimaced, hating the idea. Ginny, he could handle. But Brogan Quinlan grated on his nerves more than anyone he'd ever met. The whole time he was here with Ginny two Christmases ago, Harry had been praying for some evidence to come to light so that he could arrest the pony, muscle-bound Beater.

But nothing had, and Harry had been forced to listen to his deep laugh and watch the way he flirted with all the women. Even Susan, who had been there with Harry!

"Merlin, I hope not," Ron groaned. Harry felt a bit of camaraderie in the fact that if he hated Quinlan, Ron hated him just as much. In fact, he and Ron had a sort of game going where every time Quinlan was mentioned in the news or by someone in the family, they would secretly call him vile names underneath their breath, giving points for the most creative one that didn't repeat. Ron was up two points—it was bound to happen since he was married to Hermione and heard big, fancy words more often. Harry was limited to what he overheard training Aurors.

“The letter didn’t say,” George supplied. His eyes rested on Harry a bit too long, but Harry was feeling incredibly worked up now and the few pints he’d had were swirling in his belly.

Knowing Ginny was seeing someone else was one thing, having it thrust in his face time and time again would send him ‘round the twist. He knew he wasn’t stable enough to sit across the dinner table from Quinlan for an extended amount of time making polite conversation while the bastard put his hand on Ginny’s thigh and made her giggle in that light way she had. Just thinking about it now stirred his stomach unpleasantly.

“Mum was taken in by him, but Dad saw what he was,” Ron half-convincingly nodded. “If he does follow Ginny home, we’ll just have to do something about it.”

Harry ignored the comment, still thinking about why he hated Brogan Quinlan so much. It wasn’t that he still had a thing for Ginny—not at all—he simply hated the man. Ginny could do so much better. She could be... she could be with *anyone* and yet she chose to be in a silly tabloid-driven, scandalous relationship with a man she had to know dallied behind her back with any number of women. How could she honestly take him back when he treated her so horribly? There were always pictures of Quinlan in the tabloids with some new, exotic woman draped on his arm. Not that Harry read them, he just heard about them.

Ginny definitely wasn’t the girl he’d fallen in love with so many years ago. *That* he knew.

“I need to get home and feed the cat,” Harry observed, fatigue seeping into his voice.

“I can’t believe you still have that cat,” Ron shook his head.

Harry bristled inwardly. In truth, he had no idea why he still had a cat who hated him. He’d been Ginny’s cat all those years ago, and after the breakup Harry wanted to get rid of him, but...he just couldn’t. And at least there was someone at home waiting for him, even if the cat was only waiting to have Harry fill his food bowl and then pointedly ignore him.

“I can’t believe you’re leaving us at half-nine to go and take care of your cat,” George guffawed. “That’s pathetic, Potter. You’re like one of those old cat ladies.”

Harry wanted to protest, especially as a picture of Mrs. Figg entered his mind. At least he didn’t own any carpet slippers.

“Leave him alone, George,” Ron warned.

“That’s okay,” Harry said, the side of his mouth quirking. “It was sort of funny.”

“Sort of?” George spluttered. “It was damned funny, Potter. You’re an old, cat woman who hasn’t had a woman in eighteen months.”

Any humor was sucked out of the moment by the truth of the statement and Harry’s chest felt hollow.

Ron smacked George’s arm, making him teeter on his stool.

“Harry, I’m—”

"Don't worry about it," Harry dismissed, forcing a smile on his face and a chuckle out of his throat. They both died without the effort to sustain them. "It was funny," he lied. "Remind me to take the mickey next time, yeah?" He took a long swallow from his pint and gave a quick nod to Ron, who looked like he was in pain, before removing the charms that protected their conversation.

"Harry—"

"I'll see you tomorrow, Ron," Harry called back over his shoulder as he marched through the mostly-empty pub toward the door.

Ron lunged forward, wrapping his hand around Harry's arm to prevent him from leaving. "He was just being stupid, like usual," Ron said, dismissing George's comments.

Harry took a breath and put on his public face, blinking up at his friend. "I'm fine, Ron. I really do need to get home. The damned cat's probably torn up the place looking for his food, and I have early training tomorrow anyway."

Ron's jaw worked for a second before he nodded, his knowing gaze piercing into Harry's.

"Okay. See you tomorrow."

Harry nodded jerkily and exited the pub, taking quick steps toward the alley where they always Apparated from.

The damned cat was in his now-permanent home on the end of the sofa. He never even bothered to look up when Harry came home anymore. He should really just get rid of the thing, because it gave him more trouble than it was worth.

"Stupid cat," he grumbled, grudgingly filling the small bowl with food and then the other one with water. "Stupid, stupid cat."

As if being called, the animal waltzed into the kitchen and stared up at Harry, its glassy eyes peering at him in a much more intrusive way than he ever thought was possible for a cat.

Would Ginny want it back now that she was coming back to England? Should he ask?

The idea made him feel funny and he leaned his hip against the counter, watching the cat as it watched him.

"Stupid Cat," he said again, with much more fondness than he ever showed toward the animal. And it really *was* a stupid cat. In the months after the breakup, once Harry had retrieved the cat from the Burrow, he tried to rename the silly thing. Midnight had been Ginny's chosen name for it.

After exhausting a huge list of names that would all be perfectly acceptable for a cat, and none that it would actually respond to, Harry settled on simply calling it 'Stupid Cat'.

The cat made a small mewing sound and Harry nodded. "I know...I'm leaving. Can't even be in my own damned kitchen," he grumbled as he began removing his tie and robes.

Ginny stared out the wide balcony to the bright blue sea she could make out in the distance. It was close enough that when the wind blew the tiniest bit, billowing the sheer curtains on the windows, she could smell the salt air.

Barcelona really was a lovely place. And had she not had somewhere a million times better to go, Ginny might have been content staying here a few days, just to get her thoughts more sorted.

Her body still ached and she walked like an old woman, shuffling one foot along the floor and wincing when the sore side of her body ended up with too much weight on it. The Healers said the stiffness and pain would die out after a few days. They gave her pain medication, but Ginny didn't like the way it made her already-fuzzy head swoop and spin.

Before they left to go prepare the Burrow for her arrival, her mother fussed about her taking all her potions, but her father just shrugged his shoulder and told her to do whatever she felt was best.

This place seemed so much more foreign and frightening now that she was alone. The house didn't feel like home at all, despite the things she could see scattered around that reminded her of home; pictures on the tables, a broom propped in the corner, a quilt from the Burrow bunched at one end of the sofa.

It was all so...foreign and...wrong.

The numbness Ginny felt at the hospital extended up until fifteen minutes after her parents gave their tearful goodbyes, and then Ginny exploded, searching the entire flat for anything that would give her some clue to her life now. She begged, time and time again, to find something that could convince her that this was just a horrific dream; that she would wake soon, safe in Harry's arms, and that everything would be fine. Instead, all she found was evidence that this nightmare was real.

Her Quidditch gear and uniform of purple and gold were in the closet. A pile of mail addressed to her here in Spain was behind the door when she and her parents came in. Someone had slipped them into the small slot on the door. Ginny hadn't brought herself to open any of it yet.

But the most damning evidence was found in the table drawer next to the obscenely large bed covered in pillows and an incredibly soft duvet; a dark brown, hard-bound book that had Ginny's own handwriting all over in it.

A diary.

At first Ginny was horrified to think that she actually kept a diary—not that she was worried about what had happened to her when she was eleven, she'd learned *that* lesson well enough—but that if this was here, it was further evidence that she really must have hit her head and forgotten all of this.

She really must have made the choice to leave England, and Harry, to play Quidditch in France. But how had she ended up in Spain? How had she let this happen to her? How had she let Harry slip away?

The answers must be in the book. Page after page of her writing poured onto the paper and Ginny skimmed it

with tear filled eyes, only catching phrases here and there.

Her father had mentioned several times her moving on. To Ginny that signaled a relationship, or possibly more, in her life. She finally begged them to tell her everything they knew—which didn't amount to much.

Apparently, she'd been seeing a man named Brogan Quinlan. *The Brogan Quinlan*—International Quidditch Player. He was a teammate of hers; a Beater. She'd even brought him back to the Burrow for holiday two Christmases ago.

What they didn't tell her screamed much louder than what they did say about the man. Her mother was complimentary, but in an airy, slightly flustered way, while her father scowled through most of the conversation.

Ginny thanked them for the information and changed the subject.

Her eyes skimmed the diary, searching for Brogan's name and finding it all over the place. He had been on the French team when she first joined, so many years ago. And it seemed he was a friend more than anything. There was casual mention of them doing things together, but just mentions—not long paragraphs like she wrote about Harry.

Those were painful to read and Ginny skipped over most of them, knowing she was going to have to return soon. But if she *was* seeing someone, he was bound to turn up at any time. Ginny needed to be prepared

Reading backwards, it seemed that she would be fine, however, because she and Brogan had a falling out a few weeks before—about what Ginny couldn't decipher, because it was listed as 'the same old thing'.

Her shoulders slumped in gratitude, both for the diary and the reprieve from having to end a relationship that she had no memory of.

There were a few press clippings folded into pages here and there, and Ginny studied them closely. She hardly recognized herself in the photos there; all dressed up in fancy robes, her hand intertwined with a huge man who was extremely handsome. It was definitely Brogan Quinlan; Ginny remembered seeing press photos of him back when she'd played for the Harpies. Several of the girls even had posters of him tacked up in their lockers. The years hadn't aged him much at all.

Taking a critical look at the clipped photos of her and Quinlan, she could see the stiffness in both of their shoulders and the tightness of their smiles. Was it simply that they hated to be photographed, or was there more going on behind this picture? The clues were probably in the diary, but Ginny's head was already spinning too much. She'd read it later.

Tossing the diary aside, Ginny laid her head back against the headboard and stared around the plush room. It was so far different than what she was used to, it almost made her laugh. Even the flat that she and Harry had shared was more comfortable and homey, rather than posh and fancy. This whole beige decorating scheme—pale browns, creams and whites—made her feel like she was in a hotel, rather than her own bedroom.

The mess she had made from searching the flat trailed down the hallway and Ginny sighed, supposing that she ought to sort it out. At least she needed to decide what she was taking back to the Burrow with her in a few days, and what she was abandoning completely. Her father said he thought Bill could arrange the sale of

the house after she was back in England.

Once she reached the living room, the determination to leave this place grew and she gathered up the framed photographs of her family, wrapping them in loose clothing and packing them away into a box her father had procured for her somehow.

Interesting books on the shelves followed the pictures. Two large oil paintings of some seascape where the waves rolled in and then back out, again and again, were shrunk down and tucked into a second box.

Ginny had five full boxes sealed and stacked against one wall before a knock came at the door.

“Open up, love,” a man called, causing Ginny to cringe. “I know you’re in there, Gin, I can hear you.”

Ginny’s grip on her wand tightened and she moved slowly to the window near the door, peeking out and startling when Brogan Quinlan’s face peered back.

His face stretched into a wide smile and his honey-colored eyes sparkled as he held up a bag of something.

“Don’t leave me standing out here, love,” he cautioned, winking and showing his impossibly white teeth.

Ginny spun on her heel and pressed her back to the door, wincing at the pain that shot through her. She’d probably overdone it today, packing everything up like she had. And the Healers had cautioned her to wear the sling as much as possible to allow the muscles in her shoulder time to heal. The sling that was now lying crumpled on the edge of the bed.

“I brought Chinese,” Brogan called again.

The Irish lilt to his voice took her by surprise—it was much thicker than she imagined it would be—and Ginny took a deep breath, trying to figure out how she was going to get rid of him. Somehow she had the idea that Quinlan wasn’t the type to be deterred by something as simple as a locked door.

And she was hungry...

Perhaps she could just open the door, explain to him that she had no idea who he was, that she didn’t want a relationship with him, but that she’d gladly take the food.

Not likely to happen, she decided.

“Hi,” she greeted, finally cracking the door open just a bit.

“Awww, knew you couldn’t resist,” he said, waggling his eyebrows and lifting the food.

“I...I’m not sure you should be here,” she protested weakly when Brogan nudged the door aside. “Didn’t we...didn’t we end things?” She pressed her fingers to her temples, rotating them slightly as Brogan laughed.

“Do we ever really end things?” he asked with a quirked eyebrow. He moved about the kitchen with much more efficiency than he should have in her home, scooping out noodles and rice and all manner of food that smelled incredible. “It’s the same old story, Ginny. You simply love me too much to lock me out forever.”

Her heart jolted at his teasing and her stomach rolled, making her think the food wasn't going to stay down after all.

"It's different now," she protested, taking a deep breath. "I'm different."

"Because you got hurt?" he asked, freezing and blinking at her. "We've been through this before, Gin. You'll be back at it in a few weeks, flying as if you're on fire. And you and I will be back together, like we should be, and I won't have to find another mindless woman to drape all over me for the end of year Quidditch Banquet. And you won't have to pretend you don't want to go. And neither of us will have to pretend anything for the Press. Maybe they'll leave us the hell alone this time."

Ginny stared at him, her mind struggling to keep up with his self-confidence and logic.

"Not this time," she shook her head again. "I resigned."

Brogan stared at her for a minute, looking completely thrown before he pushed the bowl away from him and set the cardboard box of food on the counter. He backed up a step and leaned against the counter.

"And when were you going to tell me about this? I stayed away out of respect for your family, because I know they don't like me..."

"Brogan," Ginny growled, hating that this was getting so complicated. Why could she not just brush him off and get on with packing?

"They got to you, didn't they?" he said, his face lighting in a strange way. She watched as he stared at the boxes, finally understanding what she'd been doing before he came. "They finally convinced you to go back."

"I'm going where I belong," she affirmed strongly. England and her family were where she belonged. She knew that as surely as she knew her name. No memory loss, or magical accident, or whatever had happened to her could erase the fact that she belonged where she belonged.

"You're going back to *him*." The phrase was torn from Brogan's throat as he pushed away from the counter and stalked toward the living room, flopping dramatically onto the beige sofa.

Ginny knew who he was talking about, just as he had known what she was meaning when she confirmed she was leaving.

"They didn't need to convince me," she protested. He was taking this far worse than she expected, and for a minute Ginny wished she'd read all of the passages in the diary about Brogan Quinlan. Who was he and what did he mean to her? "I *want* go home. It's where I'm supposed to be."

Brogan stared at her and then looked away, pain showing on his face.

"You and I don't belong in that world, Ginny," he protested. "We belong here. We're the same, you and I. We were there for each other when neither of us had anyone else. And now you're going to throw it all away for...for something that existed once but wasn't strong enough to last. You and I, Ginny...we've been together for *years*. We've lasted."

"I don't remember you," she whispered, shocked that the truth was falling out of her. She hadn't expected this to happen. But she also hadn't expected to see the anguish painted on Brogan's face like it was. She honestly hadn't thought the relationship was more than just...friends with benefits.

"I don't remember any of this," she shook her head again, her voice cracking in the middle. "But I *do* remember that life. I *want* that life."

Brogan's face compacted into a hard expression and she feared he might explode in anger or frustration. Really, she had no idea what he might do; she didn't know him at all.

"What the hell do you mean you don't remember?" Brogan sat up, scowling at her. "It was your shoulder the Bludger hit—and I'm still furious about that, by the way. I damned near killed Antonio for missing that shot. If I hadn't been all the way across the pitch..." He let the words die out and growled, possibly remembering the start of his rant. "Did you hit your head too?"

"I don't know," Ginny admitted. "I just...I don't remember the last eight years. Not a fuzzy memory, not a single moment."

"What did the Healers say? Have you seen a specialist?" he asked, genuine concern showing on his face. "Maybe they can..."

"It wasn't an injury," she sighed, moving to sink down into the chair, still keeping her distance from him. Why was she spilling her heart to this man? "I...I went to sleep one night with Harry beside me. When I woke up, I was in hospital, eight years later. I don't remember anything in the middle. I don't even know what to believe."

"Dammit, Ginny..." Brogan exploded, and then sank back into the chair, as if the arguing was draining all the life out of him.

The weight of his stare made Ginny squirm. "You're really going to do this...go back there."

"I have to," she told the ceiling, refusing to look at him. She was already feeling sorry for him, and that just wouldn't do. This wasn't where she was supposed to be. "It's who I am."

"And what do you do when that life rejects you again?"

Ginny flinched and gripped the back of the chair in front of her, her fingernails sinking into the fabric. "I...I don't know," she admitted. "But I have to know."

He didn't comment but the sound of disgust he made portrayed his feelings on the idea clear enough. "I thought we were past this two years ago," he said softly. "I thought Christmas proved that to you."

"I don't remember it," she shook her head again, growing tired of the conversation.

"Then let me refresh your memory," he snapped, his earlier anger coming back and washing over her like a wave. "You went there to try and make peace with him, finally put that ghost of a relationship behind you. And he was a complete prick, flaunting his girlfriend all over in front of you, judging you, and needling me

every chance he got.”

“He’s not with her anymore,” Ginny said dully, remembering her father tell her about Susan and Harry. The person Brogan was describing sounded so different from the Harry she knew that it couldn’t possibly be the same person.

“He’s an arse,” Brogan roared. “He never cared about you, Ginny. The moment you were out of country, he was all over the place, a different woman each night. And who was the one who dried your tears? Who was the one who picked you up off the floor and cleaned you up from the mess you were? Me, that’s who.”

He was clearly into his rant now, pacing about the living room and nudging her packed boxes every time he passed. “He sits up there on his throne, mister high and mighty Harry Potter, while the rest of us are expected to overlook what a bastard he truly is.”

“He’s not,” Ginny protested. No matter what he said, she would never be able to picture Harry being the person that was described. Harry never acted that way.

“I don’t know why I’m even trying,” Brogan deflated, standing near her chair, his shoulders slumping. “You’re not going to believe what I say anyway.”

“If you had any proof…” Ginny trailed off moodily. She was finished with this conversation. This man needed to leave, before she got angry and forced him to. But she was keeping the food. He could damn well get his own if he wanted it.

“Fifty-four pictures in the paper with different women. Some even in the same week.”

The words were a slap to the face and Ginny hissed, turning away from him.

“Three different women the month you finally called it off with him. Ginny, love,” Brogan sighed as he crouched down next to her chair. He looked incredibly silly, a big man like he was, all folded up on himself. “When are you going to wake up from this dream you have that you can waltz back into his life and he’ll be that prince waiting to welcome you back?”

The pain from the words washed over her and she curled her legs under her on the chair. “It’s not like that,” she protested softly. “You don’t understand.”

“You’re wrong,” Brogan said with a heavy sigh. “I never thought I could understand the type of devotion that ties you to pain and heartache. I honestly didn’t believe I could ever feel that. But I do. I feel it every time I look at you and know you’re still gone over him.”

Ginny refused to look at him, praying he would just go and leave her alone. If she was alone, she could sort her thoughts and somehow prove that everything Brogan said was a lie; Harry would never—could never—treat anyone like that, especially someone he loved.

“I know you’re confused right now, Ginny.” When he gently touched her hair, she flinched away and he swore softly. “But don’t make the same mistakes over and over again. Don’t hold onto something that’s going to end up killing you one day with all the heartache it causes.”

"It's never a mistake to love someone," she protested.

He was quiet for a long minute, standing slowly until she could just see his legs in front of her. "No, it's not," he agreed softly.

He was almost to the door before he spoke again. "Shall I put on for the team then?" he asked.

His words confused her and she lifted her head to see the corner of his mouth tilting in a very pathetic attempt at a smile. "Tell them you've finally tossed me out for good? Really make a show of it? I could spend a week or two drunk," he added thoughtfully. "Pretend you've broken me heart into a million pieces. No one has to know it's not a lie."

She appreciated his attempt at humor, pitiful as it was. "And in a couple weeks you can find yourself someone new."

He looked thoughtful for a minute before the expression faded to one of resignation. "I just might. Only this time, I might make it real, and not just for show or to keep the press happy with another photo opportunity."

Ginny nodded, silently wishing him the best of luck. "I'm sorry."

"I hope everything works out, Ginny."

And then he was gone, leaving Ginny alone in her house in Spain.

The Chinese food tasted much better while eaten from the box, safely tucked into the very middle of the huge bed and flipping through the diary, looking for Christmas 2007.

The entry was almost in the middle of the journal, which looked as if it had been charmed to expand and add pages whenever Ginny needed them, without ever looking larger on the outside.

While she read, the food lay forgotten next to her.

Harry looks truly happy now. For that I can't begrudge him. He has no way of knowing that watching him with her makes me feel incredibly empty and like the loneliest person on earth.

Brogan was right, as much as I hate to admit it. It's time for me to move past this, finally, and get on with the business of living.

I've clung to the thought that Harry and I being apart was the best thing for both of us for a long time now. Too long. I've given up so much to make him happy that I never really stopped to see what it was costing me.

Tomorrow morning, when they're here opening gifts and cuddling together on the sofa, I have to pretend that I'm not falling apart in a million little pieces; shattering all over the place. Brogan promises he'll be there to hold my hand. I appreciate that, even as I know he's thrilled at the idea of me moving on. I do love him. But it'll never be in the way I loved Harry. They say you never get over your first love...

That's all too true in my case.

I may not ever move on fully from loving Harry, but he doesn't need to know that. I've always been a good actress. I've certainly managed to be over the past five years—no one will benefit from knowing that I don't really feel the way I act.

Ginny closed the book and tucked it beneath the duvet, staring out at the dark room before slowly closing her eyes.

Harry blinked at the newspaper that rested on his desk. It was in its usual place—the same place Martha put it every morning. He usually skimmed it while he noshed on the Danish she left him and drank his coffee, but Harry hadn't had the chance to read it yet today.

Today Collins had been waiting for Harry when he got to the Ministry. While the man had proved his worth—just barely—over the years, he still found occasion to nitpick little things that any normal wizard would fix themselves or overlook.

Honestly, it was like having a younger Percy walking around at Harry's elbow, only with thicker glasses and a nasal voice.

By the time Collins was finished with his complaints about the way things *should* be run, Harry's coffee had been cold and his Danish stared up at him from the plate pathetically. Too bad Robards had retired years ago; other than sending Collins on to Kingsley's office, Harry was out of options. He'd tried that once; Kingsley had been less than impressed.

All day long, Harry had been forced to ignore the paper in favor of running around arranging to get the N.E.W.T. scores for the incoming applicants to the Auror Academy, interviewing applicants for a vacant administrative position at the Academy, and the general business of running the largest department in the Ministry.

Now that things were quiet outside his door, Harry pushed away files that he preferred to ignore in favor of pulling the paper toward him.

He sat back in his chair and shook out the parchment, only to stare right through the gaping holes that stared back. It was like reading Swiss cheese.

Entire headlines and articles had been cut from the paper. Harry scowled at it and wiggled his fingers in one of the voids before dropping the whole thing, crumpling it in his lap.

Over the years he had come to appreciate the lengths to which Martha went to take care of him. She often made sure he had food and commented when she noticed he'd slept on the sofa in his office.

She was like a mixture of Molly Weasley and Hermione...but with far more attitude.

Harry knew she censored his mail and newspaper at times, removing articles that commented on his personal life, and especially anything with the name Ginny Weasley in it.

He sighed and vanished the dissected paper, knowing it would be no good. Ginny had come home this week, and the newspaper would probably be covered in articles about her, photographs of her. They'd rehash her entire Quidditch career, in detail, and probably her personal life as well.

The thought made him queasy, but his curiosity at literally how much had been cut out of his paper grew inside him. Surely Martha hadn't gotten to *every* newspaper in the MLE. *Someone* had to have an intact newspaper around here.

Before he could really contemplate the sense in the decision, it was made. Harry wandered out of his office, glad Martha was gone for the day, and searched for a newspaper.

The second desk he walked by had a stack near the rubbish bin and Harry snatched up today's edition, folded it in the center, where Ginny's smiling face blinked up at him, and moved toward the loo. No one would bother him in there, even if he didn't have to really go.

It only took him fifteen seconds of pep talk before Harry snapped open the newspaper and winced.

Wonderful Weasley Back On British Soil! the headline screamed, the letters appearing one at a time and flashing twice before it disappeared and the cycle started all over again. The photograph was one from the last year, with Ginny wearing the purple and gold uniform of Barcelona and celebrating a fantastic win.

Harry skimmed the article, which was mostly a recitation of the facts of her career: begun at Holyhead, moved on to France, and then Barcelona. There was nothing here that Harry didn't know already.

The last paragraph was, however news to him. The reporter had actually spoken to Ginny yesterday, apparently, when she'd come into the British Portkey office.

When asked about her plans for the future, Weasley, still wearing the immobilizing sling from her last injury, simply shook her head. "I don't know for sure." Her oldest brother, William Weasley, who was there to greet her, had an answer, however. "She's going to take some time to rest and recover before exploring her options." Weasley seemed fine with that answer as she nodded and hurried away, leaving the whole world to speculate on the famous Chaser's real designs for her life. No sign of Brogan Quinlan, who Weasley has had an on-again-off-again relationship with over the years, was seen. Rumors that the couple had been engaged but have since called it off have not been confirmed.

Harry swore softly and turned the page, trying to remember all the blank holes that Martha had left.

The worst, by far, was a candid picture of Ginny and Quinlan on some beach, presumably in Spain, although it really could have been anywhere. Harry swore again watching as Ginny—clad in a swimming costume that revealed entirely too much—went up on her tiptoes to kiss Quinlan. They looked entirely too comfortable together and it made Harry feel sick.

The story speculated on the details of their breakup as well as giving a timeline of the relationship, which spanned seven and a half years, according to the reporter's theories. Which meant...

Harry didn't want to contemplate what it meant, because he and Ginny had still been together at that point. And photographs of Ginny and Quinlan having lunch together, or even sharing a glass of wine were all too fresh in Harry's mind, even after all this time.

The article presented the idea—not for the first time—that Quinlan had actually been the reason behind Ginny breaking up with Harry, who they were quick to point out, hadn't had a serious relationship since—obviously they'd either forgotten about Susan, or discounted the whole year she and Harry were together..

The idea that Ginny's relationship with Quinlan—no matter how insane it seemed to Harry—had actually lasted that long when Harry couldn't seem to have any sort of meaningful relationship, besides Susan, hurt.

Harry finally vanished the paper, knowing that it had been stupid to sit in the loo torturing himself. But seeing Ginny's face in the paper was probably something that was going to happen all too often now.

Maybe Martha had the right idea by censoring everything. Harry didn't need to see that rubbish.

Chapter 5: Dare You To Move

Just Say The Word-Chapter 5: Dare You To Move

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Once again, we're looking for a title, friends. So, read and then give me your best title ideas. Don't feel limited by using music, simply because I do. I literally take all the suggestions, write them in a list and re-read the chapter, thinking of how the title would work.

Another small note...some of you really, really don't like Ginny in this story. And that's okay. Ginny was written very carefully here. Ella and I talked and talked about reactions and character traits that would be there before I wrote certain sections. So, you're being shown something quite deliberately. Maybe your opinions will change, maybe they won't. That's fine. The fact that you have questions and are intrigued enough by the story to think about it is wonderful and all that I can ask for.

Enjoy the chapter. Andi

Chapter 5: Dare You To Move

Hermione took a deep breath as she prepared to Apparate to the Burrow. She was meeting Ron there for what promised to be an awkward welcome home dinner for Ginny.

Thankfully Harry had declined Molly's tentative offer to attend, politely asking her to tell Ginny 'welcome home' from him and saying that he'd been promising Teddy a night at the movies for months.

Hermione wasn't sure if that truly was what he was doing or not; it was hard to tell with Harry. His moods over the past years were so varied that she never knew what to expect when she talked to him.

At least he seemed to have gotten over the phase where he dated everything that walked in the door. She knew they weren't serious relationships; Hermione could see it in the way Harry smiled hugely and fidgeted around them. These were simply gestures to prove to his friends and family that he was getting on with life. And, although he had never admitted it, Hermione felt he positioned himself in front of the press with women often during those early years because he knew the photos would be in the papers.

Vindictive wasn't a word she would normally associate with Harry Potter, but he had been tremendously hurt when Ginny had broken things off with him.

She sighed and focused again, picturing the deserted corner of the front entry way that she always Apparated to.

The quiet awkwardness she expected wasn't there, and it made Hermione freeze for just a minute, hearing the raucous laughter pouring out of the kitchen.

This certainly wasn't like the stiff, formal atmosphere of the Burrow that Christmas when Ginny had visited. Then again, this was Ginny's childhood home. She had every right to be here and happy.

"Hello everyone," Hermione greeted as she entered the glowing kitchen. George finished his racy joke, giving the incredibly silly punch-line and Ginny and her brothers, minus Percy who gave a disapproving look from where he sat with his parents, erupted in laughter once more.

Hermione took a minute and really studied Ginny critically. The hair was shorter, like she'd taken to wearing it over the past five years or so. Her arm was bound up in a sling, holding it to her chest in a way that kept her shoulder immobile—remnants of her latest injury.

But it was the smile on her face, more real and genuine than Hermione had seen in a very long time, that made her look incredibly beautiful. The way she was laughing now—full, throaty and open—made her eyes sparkle and dance. Her nose scrunched near the tip when Bill started a story of Ginny running around the Burrow naked when she was a toddler and Ron nudged her in the shoulder.

"Hello, Hermione," Ginny finally greeted her, a sigh slipping out of her.

"You look well," Hermione couldn't stop herself from smiling widely. It was...relieving to see that Ginny was being so welcomed by her family. Not that she *shouldn't* be welcome. The past seven years had been increasingly awkward in the Weasley family when it came to Ginny—and Harry for that matter.

Because the actual facts of the breakup had been private and behind closed doors, as it were, no one was really quite sure how to deal with the outcome. Bill and Fleur seemed to favor Ginny a bit more, while they were openly polite and welcoming to Harry. Bill had vehemently defended Ginny in those early months.

Charlie wasn't really around enough to know what he thought, although Hermione had heard that he visited Ginny often. He was never rude to Harry when he visited England, more...distant. But that could easily be explained by his living away from home.

Percy seemed to be the most diplomatic, choosing neither side, much like his parents. They obviously couldn't help but favor Ginny, she was their child after all, but they welcomed Harry in with open arms.

George seemed torn. Hermione knew he was the brother that kept in contact with Ginny the most, but he was also one of Harry's best friends. For a brief moment, she wondered if Harry knew how much George and Ginny corresponded, and if it bothered him. He certainly hadn't said anything.

It was much harder to say how she and Ron had reacted. Disbelief and shock at the breakup, and the resulting changes in their friendships, had been the prevailing feeling at first.

The early days weren't pretty and Hermione flinched just thinking about them. Thankfully Ron and George seemed up to the task of pulling Harry back on his feet.

"I'm feeling fine," Ginny said, glancing around the table and smiling widely. "It's good to be home."

Hermione had almost forgotten that she asked Ginny anything, because her mind had been too busy measuring the past. "I'm sure it is," she agreed, taking a deep, cleansing breath. Maybe, for tonight, they would be allowed to have this one normal moment before the rest of the world caught up with them; before childminders needed relieving, before work demanded they return, before the reality that they were all just a little bit broken came pouring in.

It seemed hours later, and minutes at the same time, when Hermione looked back up again at the clock on the wall. Harry's hand was there, along with Teddy's smiling face, pointed at 'having fun'. Ginny's hand was there as well, pointing at 'home'. The small face on the hand would look tentatively over at Harry's every now and again, although Harry's picture refused to look at Ginny's, staring straight ahead.

Hermione sighed, wondering if that was how it was going to be from now on. Would everything be a polite, stiff interaction between them all?

It certainly didn't feel like it in the room right now.

"Hermione, would you like to take a walk with me?"

Ginny's question startled Hermione and she nodded jerkily, without realizing that she had been staring at the clock for a long time. She traded a look with Ron that meant...actually she wasn't sure what he seemed to be trying to say with his raised eyebrows and his nod that tilted toward Ginny.

"I'd love to walk," Hermione said, standing and following Ginny out the back door.

Once they were outside, Ginny started to undo the sling that bound her arm.

"Are you sure—"

"I need to stretch it every once in awhile," Ginny explained. Here, away from the eyes of her brothers and parents, a weary look settled on her face, making her look much older than she had a minute ago. This was the look Hermione had been waiting to see on Ginny's face. Yet...it was different, it held a complete weight of its own.

"Did you need to talk? Or just walk?" Hermione asked knowingly.

"Still the smartest witch around," Ginny chuckled. She slowly rotated her arm and then let it hang free, rolling her shoulder. "Everyone is so...polite."

Hermione tilted her head, trying to figure this woman out. "You expected them to be rude?"

"Not rude..." Ginny said, trailing off slowly. She glanced at Hermione and sighed. "Everyone is just being so careful about what they're saying, and *not* saying. I appreciate them trying to make me laugh, trying to make me feel at home. But they're all ignoring the giant herd of hippogriffs in the room."

"Which are?" Hermione prompted, fairly sure of the answer.

"The fact that I can't remember the last eight years," Ginny said, stepping off the porch and moving out into the garden. "That I have no idea how to live in this world, because it's not one I remember, or one I can even imagine."

Hermione followed, glad that they were obviously going to talk about all of this. Ginny's memory loss, or head injury, or whatever it was, had been a debated topic between she and Ron over the past few days. Hermione was inclined to believe it was completely genuine, or even magically induced, while Ron had doubts. His theory was that Ginny was ready to come home and her brain simply walled off that part of her past to allow her to deal with both the hurt of those years and the idea that everything had changed.

It wasn't a completely ludicrous idea, but Hermione wasn't sure if the mind could work that way.

"They don't talk about anything that happened in those years," Ginny continued, huffing as she moved aimlessly around the garden, nudging flowers with her bare toes and trailing her hands along bushes and shrubs. "And I understand they don't want to upset me, but I have no idea how to act around people, because I don't know anything about what happened."

"No memory at all?" Hermione asked thoughtfully. Her mind was reeling, trying to remember if she'd read much at all about memory loss. "Not even a stray thought?"

"None," Ginny shook her head. The open and honest look on her face made Hermione cringe. "I went to bed one night with the world one way, and woke up with it completely different," she shook her head and raised her hands to bury her fingers in her hair. "And I don't even know how to cope in this world. I don't understand this person I'm supposed to have become...because I'm not like that. I don't...I don't wear designer clothing and live in a posh house in bloody Spain, Hermione. I don't...date men like Brogan Quinlan, and live to see my name all over the bloody papers."

Hermione rocked back on her heels, surprised by the passion and animation Ginny was showing. She hadn't seen this much fire in the woman since...since she and Harry had been together.

"What is wrong with me?"

The phrase was practically shouted at the sky and Hermione surged forward, unable to stop herself from gathering Ginny into her arms. It felt awkward and strange to be hugging Ginny, but wonderful at the same time. Hermione had really missed her best girlfriend all these years. It wasn't just Harry Ginny had left behind when she went to France.

"I just miss him so much," Ginny cried against Hermione's shoulder, her heart breaking. Hermione could almost feel it crumble in her hands as she held Ginny. "I miss everyone. And it's not supposed to be like this. We were supposed to get married and have a family. Everyone was supposed to be happy."

Ginny pulled away, swiping angrily at her tears. "Instead, I'm left with this mess that supposedly I created, but I don't see how that's possible. Why would I leave? Why would I stay away? Why would I..."

The words were torn from Ginny's throat and Hermione couldn't stop the tears that fell. Eight years ago, when Ginny had disappeared out of this very garden, and then out of their lives, Hermione hadn't cried. She cried later, when Harry would show up at her and Ron's flat, looking desolate and lost. She cried later, when Ron

would bring Harry home at three in the morning, looking like he'd been drug behind a bus. And she cried when Harry actually decided to move on with his life.

But she'd never been allowed to cry with, or for, Ginny, because *Ginny* hadn't allowed it. She'd kept everyone at a safe distance for so many years that Hermione wasn't sure Ginny even knew how to cry anymore.

But now, Hermione felt like she had found her friend all over again, because Ginny was volcanically mad one moment, and crying the next and emotion was pouring off her in waves that made it hard to breathe. The emotionally dry Ginny of a few years ago was gone, replaced with the vibrant young woman that Hermione remembered.

"And all I have to give me any clues," Ginny said as she sank onto a tired, wooden bench squeezed between two overgrown flutterby bushes, "is a diary with words that are far too painful to read. I honestly feel like I'm being gutted every time I open that book."

Hermione took a deep breath and sat next to Ginny, ignoring the way the bushes tugged lightly at her hair that was caught in the leaves. "How much have you read?"

"Parts," Ginny admitted, using the collar of her t-shirt to wipe her eyes dry. "A bit about...Brogan."

"What about Harry?" Hermione hated to bring it up, it felt like betraying *both* of her friends. But it was up to someone to acknowledge the hard truths, and Hermione seemed to always be the one up to the task.

"I haven't been able to," Ginny admitted, giving a watery half-smile. "I don't know anything about the breakup other than...other than it happened. Other than I never fully moved on, even though Harry seemed to have. What if it's all my fault? What if what I did was so huge, so...unforgivable that he can't even look at me anymore? Hermione I..."

Hermione took a deep breath. "The only person who can really tell you about the breakup is Harry, Ginny. He...he didn't tell us much, and neither did you. What you need to decide is what you want from him." she asked. They both flinched when the idea was out, but probably for very different reasons.

"Not sure I have the right to ask anything," Ginny said, her tone more defeated than Hermione had ever heard. "The way people are acting around me...I must have been horrible. I just...I just want explanations, I guess, from both of us. I don't know how to treat him. To me, he's still a man I'm hopelessly in love with...and yet, to him we've been apart all this time..."

"I can see how that would be hard."

"Maybe if I remember those years," Ginny started, trailing off as if it were committing to some horrific torture. "Or...set things back to how they used to be." The idea seemed to take hold and her face lit up. "Could it be possible?"

Hermione scowled, trying to follow Ginny's sporadic thinking. "Going back in time?"

"Something happened, Hermione," Ginny pleaded. "I don't know if it was some magical accident or something someone did deliberately or if I really am just insane...but something happened."

"I...I can look into it, if you'd like," Hermione offered, more because that's what she did than real interest in the idea. Was it even possible to erase that much memory from a person? Or was it a case of time shifting somehow? "I have no idea where to even start, but..."

Ginny sighed, her shoulders slumping. "I'll take anything you offer, Hermione," she said in a small voice. "Because I'm not sure I can live like this. I can't exist in a world that's moved on without me. I can't...see him and know he doesn't feel anything for me, because that's not how I feel."

Hermione wanted more than anything to jump in and point out that Harry certainly didn't feel *nothing* for Ginny. But it wasn't her place. And because Harry refused to talk with her about it, she wasn't completely sure how Harry *did* feel. It was all just vague impressions more than anything.

"I can't make any promises, Ginny."

The redhead nodded, staring off into the field with eyes that no longer shined. "I'll take anything you can give me."

"In the meantime," Hermione said, her mind already mentally browsing her library at home, searching for something that would help, "I think you need to read that diary. I know it's going to be hard. But you need to know and I really feel like that's your best option, besides talking to Harry directly."

"Could I talk to him?" Ginny asked. "I...I want to. I want to see him, but I'm afraid I'll jump into his arms and tell him how I feel."

Hermione couldn't help but snort at that image. Ginny cracked a small smile too, thankfully. "I'd suggest starting with the diary first, maybe even just a few passages each night. Harry is...Harry wouldn't take to that kind of confrontation well."

Ginny nodded, but Hermione wasn't sure she even heard the words. There was a mask in place once more, a mask that hid who the real Ginny Weasley was. It was one Hermione suspected had been on for a very long time. But there were cracks now, allowing the real Ginny Weasley out sometimes.

He knew she was in the house; had known it from the moment he walked in. But he'd be damned if he stayed away from people he loved simply because *she* was back in the country. Besides, he was adult enough to handle himself.

And Ron had explained that she was...different now. Harry wasn't sure exactly what that meant. *Different* could mean so many things, and Ron really hadn't been able to elaborate with enough clarity that Harry knew what to expect. He was sure Hermione could document and catalogue the differences, but he wasn't exactly keen on talking with her right now. In fact, he'd been avoiding Hermione.

He could smell the floral scent of *her* shampoo when he came into the kitchen. It was familiar in an extremely painful way.

Why hadn't things been this hard the last time when she was here? They'd even had a civil conversation before Susan and Harry had left for the evening. Dry as hell, but civil.

Ron was concerned that Harry would...well, Harry wasn't exactly sure what Ron expected he would do. But whatever it was, it was extreme enough that Ron had visited twice this week. Once just after Ginny's accident, when he found out she was moving back to England, and the other day, after the Weasley siblings had had a welcome home dinner for Ginny, Ron invited Harry over for dinner. Every time Harry was around lately it seemed to involve a hell of a lot of watching and whispering to George and Hermione.

Honestly, it was enough to drive anyone around the twist.

He was *fine*. No, it wasn't the most comfortable idea having Ginny around, especially since he really thought there were still feelings buried deep down inside him. But it had been years--*years!*--since he'd allowed himself to think he was still in love with her.

And she'd changed so much from the young, fiery girl he'd fallen in love with back then. It wasn't hard not to be in love with her when he didn't recognize her anymore.

"You think I'll be able to make the house team like you did, Harry?"

Broken from his musings, Harry blinked at Teddy and smiled fondly at the thin boy who had hit a growth spurt over the last few months. Andromeda had been complaining about him shooting out of his trousers and through the fronts of his shoes just last week.

"I think," Harry said thoughtfully, tossing a casual arm over his godson's thin shoulders, "that you have as good a chance as any."

Teddy's expression turned doubtful for a minute before he shrugged a shoulder. "But you were the youngest Seeker in a century."

"But you can be the youngest Chaser," Harry conceded, ruffling Teddy's purple hair. He usually favored blue, but he'd decided a few weeks ago to vary his choices in hair color, to decide if blue was actually his favorite. It sounded like a good idea to Harry, who noticed that the blue hair tended to come out again when Teddy let his guard down, or was tired.

"Maybe," Teddy shrugged again. "Molly told me that maybe now that Ginny is back she can work with me."

Harry clamped his mouth shut and nodded. "I think that would be a good idea. You can ask her at least. I don't know much about her injury so..." He trailed off. He couldn't quite say why he was jealous of the thought of Teddy spending time with Ginny. Teddy had every right to ask Ginny, who had made a successful career in professional Quidditch, for help. And it wasn't as if he didn't trust Ginny with Teddy—she'd never do anything to purposely put him in danger.

Maybe it was the fact that she'd had little contact with Teddy over the years that bothered Harry. She sent Christmas presents and birthday cards, the same as she did for all her nieces and nephews. Teddy always was more like one of the Weasley grandkids than not. And while Harry was grateful that she hadn't simply ignored him, not being a part of Teddy's life was simply unthinkable to Harry.

"I might ask her," Teddy shrugged, his cheeks going slightly pink. "Do you...do you think she'll like me?" he asked, tilting his head upward just a bit, worry all over his face. "I mean now that she's really living here and

not just visiting. Sometimes people pretend to like kids when they're just visiting, but when they're really around them..." He trailed off, giving a rather dubious look.

Harry forced away his own jealousy at the idea and pulled them both to a stop in the middle of the garden, bending over until he and Teddy were eye to eye. "Ginny is a nice person. She's not one of those people, okay?"

Teddy watched him closely before something quirked his lips to the side. "You used to love her. I heard Gran saying something about it once. And I remember when she used to be around...not much, but I remember her."

Harry's insides twisted and he let out a deep sigh. "Ginny and I...we used to date."

"Like you and Susan used to date?" Teddy said, his eyebrow rising slightly.

"Yes," Harry conceded, "but...it was a bit more with Ginny."

"Why didn't you just get married?" Teddy shrugged as if it were the most obvious solution in the world. "Then you'd both be happy. Gran says she thinks Ginny only pretends to be happy, but Gran can see that she's not. And she says you do the same thing—"

Harry sighed again and smiled tightly. "I think you listen too much when you probably should be doing something else." Silently, he decided that he'd better have a conversation with Andromeda to see what was being said. Probably, Teddy had been eavesdropping on a conversation between Molly and Andromeda—something he was known for doing.

They were quiet for a minute and had almost made it to the back door of the Burrow when Teddy looked up again. "You're not going to tell me, are you? Gran always ignores the question or changes the subject when she doesn't want to answer." He looked down scuffing his shoe on the edge of the step.

Teddy turned to go in, but Harry's heavy hand on his shoulder stopped him. Harry motioned to the step and they both sank down onto it.

"It's not that I don't want you to know anything about Ginny and me," Harry excused in a soft voice, carefully choosing his words. "She and I were very close, Teddy."

"Close enough to be married?"

Harry chewed his lip and pondered Teddy's question. There was a simple answer, and then the truth, which was rather embarrassing to admit. "Yes, I thought so." He still had the ring in a drawer at home. Seven years after the breakup.

"You don't have to tell me why, but...why didn't you?"

"That's a good question," Harry forced a chuckle, trying to keep things light. "Things just didn't work out. Ginny got the chance to play on a team in France. We were together for almost a year while she lived over there. And then...we both decided that it wasn't going to work out with us living in two different countries."

Teddy screwed up his face and Harry prepared himself for a tough question. But then Teddy gave his head a shake and shrugged.

“That’s stupid.”

The phrase rolling off of Teddy’s tongue made Harry laugh. Teddy gave a shy smile, as if he expected Harry to reprimand him for judging the situation.

“It kind of is,” Harry admitted. “But...it’s been a long time.”

Teddy took a breath again, but then looked at Harry and decided against the question. “I’m glad you stayed,” he said finally. “I wouldn’t have wanted to go to France, and then Spain, to visit you.”

“I’m glad I stayed too,” Harry said, ruffling Teddy’s hair.

Teddy’s hand absently scratched at his arm where Harry just noticed the sleeve of his shirt was torn.

“When did this happen?” he narrowed his eyes at the tear, probing his finger inside and coming out with blood on it.

“It’s just a scratch,” Teddy dismissed. “When the Quaffle went into the trees that one time, I think a branch caught me.”

“We’d better get it cleaned up,” Harry mused. The scratch didn’t look like much. Harry knew he could easily heal it, but Molly would have a fit if he didn’t put any antibiotic potion on it first. “Come on, let’s get inside and let Molly take a look at your arm. She’ll fuss over you and probably give you a biscuit while she fixes it right up.”

Teddy’s face lit even as he tried to school his features. “I’m not a baby anymore, I don’t really *need* a biscuit so I don’t cry.”

Harry chuckled and helped his godson up from the step. “Remember last week, when I was hurt at work?”

“Yeah.”

A slow smile stretched Harry’s face. “That night, when I came to the Burrow, I got a biscuit while she looked at the scar.” The laughter that broke out was rather guilty—honestly, should a twenty-nine year old man still be getting biscuits when he got hurt?—but then turned full throated when Teddy laughed as well.

Harry’s laughter was like a balm to Ginny’s worried, broken heart. Overhearing him speak about what their relationship had become hurt, even if it was reluctantly pulled from him. She knew she should have backed away from the window she’d been reading near, just above them. But...the opportunity to know what Harry really thought about their breakup was just too great. Having no memory of that time of her life, Ginny still couldn’t grasp what had actually happened.

Reading her own thoughts written in a book just didn’t do it justice, and she still had no clue what Harry’s

side of things was.

Her eyes traced the passage in the book that she had been staring at, rather than reading, for the last twenty minutes. She wasn't sure if Hermione's suggestion to read one section at a time was more torturous than helpful; Ginny hadn't been able to force herself to even read one yet.

But it was time.

Her finger traced the passage, the first one in the book. The beginning was always a good place to start. Taking a deep breath, Ginny started to read.

Activating that Portkey this afternoon was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. It meant willingly leaving England behind. Leaving my family behind. Leaving Harry.

His face looked so forlorn when I said goodbye that I couldn't help but kiss him once more, ignoring my prattish brothers and their throat clearing.

It's only a year.

I've been telling myself that for weeks now. It's only a year and then we can be together again. And it's not like we won't ever see each other. There are Apparition and Portkeys, and long weekends.

I'm even kind of looking forward to the first time Harry comes over to France and we can walk around the vineyards just outside the Stadium. He seemed intrigued by them when we visited last month.

Maybe it can be like a small holiday for us; making time for just the two of us without having to worry about anyone butting in on everything.

We survived a year apart when I went back to Hogwarts, we can do it again. And we came out stronger then.

Her writing went on, describing the house she was sharing with the other French Chasers and the first team meeting; Ginny wasn't interested in any of that.

She let out a shaky breath. Okay. This was good. She had been in love with Harry; she left to play, still in love with Harry. One entry down.

Not willing to chance more, she slid the diary behind the two fluffy, sun-bleached pillows on the padded window seat and rotated her shoulder. It was feeling much better now and she would be glad to stop using the sling, although she wasn't supposed to stop completely yet.

Getting back on a broom and tossing around a Quaffle would be wonderful, but Ginny knew it was far too soon for that yet.

Someone came up the stairs and Ginny's heart jumped into her chest. It wasn't Teddy because the steps were too heavy and patterned, not erratic like an eleven year-olds were. And it wasn't any of her brothers, who thundered up and down the stairs, banging into walls and ricocheting off landings—even now. It had to be Harry.

Breathing hurt, picturing him on the other side of the incredibly thin piece of wood. The urge to hurl herself through it and jump into his arms, apologizing for whatever went wrong between them, and asking him to forgive all, was great.

Even if she knew it would never work.

That didn't stop her mind playing out the scenario, though. In her mind, Harry would wrap his arms around her and proclaim everything perfect between them before he bent and kissed her, his round glasses pressing into her cheeks.

She stood slowly, all the while convincing herself that she had to come out of this room sometime. And since it seemed her memory wasn't coming back, or didn't exist in this strange world she'd been thrown into, Ginny knew that only one other person in the world knew the truth of what had happened between them.

Harry's rich voice called down the stairs, talking to her mother as he searched the bathroom for the antiseptic potion.

Ginny's insides fluttered as she pressed her forehead against the door and closed her eyes.

She'd missed that voice. She'd missed the sight of him, the smell of him. The feel of him.

It had only been a few days here, but she could still feel Harry's arms around her like they had been the night she went to sleep. It *had* to have happened the way her mind said it did—there one minute, here the next—because she just couldn't willingly admit that eight years had gone by since she'd lived at home, since she'd been with Harry. Her mind simply couldn't wrap around those missing years.

The Healers thought she'd accept the memory loss one day. One morning she would wake up and either the memories would return, or she would decide to simply live her life without fighting the loss.

Ginny had no idea which theory would win out in the end. She was definitely determined not to believe she'd made choices that would lead her further and further away from the man she loved and to the life she'd been living. It was simply...unthinkable.

Harry moved around, closing doors, and Ginny's stomach twisted painfully. She knew she needed to go out and face him. She couldn't hide in here forever.

An hour ago, before he'd come into the house, calling out to her mother that he and Teddy were going to the pitch, Ginny was excited to see him again. She wanted a chance to see how he'd changed—*she* certainly had—and to explain to him why they should be together.

But now...after hearing how he had reluctantly summed up their past in a few sentences to Teddy...the excitement was drained away. In its place were nervousness, confusion, and hurt.

Worried that he would finally find the potion and leave before she got a chance to see him, without an audience watching every move, Ginny forced herself to turn the handle and open the door.

He was there in the hall, staring wide-eyed at her door as it opened. His gaze darted toward the stairs, probably measuring the distance to his escape, before he got a rather resigned look on his face.

"Hi Harry," Ginny greeted him. Her voice sounded hollow and raspy, as if she hadn't used it in years.

"Ginny," he nodded, switching the potion bottle in his left hand to his right and then back again.

"You...you look good," she said. And he did. The age difference was jarring, and extremely noticeable—but only in the best ways, Ginny thought. The years had been very kind to him, filling his face out and broadening his shoulders. His t-shirt, smudged with dirt and a bit of smeared blood on the hem, stretched tight over a developed chest.

"Er...you too," he said, tilting his head to the side just a bit. "I heard you were home."

"Yeah," she nodded, forcing herself to smile as she rocked forward on her toes, bouncing slightly. "Too old to be playing Quidditch anymore. Probably wasn't ever good at it anyway."

Damn. This was awkward as hell. Worse than it had been when Ginny was eleven and embarrassed herself on an hourly basis in front of Harry. Because that Harry had been knobbly kneed, rail-thin and hadn't looked as wonderful as he did right now.

"I doubt that," he chuckled, edging toward the stairs. It almost seemed as if he hesitated in his step, however, the way his feet slid across the floorboards, rather than willingly advancing.

Ginny chanced a step forward and peered at him. "You got new glasses."

"Oh, er..." Harry took a full step this time, shifting the potion in his hands again.

She bit her lip, realizing that he'd probably had these different, slightly odd, glasses for awhile. And she didn't remember.

"They make your eyes stand out," she tried to recover it, but the whole situation was quickly failing. Epically.

"Thanks, I guess," Harry said, nudging his glasses up on his nose.

"I don't know what anyone told you," Ginny said, diving into the middle of her thoughts. Really, there was nothing left to lose. "I...I don't remember the last eight years. We don't know if it was an injury or...or what happened, but I don't remember."

He visibly flinched and shot another panicked look down the stairs.

"And I wondered...is there a time we could maybe talk so that I could..." She trailed off as Harry spun on his heel, grasping the railing and rubbing his forehead. "I...I'm sorry, I don't mean to push. I just...I don't know what happened and I don't have any frame of reference to deal with people. To deal with you."

"I need to get back to Teddy." His voice was harsh, like he forced the words out, instead of saying something different. He finally looked at her, but she couldn't read the expression on his face. Instead of saying anything else, he held up the potion. "I...I need to get back."

Ginny swallowed past the lump in her throat and nodded, giving silent and unnecessary permission for him to

walk away from her. And he did, his step making a rhythmic cadence on the wood. And he didn't look back.

She took a step toward her bedroom, almost ready to close herself in completely, before she swore softly. That wasn't who she was. Ginny Weasley didn't hide in bedrooms and pretend that all her dreams could come true just by crossing her fingers and wishing. Life didn't happen that way.

One foot in front of the other, Ginny talked herself into going downstairs. She forced her heart to stop pounding in her chest and pasted a pleasant look on her face as she nudged the door to the kitchen open.

Teddy's face lit when he saw her, and then he winced, looking down at Harry, who was dabbing cotton against his upper arm. Her mother watched the whole drama while studying everyone intently. Ginny forced herself to ignore the way her stare made Ginny's stomach tighten uncomfortably.

Harry refused to look at her completely. He hadn't said no, even though he hadn't committed to anything. And, really, Ginny had dropped a heavy weight on him by admitting that she didn't remember anything.

"Hey, kiddo," she greeted him. "I hear someone got their Hogwarts letter."

That seemed a safe topic and Teddy launched into a detailed account of the letter coming, forgetting that Harry was thoroughly cleaning his wound.

Harry wasn't even sure why he was here. Really, there wasn't anything *they* could do about it. This was completely his problem to deal with. Sucking Ron and Hermione into it would do no good, except to cause more hard feelings in the family—and he really didn't want that.

So why was he here, stalking through Ron and Hermione's back garden like a loony and drawing the attention of Old Mrs. Skitterish from next door? It was a good thing *she* was loony and blind as a bat, otherwise she might have taken exception to a strange, more-than-slightly-insane man tramping over her neighbor's chrysanthus.

She'd seen worse before, Harry knew. And if Ginny stayed here, walking around in her...in jeans that she'd worn all those years ago and...and bare feet...and looking so incredibly amazing... Well, Old Mrs. Skitterish was probably going to witness more than just an angry, frustrated man.

Why hadn't Ron told him what "different" really meant? Why hadn't he warned Harry that Ginny would be using her old shampoo again? Smelling all flowery and...and bloody frustrating?

Why hadn't Ron told him she would be just as beautiful as he remembered, although looking older, and yet infinitely more appealing with her rounded hips and fuller figure?

And why hadn't Ron warned him that she would know, instinctively, the perfect way to distract Teddy so that he didn't feel the sting of the potion and healing?

He certainly should have warned him that her laugh was different. It wasn't the careful, measured laugh from that Christmas. This one was...full and much freer than he'd expected.

And the way she looked at him...it reminded him of back when she had loved him. And it unnerved the hell

out of him.

Harry growled as he stepped over another plant, quivering for its life under Harry's shoe, and stormed off toward the house, intent on getting a few answers.

"Fancy seeing you here, mate," Ron greeted when Harry threw open the door wide.

"Ten whole minutes," George whistled from where he was perched on the kitchen counter. "I'm impressed. When you appeared in the garden I bet Ron you wouldn't last eight before you exploded."

"I'm not exploding," Harry grumbled, glaring at George and then turning to Ron. "And *you* should have bloody well warned me about *her*."

Ron and George exchanged another of their ridiculous looks that drove Harry crazy. "I did," Ron shrugged, leaning back against his chair and playing with the quill in his hand. "Back in sixth year, after you and she snogged in front of the whole Common Room. I told you she was trouble."

Harry growled again and ran his hand through his hair. "What does she bloody well want from me? I have no idea how to act around her anymore. This Ginny...she's different. I hated the other Ginny...that was fine. I was allowed to hate her. But this Ginny... Bloody hell..."

His hands groped for the back of the chair and Ron leaned forward just as Hermione and little Rose came into the room, their eyes wide at Harry.

"Bwoody hew!" Rose squeaked loudly, smiling proudly around the room at her new vocabulary.

"Harry!"

"Er..." Harry fidgeted and winced, knowing he was being a complete berk. He simply had no control over his mouth, his body, or his mind today.

"George, you know I'd never ask you to do this normally..." Ron sighed, standing and gathering Rose into his arms. "Must be out of my mind, but would you please take Rose somewhere. There's a play park just the other side of the—"

"Come on, Rosie," George said, giving Harry a knowing smirk and lifting his happily squealing niece into his arms. "Uncle George will swing you as high as he can."

Hermione looked torn between stopping them and laying into Harry. She crossed her arms as George opened the door. "No sugar, George Weasley, she hasn't had supper yet. And no fireworks!"

Silence settled uncomfortably in the kitchen when George closed the door and Harry leaned heavily on the chair.

"I take it you've been to the Burrow?" Ron said, nodding for Hermione to take a seat next to him.

Harry glowered at him and moved away from the table, staring, unseeingly, at the framed photographs all over the mantel of the fireplace. "She's..."

"She's different," Ron said. "I warned you."

"Yeah, but..."

"You wouldn't have listened even if we had tried to tell you," Hermione scolded. "You made your mind up about Ginny long ago, Harry—not that I blame you at all."

Harry was quiet for a minute, fighting the ancient feeling creeping up from somewhere extremely deep inside him. He'd struggled with it from the moment Ginny had stepped out of her bedroom, in her jeans that fit perfectly and the snug t-shirt advertising Weasley's Wizard Wheezes. She looked...so much younger and vulnerable than he had seen in a long, long time. It threw him off right then and there.

And then she opened her mouth and a friendly voice came out—one he had missed hearing—saying pleasant, although awkward, things and silently demanding that he fall for her again.

Even though Hermione had told him that Ginny didn't remember, Harry hadn't grasped that until she'd stood across from him, with that *look* in her eyes—the one that said she loved him and wanted affirmation in return. Hearing her say it...made it real.

She'd been entirely too pleasant for the whole thirty minutes Harry had forced himself to stay in her presence. He could feel her eyes on him much of the time and it made his skin tingle in a way that was comfortable and familiar, but completely unwelcome at the same time.

"I'm not sure I can do this."

"Things will settle down," Ron defended, very little conviction in his voice. "This is all just...new, to both of you."

"I wasn't prepared for this," Harry whispered. He wasn't sure if he wanted them to actually hear it or not. If they did, they might try to help. If they didn't...they might try to help.

"You weren't prepared for what?" Hermione said. Her chair made a scraping sound along the floor and Harry rolled his shoulders in annoyance. "For how she makes you feel?"

Ron glared at his wife. "Hermione—"

"Don't," Harry warned, feeling the tenuous grip he still held on sanity slipping.

"It's about time he actually did this," Hermione scolded both him and Ron. "You need to talk about this, Harry. If you keep it all inside then you're bound to make yourself sick or...worse."

Harry's teeth hurt from clenching so tightly and his jaw quivered. "I don't feel anything."

Even though he couldn't see her, Harry knew Hermione huffed at him. "We're back to this, are we?"

Ron stood, trying to get between her and Harry. "Hermione—"

“No, Ron!” Hermione yelled, startling both men. “It’s been years since he actually admitted that he’s allowed to feel—”

“I hate her,” Harry admitted, feeling incredibly weak that the words had escaped, and that there was real feeling behind them.

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione sighed. Her hand hovered near his back, but she didn’t touch him. “I don’t think you mean that.”

“I do,” he nodded, finally looking at her. But she could read the look on his face like a book, and she knew how much it hurt him to admit that.

“She’s not supposed to be nice.”

He turned to face them, leaning his back against the worn stones in the fireplace and burrowing his hands in his jeans pockets. Hermione sank down next to Ron and scrabbled for his hand, clenching it tight enough that Ron’s fingers turned white.

“She’s not supposed to be...attractive.

“She shouldn’t get to just...just forget the past eight years. Things...things *happened* in those eight years. Important things. Things that...” his voice broke and Harry swallowed, needing to get this out. “Things that changed both of us forever. It’s not fair that she gets to not remember that.”

“It’s not like she did it on purpose, mate,” Ron defended. But Harry wasn’t sure what to think.

“She...she wants to talk about it. She... I can’t do that.” He shook his head, vivid memories of the past floating up and clawing at him. “I don’t want to think about that.”

“Harry, you need to see things from her point of view,” Hermione suggested. “If things were different, if you were where she is now...”

“I’m not,” he snapped. “I can’t think like that Hermione, because I *do* remember what happened.”

The kitchen was heavy with silence and Harry felt horrible. He hadn’t told anyone everything that had happened between him and Ginny—Neville probably knew the most of anyone—so they didn’t know everything he’d been through.

“She’s not supposed to make me feel things,” Harry finished finally. His head spun with the revelation and he violently shoved it away, clenching his jaw.

“What does she make you feel?” Hermione asked.

“I don’t know,” he shrugged, being completely honest. “I don’t know what to call it.”

She nodded and Ron puffed out his cheeks with a deep breath.

“I knew this was going to be harder than you let on,” he mumbled.

"It shouldn't be," Harry defended. Now that he'd actually admitted the truth—that Ginny could still make him feel...something...anything—Harry felt his cheeks heat. It wasn't supposed to be this way. He repeated that thought aloud and Hermione nodded.

"How do you want it to be between you?" she prompted.

Harry thought about that for a long minute. "I don't want to hate her, because I shouldn't. It wasn't all her fault. I...I don't want to have to think twice about dropping by the Burrow and nicking biscuits, or flying with Teddy simply because she might be there.

"I don't want to feel anything for her."

"Even if you really do?"

Hermione's question made him flinch and Harry allowed himself to dredge up that feeling, brought on by Ginny as they stood just an arms-length away from each other on the first landing. It wasn't love...that he knew. He remembered how love felt. It had been more than seven years since he'd felt that flying, floating feeling that kept him grounded at the same time.

No, this was more like guilt, and anger, and betrayal, and...attraction, all rolled into one messy knot in his stomach. It made him sick just thinking about it.

"It's not like I'm ever going to fall in love with her again, or anything," he defended, feeling it was true, "because I don't know her, not really. But..."

"But what you feel makes you uncomfortable when she's there," Ron guessed wisely.

Harry met his eyes across the room and knew that Ron truly understood. It was nothing against Ginny, Ron's sister, but against Ginny, the ex-girlfriend who was supposed to be so much more.

Years of shared pints at the pub, long walks, midnight Quidditch games, and even one or two complete, tear-filled breakdowns meant that Ron knew all too well what Harry felt for his sister.

"Yeah," he nodded. Suddenly, all the anger and fight drained out of him, leaving him simply tired. "Yeah."

Harry gave a mighty shove and pushed himself away from the fireplace, shuffling his feet toward the door. Hermione stood up, perhaps to protest his leaving, but Ron put his long hand on her arm, stilling her.

"Is it real?" Harry asked as his fingers traced the gold doorknob. "The whole memory thing?" Harry didn't know what to think of the idea that Ginny couldn't remember the past years. It complicated everything beyond where it already sat. Immensely.

"As far as I can tell," Hermione said. "Yes."

Harry nodded, not sure what to say. Did that mean Ginny wanted him to love her again? For them to be...together? A couple? She hadn't said so when she was in the hallway...not in words, anyway.

The whole idea was... It was too much.

"I'm sorry about Rose...earlier," Harry mumbled out. "And the flowers." Without even opening the door, Harry Apparated out.

Chapter 6: Dreams That Slip Away

Just Say The Word-Chapter 6: Dreams That Slip Away

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: I hate that I'm getting predictable in my updating. That was sooooo not the goal with this story. ;) Maybe I should really make you all wait a few days for the next chapter. Or a week. Yeah, I probably should. But I won't. lol So, last chapter needed a title and you all came through with flying colors! There were so many amazing choices that it took me all morning to really decide just which one it was going to be. And the winner is...Jen,  [texasminx](#), with "Dare You To Move". I adore Switchfoot, but that wasn't the only plus. The song itself really fits well with the tension between Harry and Ginny in that chapter. It's all about insecurity and watching and waiting. So, Texas Jen, get that request ready and let me know what scene you want to see.

By the way, you all owe this update to  [anony_2](#) who offered me virtual chocolate to get the editing finished and posted. ;)

Chapter 6: Dreams That Slip Away

The storefront of Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes was just as bright, just as obnoxious as ever. And that, more than anything, gave Ginny the confidence to walk down Diagon Alley, ignoring the stares she was drawing, and make her way to George's shop.

The interior smelled just like she remembered...something slightly sour and...gunpowder. It was a unique smell and Ginny remembered it well; George and Fred had smelled like that starting back in their fifth year of school, when they really began experimenting with their products.

"Wondered when you'd get around to see me," George greeted Ginny with a wide smile. He was stocking shelves, putting small, violently pink boxes of self filling water bombs next to the Insulting Quills. Ginny shook her head in amusement at the various displays in the room, perfectly designed to catch the attention of the Hogwarts students who were bound to flood the shop in the next month before they were off from Kings Cross.

"Decided I could use a change of scenery today," she shrugged. In truth, Ginny was tired of being cooped up at the Burrow. She'd been home for more than a month and hadn't really done, or seen, anything. At first she was still dealing with her injuries and enjoying letting her mother fuss around her and her father invite her on long walks around the back garden. But the novelty was wearing off and Ginny was getting restless for

something to do.

She wanted to talk to Harry, more than anything, but he'd gone on holiday with Teddy; an impromptu trip before Teddy left for Hogwarts. Ron and Hermione had told her about his leaving. Ginny had the distinct feeling he'd invented the spontaneous trip simply to escape from her, but Ron had simply changed the subject when she asked him straight out. And Hermione had pleaded with Ginny to give Harry some space and time. The urge to Apparate to wherever he was—even if Ron and Hermione wouldn't tell her where he'd gone—was almost overwhelming.

“Big plans for your day away?”

“Not really,” Ginny shrugged. The restlessness seemed to be growing incrementally as the days trudged on. She knew what it was, but admitting that she missed Harry didn't make him come back from wherever he had taken Teddy.

“You've come to the right place, then,” George waggled his eyebrows. He put the last box on the shelf and vanished the larger, empty box in front of him. “Because I've just decided I could use some help upstairs.”

Her first inclination was to refuse; dragging dusty boxes of who-knew-what down the stairs wasn't her idea of a good time. Yet...it would give her something to do, something physical that might let her work off some frustration.

“You've got yourself a worker,” she smiled, watching as George looked relieved and excited to have the company.

“Let's get started,” he gestured grandly to the back room that hid the staircase to the small flat above the store. Fred and George had lived there, and then George alone, before he'd married Angelina. Ginny gathered that he now used the space to store excess inventory.

He nodded to the young wizard working the counter, who looked to be just out of Hogwarts—they look younger every day—and parted the curtains that separated the storefront from the back.

“Given any thought to what you want to do now that you're home?” George asked.

Ginny climbed the stairs after him, skipping the ones he did, strictly from a survival standpoint—one never knew what George had cooked up for those particular stairs. One time, he and Fred had charmed every other step at the Burrow to force you to say something embarrassing about yourself. Thankfully Harry hadn't been at the Burrow when Ginny explained to her family that she liked his bum. Although Hermione *had* been there when Ron blurted that he still had his childhood teddy bear and sometimes slept with it. Ron refused to speak to Fred and George for two days after that.

“Fred did these,” George gestured down at the stairs, “the charms sometimes wear off, but I keep putting them back on.”

Ginny smiled fondly and purposely stepped on the last one, waiting to blurt something horribly embarrassing.

George smirked at her and nodded with satisfaction. “You look good in blue.”

She couldn't help the laugh that bubbled out of her. "Blue?"

"Same color as Teddy's hair," George said enthusiastically as he swung the door to the flat wide. "It'll wear off in a couple of hours, don't worry."

Ginny's hand automatically lifted and tugged a chin-length piece of her hair into sight. The bright blue was shocking, but she had to admit it was rather funny.

The mention of Teddy, however, brought her mind back to Harry, whom she hadn't been able to see more than once since being home. And the sadness crept back in. There was a card addressed to him and sitting on her desk in the guest bedroom of the Burrow. Several times she had started down the stairs, determined to attach it to an owl and send it off for his birthday. But something stopped her each time, and she would turn around, returning the card to its place. Harry's birthday came and went, but the card stayed where it was.

"Where do you want me to start?" she asked, forcing the sadness away. The flat was somewhat recognizable to what it had been when George had lived here. Some furniture was left, but the majority of the space was taken up by boxes.

"Anywhere you'd like," he shrugged. "We're transporting these to a storage facility, instead of storing them here. But first we need to mark on the box what's in them so we can find them fast if we need them."

Ginny nodded and lifted her wand, but then paused, wondering if she should open the box by hand instead. "Why not just leave them here, where you have easy access?"

George's back was turned, and he took a moment to answer. "Because this space is going to be needed soon."

"Oh," Ginny shrugged and started to carefully open boxes and label them with various Weasley products.

"Are you going to expand the shop up here?" Ginny asked a few minutes later when she levitated a stack of boxes toward the kitchen. George was organizing them according to a map he had in front of him, and then sticking a small sticky spot on them. Ginny watched as the exact area George touched on the map now showed boxes labeled with the items.

"Portkey patches," George explained, slapping a sticker on the next set of boxes. "They only work for inanimate objects, but..."

"Impressive," she nodded.

George accepted the next stack. "Not expanding," he shook his head. "Actually...I'm cleaning this out for you, Gin. I thought maybe..."

"Are you serious?" Ginny couldn't help but stare at him, and then the flat. It wasn't much, she admitted, but the idea of standing on her own two feet again sounded wonderful.

"Yeah," he shrugged and sent another stack of boxes off, watching as they appeared right where he wanted them to. "Living at home is great for a while, but...sometimes you need your own place."

"George, I don't know what to say..." She shook her head, thoroughly touched that he would think of her this

way. "I'll pay rent, I promise."

George laughed. "You will," he nodded "as soon as you get a job."

"I have money; that's not a problem. And I'll find something I want to do soon." Ginny's face fell and she shrugged a shoulder. "There was a sign at Flourish and Blotts."

"Who are you, Hermione?" George quipped with a wink. "You'll find the right place. Don't settle for anything less than you're worth, Ginny."

The words inexplicably brought tears and Ginny blinked, turning away.

"I mean that in every sense I can mean it, Gin," George said behind her, startling her with how close he was standing. "It's not going to be easy, but...if he's what you want..."

"It's all a big mess," she protested, opening a box and staring at what was inside, not even truly seeing it. "Both in my head and out here."

"You've both been through a lot," George said, labeling the box that she was staring into.

"I wish I could agree with that," Ginny corrected him, "but I *haven't* been through a lot, George. He's...he's wherever he is and I'm stuck in the past eight years...in a past that doesn't exist for anyone but me.

"I've seen him once, George. For two whole minutes I was allowed to exchange horribly awkward words with a man I'm in love with," she sighed, rubbing her forehead and opening the next box. "And I know this must be hard for him. I *know* that, because I can see it in his eyes. He's not rude, but...I can tell he's not happy about me being here."

George was quiet for a minute, but Ginny could see the muscles in his jaw working, as if he were chewing on what he wanted to say, trying to acquire the taste first. "Harry was really messed up after the breakup, Gin."

She wanted to protest, scream, and rant that this wasn't all her fault. She couldn't even bloody remember what had happened. And the entries she was reading in the diary had grown vaguer as time went on. The writing only talked of missing Harry, and then becoming busy with training and games. There were short, happy entries when Harry would visit, or she would go back to England, but they grew further and further apart. Ginny couldn't bring herself to read the next one she was scheduled to read—she had a feeling it was the most important one in the book. It stared at her every time she looked in, but Ginny only saw the tear-stains on the pages that smudged the ink slightly.

"What happened?" she asked instead, her voice cracking in the middle. "I need to know, because I really don't remember, George. Ron won't talk about it. Hermione gives me flighty, vague answers. No one else seems to know anything about what bloody well happened. I'm tired of hearing the same thing over and over. And I know that only Harry knows all the answers—or at least his half of them—but he's disappeared off the face of the planet."

He blinked at her for a minute and then motioned to the rather wonky looking sofa they had already uncovered.

"I'm probably not the best one to talk to about that first bit," he shook his head. "Harry stayed well away from the family—emotionally, at least—for awhile. In fact, Neville would probably be your best bet. He was around more than any of us then."

The revelation surprised Ginny, but she finally nodded. Neville had always been there for Harry, she knew. Perhaps Harry felt comfortable talking to Neville because he was a good listener, and, more importantly, he didn't have red hair.

"He seemed to do alright for a few weeks," George continued, "and then it was like he hit a wall. Stopped coming around, stopped talking to anyone. I know he was spending a lot of time at Andromeda's, helping with Teddy. But I don't know if that's where he was all the time or not."

Ginny's heart twinged painfully and she pulled her knees up to her chest, resting her feet on the edge of the sofa. Her forehead pressed against her knees and she let tears fall, knowing that George wouldn't say a word about seeing her cry.

"Then he sort of...sort of went crazy. He was dating every girl who walked by." George's harsh chuckle made Ginny's stomach roll unpleasantly. This must be what Brogan was referring to when he shoved Harry's exploits in Ginny's face.

"And...I kind of understand," George continued. "He was trying to prove to himself that it didn't matter, that he didn't still feel something for you."

"Did he ever come after me?" Ginny asked, the question torn from her throat. "Did he ever..." She didn't really even know what she wanted to ask, but the vague picture was there in front of her. Had he ever tried to win her back? Or had *he* been the one to end it all?

"I don't know," George shrugged. His voice was soft and Ginny blinked through her wet eyes at him. George winced and conjured a tissue for her. "He wouldn't have told me and Ron if he did."

Ginny nodded, knowing that was probably true. If Harry *had* come after her, tried to win her back, he would have done so on his own.

"Did he...sleep with them all?"

George winced, but Ginny couldn't tell if it was because he had to lie about the truth, or because no matter what he said it would hurt Ginny.

"Not all of them," he finally settled on. "Maybe none. It's not something we really talked about, you know. I know there have been...some."

Even repeating over and over in her mind that they were broken up, that Harry was free to do whatever he wanted, with whomever, didn't stop the ache that had now grown to be a raging monster inside her. It seeped into her very bones and drove out every other thought.

"It didn't last too long," George said. He was now staring straight ahead, as if he couldn't stand to look at her anymore. Ginny knew that wasn't true; he just couldn't bear to watch as her heart took a possibly fatal blow. "He...he, er...stopped mucking around and just...dated girls, you know."

"And then Susan?" George glanced at her. "Dad told me," she shrugged.

"That came later, yeah," George said. "After Harry had settled down. Susan was nice enough." The way he trailed off made Ginny think there was more than he was saying.

"But?" Honestly, she shouldn't be torturing herself like this. Seven years they'd been apart, it would have been...inhuman not to have relationships and move on. That didn't mean it didn't make her feel horrible hearing about it. Somewhere in the back of her mind the nagging reminder that she'd definitely slept with Brogan didn't add anything good to the feeling.

George let out a harsh breath and scratched the side of his head. "Susan was always...very *nice*."

"You say it like a swear word."

He laughed and raised his eyebrows. "She was always polite and...accommodating. Truthfully, I never really saw the attraction between them. She sort of...I always pictured her as more Percy's type, you know."

Ginny nodded, trying to remember what she could of Susan Bones from Hogwarts, but it wasn't much. She was in Hufflepuff, and in the D.A. She'd fought in the Final Battle. Beyond that there was just a vague picture of a pleasant girl with strawberry blond hair.

"Gin...you really should talk to him about this."

"I know," she sighed, swiping angrily at her tears. "The moment he stays in the same room with me for more than a minute, I'll do that," she said dryly and George chuckled, pulling her sideways into his embrace.

Craving the contact, Ginny curled into him, her arms wrapping around his chest. "I was horrible, wasn't I? I had to have been."

"No," George protested. "You were just...different."

"What the hell does that mean?!" Ginny demanded, squeezing him tighter. "Hermione told me the same thing and I still don't know what it *means*. What it really means. Having you all tell me I was different is one thing, but understanding the reasons I may have acted that way is something else."

George sighed and rubbed her back gently. "You were...distant. When you came to visit it was like seeing this sophisticated woman, dressed in fine clothes and looking like my sister...but you weren't quite her anymore."

Ginny bit her lip, trying to picture it. She'd seen the fancy robes and Muggle clothing in the wardrobe of her home in Spain, but hadn't brought much of it with her. Bill was currently arranging for everything to be sold, including everything that seemed to belong to some other person.

"You were nice and pleasant, brought the kids presents...but you were so detached from everything. Mum wrote you every week and you sometimes wrote back."

Suddenly, all of her mother's fussing over the last month made so much more sense. Ginny felt horrible for being frustrated with the woman.

"I'm sorry."

The apology sounded pathetically weak after what George was describing.

"It wasn't that you were horrible," George protested, kissing her head. "Just that we felt we'd lost the real Ginny in all of this."

"It sounds like it to me."

They were both quiet for long minutes and Ginny sighed. "I don't know what to do, George. I know it's hard to believe, but I'm not that person. I'm not posh and sophisticated. I don't wear designer clothes and enjoy having my picture in the papers. George...how do I fix this?"

"I don't know if you can, Ginny-bean. But...if there's a way I can help..."

"I know," Ginny said when he trailed off. She knew that George would give anything he could to help her.

"Maybe...if Harry won't stay put...maybe you could talk to Neville. I don't know how much he'll tell you—he and Harry are pretty close—but, it wouldn't hurt to try."

"I need to see Neville," Ginny nodded. "I've been meaning to anyway."

"He and Hannah just got back from Africa," George said. "They're staying at the Leaky until Neville goes back to Hogwarts in a few weeks."

"I missed his birthday." The comment was made absently, but it caused more hurt than it should have. She and Neville had once been close friends. She certainly shouldn't have forgotten his birthday. But she had been so focused on whether or not it was alright to acknowledge Harry's that any thoughts of someone else were just...too much.

"He won't mind," George shook his head. For a moment, Ginny wasn't sure whether he was talking about Harry or Neville. "Nev's a good bloke; never gets too worked up."

Ginny nodded. "We'd better get back to work if I'm going to move into this flat sometime this decade."

George chuckled and stood, pulling her up with an exaggerated heave. "Now that I think of it, maybe you can't afford the rent."

Ginny rolled her eyes and opened another box.

The absolute...greenness of the area was amazing. It was the most vibrant thing Harry thought he'd ever seen. The way the trees hung down over the stream created a kind of private pool that he and Teddy had spent many afternoons in, splashing and playing, and just...being. It was the perfect holiday, really. Harry couldn't imagine spending the time anywhere different.

The last minute decision to get away for two weeks had cost him quite a few galleons, but the time together with Teddy, and time away from work and the drains of the world, was priceless. Besides, it was only money, yeah?

Harry's musings were shattered when a heavy wave of water cascaded over him, leaving him drenched, when he'd been perfectly dry and warm laying out on the rock next to the stream.

"Wanker," he hissed at Ron, trying to keep his voice low enough that Hermione and Rose, who were wading just downstream wouldn't hear. Hermione glared at him and Harry looked away.

"Come on, Teddy and I are tired of watching you laze about like an old man," Ron quipped. His shoulders were starting to get pink and Harry knew he'd be crying like a little girl later tonight. Hermione obviously hadn't been the one to apply his sunblock charm. After being here for almost two weeks, both Harry and Teddy had achieved a nicely bronzed look that helped them avoid serious burns.

"Old man," Harry scoffed. "Who won the swimming race?"

"I still say you cheated," Ron sniffed, looking away. "You must have used gillyweed, or something."

Harry nearly gagged at the thought. "I'd have to cheat, with your gangly arms and legs you reach half-way across the pool before we're even in."

Teddy laughed at that, nearly tipping off the rock he was sitting on. "Neville told me about gillyweed."

"Nasty stuff," Harry shrugged, "but it does the job."

"Come on," Ron said. "Let's race one more time before Hermione decides it's time to go."

Harry watched Ron and Teddy splash through the stream to the section that was deep, a perfect pool. Today was his thirtieth birthday, and it had been brilliant—much better than he'd imagined turning thirty would be.

"You go on ahead," Harry cheered them on. "I used my last gillyweed."

Ron laughed and Teddy took the opportunity to dive into the water, splashing wildly in his haste to beat Ron to the opposite side.

Hermione wandered over, holding Rose by the hand as the little girl splashed in the water and giggled merrily about the ripples and bubbles she was making.

"Had a good birthday?" Hermione asked, perching herself on the edge of Harry's rock as they both watched Rose plop herself down in the few inches of water near their feet and inspect the rocks all around her.

"Better than I expected, yes," Harry admitted, pulling his knees up and resting his elbows on them.

"That's good," Hermione nodded, smiling at him. "Thirty isn't old, you know."

"It always felt like it was," Harry shrugged, "until I got here."

She laughed. "I remember thinking the same thing. But it's not so bad when you're looking at it from this side."

Harry nodded, chuckling as Ron let Teddy beat him by just a few inches and then pretended to be outraged while Teddy laughed hard enough to make himself fall over in the water.

"I just...my life has turned out so different from what I expected," he admitted with a shrug. "I'm not really sure what to expect, anymore."

"I don't think we *can* really expect anything, Harry," Hermione said. "I think...we just have to live."

"Yeah," Harry sighed, "but you had dreams, and you made them come true."

"Some of them," Hermione nodded. "But not all of them, Harry. Some dreams...some aren't meant to come true. Some are simply meant to be dreams."

Harry winced at her words, although he had to agree. Hermione must have realized what he had been talking about because she made a sour face.

"I don't mean that having a family isn't a dream you should still try to achieve, Harry. I meant more of the impossible dreams, like being Minister for Magic, or something like that."

"No," he shook his head, smirking at her example; her impossible dream that he and Ron had been teasing her about for years now, "I know what you meant." It wasn't completely a lie. He knew she didn't mean it to hurt him, but the longer it took for things to come together, the further away the dream seemed to be. Harry thought he'd come to grips with it, but apparently he hadn't. Ginny coming back to England had brought it all up again.

"Harry, I..."

Harry glanced over at Hermione and found that she was wearing *that* look again; the one that said she knew all too well what was going through his head and would like nothing better than for him to spill everything to her so that she could fix it.

"Ginny loves you, Harry," Hermione burst out. "I know you're having a hard time accepting that—and I *do* understand. You won't even talk to her about what's happening. What if this is your chance at making that dream come true, Harry? What if *this* is your moment to seize it all?"

Harry opened his mouth to respond, but he didn't know what to say. He certainly wasn't ready to simply accept that Ginny loved him—because he didn't even know if he understood how eight years could just... disappear.

"Is there any treacle tart left?" Harry asked, forcefully changing the subject. Hermione continued to stare at him and he knew he'd have to try harder to get her to drop the subject. Maybe because she really felt bad about what she'd said, or perhaps simply because it was his birthday, Hermione shrugged it away and smiled.

"I think Ron may have left one piece for you."

"One piece?" Harry spluttered. "It's my ruddy birthday gift from Molly!"

"Harry!" Hermione scolded. "You and Ron are horrible, you know. My children are going to be cursed with horrid mouths because you two can't remember to mind yourselves."

Harry grinned guiltily and summoned the tart to him, picking at it with his fingers and licking the sticky, sugary wonderfulness off his fingers.

"Rosie'll be able to take care of herself," Harry proclaimed proudly. "No one is going to ever touch her with a father like Ron and an Uncle like me."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "That may be a problem when she starts dating, you realize."

A slow grin spread over his face and he licked treacle off his thumb. "Not going to happen. Not until she's at least thirty." It was a pact that he and Ron had agreed on about ten minutes after Rose had come out a girl. George offered to be the Bonder for an Unbreakable Vow, but Ron had shuddered, telling them that Hermione would divorce him *and* kill him if he tried that. A pact had been made instead.

"You're such a hypocrite," Hermione growled, although the corners of her mouth twitched. "You were barely eighteen when you and Ginny..." She trailed off, perhaps realizing what she was saying.

Harry chewed the last bite of tart thoroughly. "Yeah, I was eighteen." It seemed a lifetime ago. "And Ginny was just seventeen." He smiled wryly. "Barely. It was er...her birthday."

"I knew that," Hermione said, her cheeks flushing. "Girls talk, Harry. A lot."

He snorted and shook his head. "Even now?" Despite the way he tried to act casual about it, Harry did wonder what Ginny thought, what she wanted from him.

"Not as much," Hermione shook her head. She waded out in the water after Rose who was trailing her hands through the water, trying to catch an occasional leaf.

Harry watched them for a minute and then turned to watch Ron as he and Teddy tried to dam up more of the stream to fill the pool even more. They were laughing and trying to lift heavy, slippery rocks.

Thoughts of Ginny had been littered throughout the trip and Harry tried hard not to focus on them.

Thankfully, today had come and gone with no word from Ginny. It was both frustrating and a relief. Harry wasn't sure what he would have done if Ginny had sent some token to him. But there was also disappointment that nothing had come. If she really didn't remember the years apart, wouldn't she have sent something? It was all so confusing.

He stared down at the empty treacle tin and ran his finger along one sticky spot before lifting it to his mouth. Molly's treacle tarts were the best around. Even Ginny, when they'd been together and she'd cared enough to try, hadn't been able to make one as well as her mother. Something about Molly's was just...better.

But that was okay. At least he still got treacle on occasion.

Harry lay back against the rock, taking his glasses off and squinting up at the bright blue sky. Thoughts as dark as this one were best saved for a later day. It *was* his birthday, after all.

But the thoughts wouldn't leave him fully, nudging at him when he and Teddy made dinner side by side in the small cottage, prodding at him when he forced Teddy to take a shower and get ready for bed. And, finally, they thundered through his mind when the cottage was quiet, only the sounds of the gurgling stream tiptoeing in the open window along with the darkness.

"Damnit," Harry hissed, knowing he wasn't going to be able to hold them off any longer. At least he'd made it most of the way through his birthday before giving in. The clock officially said eleven forty-eight when he poured two fingers of scotch and wandered out to the swing on the front porch.

Teasing Hermione about Rose never dating and her quip back that he was a hypocrite cut him much deeper than it should have. It was the kind of cut that you realize is there, but don't really pay attention to until something salty gets into it and makes it burn.

Thinking of Ginny, of their most intimate, wonderful, shared moments shouldn't be painful. It should be the kind of thing where Harry could have a drink once in awhile and take those memories out to relive them fondly.

Instead, they were like salt into a wound.

Remembering the first time they'd made love, in Ginny's bedroom at the Burrow on her seventeenth birthday, was extremely bittersweet. They'd gone through so much that year, being kept apart and fighting for their lives—being together was a complete celebration of life, and a release of the past. And Harry knew that if everything had worked out between them, if they'd been allowed the future that they dreamed of all those years ago, that the memory would be one of his best. And, in fact, it *was* one of the best. But it was so tainted now by the hurt and darkness of the years that followed the breakup that it was easier just to not think about it.

"Why?" Harry asked the night as he sipped at his drink. "Why did we let it get away from us?"

The only excuse he could come up with was that they were too young. Too young and expected the world to be handed to them.

It was a flimsy reason, at best. But also no worse than the one Ginny had given him for finally calling everything off.

Harry liked to think it had been a surprise, but that would be lying. The months they'd been apart, with Ginny living in France, flying in her games and Portkeying around the globe, had driven a wedge between them that seemed insurmountable.

And Harry's final Portkey to France had been taken with much trepidation. He knew a change was coming to their relationship, but he'd been stumbling along, blindly hoping it would be Ginny's announcement that she was finally coming home. He should have known better.

Ginny's letter asked him to meet her at a certain address, and Harry blinked up at the rather public French café that had the correct numbers on the front of it. He wasn't quite sure what to think of her choosing to meet here. Surely meeting in a public place, out on the small patio he could see her sitting in, was a good sign. She would be in a mood to celebrate her coming home.

Harry greeted her with a kiss on the cheek, which she stiffly accepted. Ginny's eyes were glassy and kept darting away from him, making his throat tighten with nervousness.

"Thanks for coming," she mumbled, fidgeting with small things on the table. "I know it was probably hard to get away."

It was, but Harry wasn't about to admit that. The urgency that bled through her letter told him it was important to be here.

"You know I'd do anything for you, Gin," he forced a smile. It seemed harder and harder to smile around each other these days. Something was just...off between them. Harry knew it was the distance and the tough time they'd had connecting to visit lately. It was perfectly natural to be a bit nervous when you only saw the person you loved a few times a month. And the pressure of the newspaper articles that had been circulating lately, proclaiming that one or the other of them was having secret love affairs with various people didn't help. They'd both denied the rumors, but sometimes saying anything, officially, in rebuttal made it all worse.

She looked pained at his words and Harry peered at her.

"I can't do this," she mumbled and Harry reached for her hand. Her bottom lip caught between her teeth and Harry took a shuddering breath in. He was just about to ask her what he needed to do to help with whatever she was struggling with, when she spoke again.

"This is too hard, Harry," she shook her head, blinking at him. "You and I...we're simply not working out."

"That's not true," he answered back in a dull voice. "You and I...we're supposed to be together, Ginny."

"Why?" she challenged, her hand pulling away from his. "Why are we supposed to be together, Harry? Because we've been together since you were sixteen? Because everyone thinks so? Those aren't reasons, Harry."

He wanted to tell her that he loved her. Those other things were just excuses for them to be together, not reasons. But the words wouldn't come. They got stuck somewhere in his throat and simply wouldn't climb out to convince her.

"You and I both know that this has been coming for a long time."

"That's not true," Harry whispered finally. "I...I'll come more often. We can figure something out. Maybe you need to leave the team, or maybe..."

"That's not an option right now," Ginny challenged back, blushing when her voice raised and people around them began to stare. "I won't leave the team right now, Harry. You can't ask me to do that—not when I'm at the top of my game. They're extending my contract."

"Okay," he nodded, squirming in his seat. "Maybe I can...maybe I can move here."

Ginny blinked at him, hope shining in her eyes before it faded into the dull look she'd been wearing too much lately. "You

won't do that," she shook her head. "They need you there. And you have Teddy."

Harry swore silently and rolled his shoulders, feeling sick as he stared down at his empty plate.

"This is better for both of us," Ginny nodded firmly, her emotions back under control.

Harry stared at her, wondering if he even knew this woman any more. Ginny had never been one to hold back like this, or to let something like being in a different country stand in the way of what she wanted.

Maybe she was right. Maybe it was better if they went their separate ways. So many arguments why that reasoning was bullshit swam through his head, but Harry couldn't grasp on to even one of them to convince both of them.

They were quiet for a long time before Harry nodded. "Is this what you want?"

Ginny wouldn't look at him, but looked over his shoulder, her eyes out of focus. "This is the way it needs to be."

He nodded again, feeling like he might vomit all over everything.

"Being with someone, Harry, especially if it's the right person, shouldn't be this hard. If it's right, it should be easy."

Harry wanted to scream. He opened his mouth several times before nodding and standing, his chair making a loud scraping sound against the bricks beneath him.

"I don't believe that," he whispered harshly, and then turned and walked away.

It had always bothered Harry that he had been the one to walk away. There had been something in Ginny's eye that day, some sort of look that he could never really define. At first he thought it was longing and regret, but over the years, Harry simply convinced himself it was relief. Ginny was relieved that he hadn't fought her.

How would his life be different now if he'd stayed and argued with her? Would they have worked harder to be together? Would they have actually made it work and been a real couple, with the house and the kids and everything?

Harry just didn't know.

Chapter 7: Everybody Wants You

Just Say The Word-Chapter 7: Everybody Wants You

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Just to mess with the whole predictability thing (because it's bothering me) you get another chapter today. Look, Jane! No spoilers in this note. ;) The chapter title is from a Josh Kelley song.

Chapter 7: Everybody Wants You

"Thanks, Harry. I had a really good time."

Harry chuckled and ran his hand through Teddy's wild hair, smiling down at the sleepy eleven year-old boy. A huge swell of affection broke over Harry and he roughly pulled Teddy into a hug, ignoring the way he struggled and wrestled.

As usual, the 'hug' ended with them both on the ground, Teddy crowing loudly because Harry allowed him to win the match.

"No problem, cub," Harry said. "I'm just glad we could talk your Gran into letting you escape with me for a bit."

Teddy laughed. He moved to the side and lay in the grass next to Harry, staring up at the sky that was just beginning to light with what promised to be a brilliant sunset.

Harry tore his eyes away from it when his mind flashed that the trailing clouds were exactly the shade of red in Ginny's hair.

He'd been fighting these ridiculous random thoughts since *she* had returned. Before, he'd even made it up to several days at a time before something would remind him of...*her*.

"You're not going to be all weird once I leave for school, are you?"

Teddy's out of the blue question startled Harry and he blinked at the boy, softening at the genuinely concerned look on his face.

"I know you think I'm too young to know what's going on," Teddy continued, staring back up at the sky. "I

know you were thinking a lot about...things while we were in Ireland. I tried not to notice too much."

Harry sighed and tried to decide what, exactly, to tell Teddy. He was far too bright for his own good at times. "Things between Ginny and me are complicated, Teddy. Having her here again makes me confused over things I thought I had figured out already."

"She's nicer than I remember," Teddy shrugged. "I mean, she wasn't ever mean..."

"Ginny seems to have changed a lot," Harry conceded.

"Gran said that she got hurt—more than just her arm—that she doesn't remember being away."

Harry swore silently, and tried to remind himself that Andromeda really was a wonderful person, even if she and Molly gossiped entirely too much.

"I don't know, Teddy," Harry admitted. "I haven't really talked to her."

Teddy sat up and wrapped his arms around his knees. "Do you think maybe you should?"

Harry mirrored his position and nudged Teddy's shoulder. "Since when did you get so wise?"

Teddy smirked. "I'm not, really. But you told me that once when Victoire and I had an argument. You said we were too good of friends to let something silly get between us, and that we should just...talk again."

Harry nodded and smiled fondly. "This is a bit different."

"Because you don't love her anymore?"

Harry wanted to agree, but he just couldn't make the words come out of his mouth. He really wasn't sure what he felt about Ginny. Perhaps it was just a shadow of the memory of love that still held him in its grip. Whatever it was, it wasn't pleasant, and Harry wished it would simply go away.

"It's just different," he shrugged, knowing it was a lame answer and Teddy would see right through it. "I know that's not what you want to hear. I'm not even sure I could explain it to you."

"Will you? One day, I mean. I think it's something maybe I should hear."

"One day," Harry promised. "Now, we'd better get inside before your Gran starts sending owls out looking for us."

Once Teddy was settled back in his home, Harry Apparated to his flat, glad that he'd passed Stupid Cat off to Ron and Hermione to watch while he was gone. In a way, however, he missed not having to shoo the animal from the sofa, or vacate the kitchen so the cat could eat in privacy.

Two weeks with Teddy had been a wonderful idea and Harry had finally felt a bit more like himself after getting away. They spent hours flying around the countryside and had even rented Muggle bicycles one day and explored some of the countryside that way. The evenings were the worst, when the old memories would creep out from the shadows and threaten to overtake Harry in their sweet bitterness. But Teddy was good at

wearing Harry completely thin, enough that he usually collapsed in bed each night.

Tonight sleep wasn't going to come, and Harry knew it. Being back in London meant he was going to have to deal with everything very soon. And he still had no idea what he was going to do about Ginny being back, and the feelings she invoked in him.

The dark flat seemed to encompass his mood well, so Harry left it dark and poured himself a generous shot of Firewhiskey, stretching out on the sofa and staring into the emptiness.

Teddy's questions earlier about Ginny kept playing over and over in his head and Harry took a deep swallow of the alcohol, hoping it would make his mind fuzzy enough that he could forget it all. Maybe he could get drunk enough that none of this would matter anymore.

But he'd tried that in the past and it didn't work; in the morning, through the pounding headache and the tilting floors, he would still remember that the woman he had loved was gone, and that he was alone.

His life hadn't turned out anything like he had planned. It was disappointing at times, thinking of how naïve and childish the wish to be married and have a family of his own seemed. He'd had it all figured out those many years ago, living here with Ginny, planning to marry her and start a family.

But he should have known that life rarely worked out so well when your name was Harry Potter.

Instead he'd gotten years of feeling incredibly unfulfilled, jumping from one short-lived relationship to the next.

Even being with Susan hadn't filled the void in his life like he'd hoped it would. And Harry had thrown himself fully into the relationship, pushing all inhibitions away and doing his best to be the kind of boyfriend he should be—or so he thought.

Susan always seemed appreciative, but, then again, Susan didn't make a fuss about much. Susan was...well, she was nice. Everyone thought so. And when Hannah insisted that Harry take her out one night, even Harry had been pleasantly surprised at how well the date had gone. She was pretty and smart enough—nothing near Hermione's level, but that was a good thing—and she didn't treat him like some sort of celebrity.

They'd been together for just over a year when Harry began wondering if he should ask Susan to marry him. It wasn't the urgent need he'd felt when planning to propose to Ginny, but...it was probably where they were headed. He'd even bought a ring for Susan.

But the chance to give it to her never came.

Instead, Ginny had come to Christmas at the Burrow. She came in her designer robes, with her short hair and posh attitude...and dragging Brogan Quinlan with her.

Harry winced just thinking of the night. It was horrible, watching *them* interact with each other. Looking back, Harry had to admit he'd been an arse. Ron and he were already drinking when Ginny and Quinlan walked in the back door, their hands clasped tightly. Susan had peered at him from across the room, but greeted Ginny graciously and made polite conversation with The Wanker, ignoring the way he flirted with her.

Everything was going fine—he and Ron had devised their game of name calling and making comments about Ginny's attitude—until Harry went up the stairs to the loo a few hours later. In the hallway, just outside the door to Ginny's old room he ran into...them.

Ginny's forehead was pressed against Quinlan's chest and his arms were wrapped around her, massaging her lower back gently.

"You were right," she said, her soft voice was so much different than Harry expected to hear—it reminded him of back when she loved him. "We shouldn't have come."

"I hate to say I told you so."

Ginny snorted and shook her head as Harry pulled back into the shadows. He really should turn around and go back downstairs to allow them their private moment, or at least announce his presence. But it was asking too much of his legs to work correctly right now.

"You love to say it."

"I do," Quinlan quipped, kissing her forehead. Harry remembered using the same gesture so many years ago and it made the alcohol in his stomach roll, threatening to reappear all over the step in front of him. "I love to admit I was right."

"This isn't where I belong anymore," Ginny continued. She looked up at Quinlan, craning her neck to see the large man's face. She looked so tiny and vulnerable right then, but Harry supposed anything looked small next to Brogan Quinlan.

"You belong at home with me."

Ginny smiled then, laying her head on Quinlan's hand when it came up and caressed her cheek.

"Maybe we should just go." The words seemed to come reluctantly from Ginny and it made Harry really study her face. He hadn't seen her—in the few brief times he'd actually seen her over the past few years—look this tired and broken. Did someone from her family upset her so much? Surely it couldn't have been Harry who had put that look there; Ginny was far gone from having any feelings for him still.

No, she'd managed to squash those years ago by the looks of things.

"They'll be disappointed," Quinlan shrugged. "Your Mum's been looking forward to this for a long time. Bet she didn't think I'd show up." He waggled his eyebrows salaciously and Harry bit his lip to keep back a growl.

"If I haven't said how much it means to me that you came—"

"You don't have to," Quinlan interrupted. "I'd do anything for you, Gin, you know that."

Hearing this man call her by that intimate nickname—a name that Harry had been the first to use—was the final nail in Harry's coffin tonight. He promptly forgot about the pressure in his bladder and sought Susan out downstairs, telling her he was tired and wanted to go home.

Ginny came down a few minutes later, without The Wanker, and Harry forced himself to blot out the image of her in his arms, and even said a polite goodnight to her before Apparating out with Susan in his arms.

"That was...awkward," Susan said as she made Stupid Cat—whom she insisted on calling by his real name—get off the sofa and sank into the cushions.

"Yeah," Harry said, plopping down next to her and fumbling for her hand. He usually didn't care to hold her hand too much because she always had such a limp grip.

"Did you know she was coming?"

"Ron told me yesterday," Harry said, laying his head back on the sofa. "I had hoped... Well, I didn't know The Wanker was coming."

Susan didn't say anything, but her lips pinched in that way she had. Rather than think of what that might mean, Harry leaned in and kissed her.

"Stay tonight?" he asked.

But Susan pulled back from the kiss and eyed him closely. "I don't know if that's the best idea."

Harry nodded. He wanted to protest that it was perfect if she stayed, because then he could forget all about Ginny. And forget all about The Wanker, who would surely be sneaking into Ginny's room tonight, disrespecting the Weasleys by defiling their daughter under their roof. The fact that Harry and Ginny had sex at the Burrow several times while Ginny had still lived there didn't matter.

"Marry me?" Harry blurted out, surprising even himself. He hadn't planned on doing this yet, but it made sense in an out of control way right now.

But Susan didn't answer; she just gave him a look that was full of pity. "We both know that's not the answer to this."

Harry huffed out a breath and pulled his hand away from hers. "Why not? We've been together for a long time." He stood and paced, a hundred reasons why they should do this running through his head. "We could go tonight. Somewhere, someplace has to be open. We could even do it the Muggle way."

"I'm not going to marry you, Harry," Susan protested in a soft voice. "And you don't want me to say yes, not really."

Now he was starting to get angry, the frustration of the night pouring out of him. "I wouldn't have asked if I didn't."

Susan sighed and stood, coming closer to him than he liked. "I can't be number two in your life, Harry. I love you, but you don't love me."

"I do!" he protested, clutching her arms gently. "I do."

"Not the way you should. Not the way I deserve to be loved. It took me until tonight—seeing...seeing Ginny—to understand. You're still in love with her."

"No!" Harry yelled. "I'm not. That was over...years ago." He was feeling incredibly irrational now and the picture of Ginny in Quinlan's arms was flashing in his eyes, making him swipe his glasses off his face and press his fingers to his eyes. "I want to have a family, Susan. I want to have a family with...with you."

Her answer was soft. Soft and nice, just like she always was. "No, you don't. You want a family, but I'm not the one you want it with. You can't have what you want, so you'll settle for anything you can get."

"That's not true," he protested half-heartedly. She'd finally guessed his true motivation, even though he'd never done it intentionally. He wasn't a cruel person.

"It is," Susan said, smiling through glassy eyes. "And I think I understand...because I haven't met the right person for me yet, either. I...I thought you might be the one, but you gave your heart away a long time ago."

Harry pushed away from her and sank onto the edge of the sofa, resting his head in his hands. This was it. She was going to end things with him, like she should have months ago. Maybe even after just a few dates.

"You need to get this all straight in your head, Harry," she said. Harry watched as her feet, in the sensible shoes with the little bows, came to stand in front of him. "I want what's best for you. I want...I want you to find what makes you most happy. But that's not me."

And just like that, the relationship had ended. Susan had walked out of the flat, closing the door quietly behind her and leaving Harry just as she had found him; damaged, confused, and pining for a woman who had left him years ago.

It was better now, Harry knew. For several weeks after Christmas, Harry walked around in a daze. He returned the engagement ring to the store and never told anyone he'd been desperate enough to propose to Susan, or that she'd turned him down. He knew Ron and Hermione probably suspected more than he told them. Neville had probably heard it from Hannah, since she was Susan's best friend, but he never said anything about it.

Susan was right. He was still a mess over Ginny, five years after the breakup. Harry didn't know if he'd ever be 'right' again, or even what 'right' meant anymore.

Throwing himself into work and spending time with Teddy and friends had finally led him to a place where he felt like he'd started to put his past with Ginny to rest. It was true that he'd never fully faced everything he felt when he and Ginny broke up—it had seemed too painful at first. And then burying it became a habit. And then...it didn't seem to hurt nearly as much if there was a reminder. Time faded pain, he supposed.

It was better this way. He had more time to devote to work, more time with Teddy, and more time to do what he wanted to do.

He would have loved to have a family, but that ship had sailed many years ago. It just wasn't in the cards for the Potter line to continue, he supposed. So he did his best to live a comfortable life.

And up until Ron had walked into his office, telling him that Ginny was moving back to England, Harry had been content. He had a few dates, but didn't allow anything serious to develop.

Now that Ginny was back, even that simple desire for contentment was thrown into question. And Harry had no idea what to do about it.

I finally did it. I ended things with Harry. Everything. And it's been headed this direction for months now, but it still hurts remembering how he walked away, not looking back.

I've justified doing this time and time again over the last months, because things just aren't working out. My time here in France isn't going to end as soon as we expected, and opportunity with England has moved on. This is my only shot at making a name for myself in Professional Quidditch. I don't feel I can walk away from this now that I've made the commitment. Maybe if things between Harry and I had worked out...but now there's nothing left but this.

Harry is so busy with the Aurors. It's been weeks since we were able to properly spend time together, and even then it was only dinner, a quick shag, breakfast and goodbye. As much as it pains me to say it, we just don't have much in common anymore.

And those are all really, really horrible reasons to walk away. But I can't do this anymore. I can't put work into something that is never going to last. If it was meant to be, this wouldn't be so hard.

Ginny threw the small diary across the room, relishing the satisfying smack on the wall it gave. She couldn't believe she'd actually written this...drivel. It was sickening.

How had they let things get that...dry and horrible between them? Was it simply time and distance that forced them to move on without each other? If that was all, it was a horrible excuse. If it was their work that came between them then they were just stupid; no career was worth walking away from your true dreams.

Ginny wanted nothing more than to shake the person who had written those words; take her by the shoulders and give her a good, thorough shake to knock some sense into her.

No wonder Harry refused to talk to her; she'd been horrible to him. She was really starting to hate this person that she must have become. No wonder everyone stared at her the way they did.

The rational side of her brain pointed out that the writing clearly said 'Harry walked away'—what did that mean? Had Harry not fought for them at all?

Knowing she needed answers, Ginny forced herself into the loo to wash away her red eyes and the tears on her cheeks. She kissed her mother on the cheek and Apparated to the Leaky Cauldron. If Harry wasn't home yet, or simply wouldn't talk to her, she'd have to get her answers another way.

It was early enough in the day that the pub wasn't too busy, just a few patrons turning to look when she popped into existence.

Ginny felt her face heat as she wove through the tables toward the bar. Hannah Longbottom was wiping a small circle on the wood, looking as if she was trying not to stare.

"Hi, Hannah," Ginny greeted her, suddenly remembering that Susan was Hannah's best friend.

"Ginny."

The tone was tight, but not completely unfriendly. Ginny sighed inwardly and tried to smile. "Is Neville around today? I...I need to wish him a happy late birthday. I feel awful for forgetting."

Hannah's demeanor softened and she nodded. "I'll get him. There's a private room in the back if you'd like."

This time Ginny's sigh was audible and she smiled, nodding. "Thank you," she said gratefully. "I'll try not to keep him long."

"Don't worry about it," Hannah said, smiling. "He didn't have anything planned for today. He'll probably just wander out to his Gran's old house and tend to the plants. You're doing me a favor, really, by keeping him in town. He could spend hours out there." She moved into the back room and Ginny braced herself, not sure how Neville would greet her. It had been, apparently, a long time since she'd seen him, and too much had happened. It was possible—likely even—that he wouldn't want anything to do with her.

"Ginny!"

The warm greeting, and Neville's arms wrapping around her shoulders made her throat grow thick. She should have known better—Neville wasn't the type to judge someone, or hold a grudge.

"Hi," she greeted him, returning the hug, holding it just a little longer than she planned. It just felt so good to have someone really *want* to see her, besides her family.

"I was wondering when you'd come to see me," he scolded, the accusation betrayed by the wide smile on his face. Ginny pulled back, amazed at the years that showed on his face. There were wrinkles at the corners of his eyes that hadn't been there when she'd seen him last.

"I'm sorry," she said again, hating that it seemed to be her standard phrase lately. "I...I wasn't sure if you'd want to see me," she admitted.

Neville opened his mouth and then nodded once before taking the two Butterbeers that Hannah set on the bar and motioning toward the back room.

"I've missed you," he said once they were alone.

Ginny's eyes filled with tears, the weight of the past weeks finally forcing her shoulders to slump completely.

"I've missed you."

Neville pulled out a chair for her absently and Ginny was touched by his unthinking courtesy—he'd always been like that. "I heard...heard you were injured...having memory issues. I've been thinking about bringing you a *Mimulus Mimbletonia*. I have a few small ones and...they're really amazing."

"I'd like that," Ginny said, chuckling through her tears. "I'm not sure if it would help or not, but I'd like to have one anyway."

"I'll repot one and bring it by soon."

"You can bring it to George's shop, actually," Ginny said, blinking her blurry eyes and shaking away her reservations. Talking to Neville was just like she remembered it being: comfortable and welcoming. "I'm moving into the flat above the shop at the end of the week."

"Yeah?" Neville's face glowed with his smile and Ginny allowed herself to relax for the first time in weeks.

"Yeah," she shrugged. "It's time I get out and find my place here."

"You'll let me know if you need anything?" he asked. "If I'm around I'd be happy to help. And if you need any plants..."

Ginny laughed. "I'll let you know. I'm sure my brothers will be blackmailed into helping by my mother."

They settled into a happy, comfortable silence and Ginny shook her head. "You always surprise me, Neville. I thought..."

"You thought I wouldn't want anything to do with you." He nodded and Ginny felt her face heat.

"It's stupid. I should have trusted that I knew you better."

"I was never happy with the situation, Ginny, but I didn't blame you. I didn't blame either of you, actually. I tried to remain as...neutral as I could."

"I'm sorry I don't remember any of this," Ginny said. "Merlin I hate saying that. It's all I say anymore." She rubbed her face harshly. "I'm sorry that I was horrible to everyone. I'm sorry that I missed birthdays—Shit! I had a card for you."

"Don't worry about it," Neville dismissed with a small laugh.

"I let myself worry about sending something to Harry...and then changed my mind...and then back again." Ginny laughed at herself, thinking how neurotic she sounded. "It's still sitting where it was." She shrugged and Neville smiled and shook his head.

"I understand."

"I just...I just want things to be the way I remember them," Ginny sighed, scrunching down in the chair and resting her head against the back of it.

Neville quietly studied her for what seemed like a long time. "And if they can't be like that?"

"I don't know?" She asked more than stated, because she really had no idea. If Harry never let her back into his life, if she never regained her memories, if... It was all too much to think about. "Guess I need to work on that."

He smiled genuinely and reached out for her hand, wrapping it inside his in a familiar, comfortable way.

"You've always been a strong woman, Ginny. You'll find your way...and if you don't, you'll blaze your own trail."

She nodded, angry that her tears were returning. "Is it worth it if I don't have the thing I want most?" The whispered question hurt to ask; it hurt her chest as it escaped out of her, burning her throat and the back of

her eyes as it floated between them.

“That’s something you’re going to have to decide for yourself,” Neville admitted.

“I can’t ask you to tell me everything,” Ginny shook her head, “and I won’t, because that’s not fair. But...I need to know, Neville, what happened. My family—they’re all very polite, and neutral, and completely biased about it. No one will tell me much; all I have is an old diary in which I didn’t write nearly enough, and wrote entirely too much sometimes. And no one here really...they don’t know much, they say.” She turned her pleading eyes on him and sighed when he sat back in his chair, staring off into the empty room. He was quite for a very long time before he spoke.

“It was more mutual than probably anyone knew at the time. I think you both knew something was coming—a change in the relationship. If one of you didn’t give in to change, then the break was inevitable. Harry worried about it for months. He...I think he tried nearly everything short of moving over there to work it out. And I knew you were fighting for it too. But giving up everything you’ve worked so hard for must have been...an excruciating thought.”

“Stop being neutral,” Ginny chided softly. “If I mucked it up, call it what it was.”

The side of Neville’s mouth quirked up slightly. “You mucked it up.”

A slow, shaky breath exited her lungs and she nodded, glad that the truth was before them, but terrified all the same.

“You let him walk away, gave up a dream you had in your hands for one that lingered somewhere on the horizon.”

The words hurt as they pounded into her skull, but at least she knew.

“But you’re not completely to blame, Ginny,” Neville said, reaching for her hand and rubbing it between his large, rough ones. “Harry didn’t turn around; he didn’t offer you what you would have needed to come back.”

“What would that have been?” Ginny snorted through the tears that were escaping. “Because I seemed hell-bent on proving something to the world out there, and it cost me everything I ever held most dear to me. I took it all for granted, and it’s gone now.”

Neville chewed on that thought. “Harry was going to propose to you, Ginny. Right before you got the offer to play in France. He had the ring and everything.”

Her chest constricted even more and Ginny had to look away. “Why didn’t he?”

“I think... I think he thought you deserved the chance to go out there and accomplish your dreams. He thought he was being selfish by holding you back from something you were so amazing at.”

“And look where it got me,” Ginny said spitefully, still clutching Neville’s hand. “I was living in a house I don’t remember buying, dating a man that I don’t remember. My family is all very distant and polite. The man I love—loved, whatever!—won’t even talk to me. And I have nothing left, Neville. I have nothing.”

"You have me," he shrugged. Ginny looked up at him and his thirty year-old face, with the lines and wrinkles and slightly receding hairline, was replaced with the determined, strong features of a seventeen year-old boy. "I could never turn my back on our friendship, Ginny. You and I have been through too much."

"I don't deserve it," she said in a small voice. "I...I don't understand why you're even talking to me. I'm sure I offended you over the years as well."

"Do you remember offending me?" he asked, leaning forward in his chair.

"I don't remember anything," she shrugged.

"Then why should I remember something like that?"

The tears flowed again and Ginny cried as Neville gathered her into a hug, holding her while she sobbed into his shirt.

"I'm not sure I deserve a friend like you," she admitted when she finally pulled back.

"Well, deserve me or not, I'm here," he smiled.

"Then I'll do my best to be worthy of that loyalty," she promised.

The week couldn't get much worse for Harry. Two of his Aurors had been seriously injured by a potions spill while bringing a suspect in for questioning and the wizard had Apparated away, without the trace attached to him. The Department was in a rage, trying to track him for harming two of their own. All other cases—save the most urgent ones—had been put on hold while Aurors fanned out across the countryside, putting in murderous hours trying to find the man.

Harry himself had even gone out in the field—a rarity these days—for two nights, missing dinner at Andromeda's and his normal day to have Teddy. It was something both he and Teddy looked forward to every week—one whole day together to do whatever they wanted. Andromeda was quick to point out that Harry and Teddy had just come back from two weeks together in Ireland, but Harry still scowled over the floo call. It wasn't so much that Teddy needed the extra time flying, or watching a film, or eating a burger together. Harry needed it.

Later that night, when Harry flooed to see if Teddy wanted him to come over anyway, Andromeda informed him that Teddy was already asleep; worn out from spending the day flying with Ginny.

Ginny!

He tried, very hard, to push the irrational jealousy from his mind at hearing that, but it wasn't easy. Hearing Teddy's excited report the next day, spilling out of his mouth, words tumbling over each other like excited puppies, didn't help either.

Apparently, Ginny was the height of cool now. Teddy was even wearing his hair green, because it was Ginny's favorite color. He talked about nothing but the Chaser drills Ginny had shown him and the new grip she'd helped him work on perfecting.

Harry listened, a forced smile on his face, nodding when required and not even bothering to get a word in edgewise. Andromeda just gave him a knowing look that he ignored.

Teddy's enthusiasm finally slowed to a crawl and Harry excused himself to hide in his office at work, feeling horrible for snubbing everyone. He didn't do things with Ron and Hermione much anymore, because Ginny was Ron's sister. He didn't go to the Burrow, because that's where Ginny was. He couldn't even go and see Neville, because *Neville* wouldn't shut up about how wonderful it was to see Ginny again!

That was completely and utterly unfair! *Neville was his friend!*

The thought that he was being a complete prick was pushed aside in favor of brooding over the whole situation until Harry couldn't even stand to be around himself. Perhaps what he needed was to unwind. Maybe he could track Ron or George down and they could get a pint together—there would, of course, be a rule against talking about *her*.

Yes. A pint with his mates sounded like the perfect way to end the week.

Harry tried to put a pleasant look on his face as he moved down Diagon Alley, his Auror robes thrown open, showing off his loose tie and rumpled clothes beneath. Ron hadn't been in his office and there had been no response to Harry's scribbled note to meet him and George at the Three Broomsticks. Whatever. If they didn't meet him, then Harry wouldn't be expected to buy. He could sit in a booth all by himself, ignoring whoever he wanted and drinking until he couldn't remember why he'd started.

The shop was busy, but not packed, when Harry went in. Two clerks were ringing teenage boys up at the counter while a third tried to answer questions and inflict a bit of damage control on the shelves.

The whole scene made Harry even grumpier as he was reminded that Teddy was going to be off to Hogwarts in a matter of weeks. Then who would Harry spend Thursdays with?

"George upstairs?" Harry asked, ignoring the excited squeaks of the boys who recognized him.

"Yeah," the young clerk with the spotty complexion answered. "Last I saw, anyway."

Harry nodded and disappeared behind the curtain, scanning the work room to see if perhaps George was avoiding the mob out front. Not a single cauldron was bubbling today and Harry shrugged, loping up the stairs, skipping the ones that were charmed.

George was probably hiding up here, drinking Butterbeers that he kept in the icebox and lounging on the boxes. This little flat had been a great hide-away over the years. Harry had spent many nights drunkenly passed out on the sofa, or playing Muggle poker with his mates as they surrounded a makeshift table made of boxes that were likely to erupt with surprises at any time.

"Oi, George," Harry called out, swinging the door open wide. "Get your sorry arse out here and..."

The words died in his throat when he blinked around at the flat. There were no boxes anywhere. The sofa was in the center of the room and there were...flowers...sitting in a vase on the table next to the sofa, along with

framed photographs. The bouquet was huge and vibrant in color, the pleasant scent chasing out the always-present smell of cardboard.

“George isn’t here.”

Harry cringed at the soft voice behind him and looked over his shoulder slowly, seeing Ginny standing in the small kitchen, dirt smudged on her cheek and across the thighs of her jeans. The most ominous thing, however, was her wand pointed directly at him.

“I’d move if I were you,” she said, staring at him. Harry blinked at her, unable to read the expression she wore.

He looked down and saw a blue square just at the edge of his toes. “Wha—”

Before he could finish the thought, however, the square flashed and a stack of boxes appeared. Harry gave a startled cry and jumped back, bumping into a table and knocking over a stack of books that had been resting there.

Ginny sighed and levitated the boxes off to the side before stacking the books back as they were. “George isn’t here,” she said again, sounding more tired than anything. “He’s at the Burrow.”

“What the hell happened in here?” Harry asked, staring at the flowers. There were also pillows on the sofa; little pillows with ruffles on the edges. Harry vaguely remembered seeing them in the guest bedroom at the Burrow. But now they were here...on the sofa that had housed him many nights.

Ginny blinked at him, her eyes flashing in a way that Harry was pretty sure meant she was frustrated with him. He remembered that look. “I happened here,” Ginny said.

She turned around as another set of boxes appeared in the glowing blue square. Harry blinked at her back, trying to figure out what was going on here.

This was *their* spot. The place he and George and Ron came to escape women and dealing with the problems caused by women. This...this was George’s storage facility, for Merlin’s sake! Where did all the boxes go?

Ginny remained silent, levitating the boxes over to rest gently on the other two. Harry watched in amazement as the boxes hovered perfectly. He’d forgotten how graceful Ginny could be at times; how delicate her hand looked wrapped around her wand, and how elegantly she could perform even the simplest charm.

“I’m moving in.”

Her words shocked him and he looked away, feeling his cheeks heat.

“I...I hadn’t heard.”

“You’ve been busy,” Ginny commented absently as she moved past him, floating a suitcase into the small room off to the left. “I read the papers and Teddy told me about going to Ireland.” Harry could see the edge of a colorful Molly Weasley quilt over the edge of the bed and snapped his eyes away. It made him feel... weird to think of Ginny like this—having a home in this place. She seemed out of place here, above George’s

shop, instead of at the Burrow, or at the flat they once shared, or even in France or Spain.

"I have been busy," he nodded, feeling stupid for answering her question when she wasn't even in the room anymore. "Er...the square is glowing again."

Ginny swore and he heard a crash before she came out, rubbing her shoulder and scowling.

"Why isn't anyone here to help you?" Harry demanded, fighting the urge to run and make sure she was alright. Old habits died hard.

"Ron was here," Ginny said, moving more boxes, "but he got hungry and decided we needed food."

"And George is—"

"At the Burrow," she sighed, swiping at her forehead. "He's the one sending boxes." The small blue square on the floor faded and Ginny leaned on the back of the sofa staring at him. Harry squirmed and tried to think of a good excuse to leave. Maybe he shouldn't say anything, just turn and walk out.

But Ginny's face looked so...so young with the way she watched him. It reminded him of when she was fourteen and watched him across the Common Room. There was a longing there that a fifteen year-old boy hadn't been able to understand. Even now, at double that age, Harry had a hard time understanding everything that was implied in that look.

"You don't have to stay, you know," she said. Her tone betrayed her, however, and the hidden pleading made his stomach roll unpleasantly. It took all he had to make his foot move one step closer to the door. "I'm not going to...make you talk or anything. Your avoidance of me is pretty much evidence that you don't want to talk to me about what happened in the past."

"Who gave you the flowers?" Harry asked, unsure where the question had come from. Now that it had escaped his brain, he admitted that he did want to know. When Ginny didn't answer, he looked at her to find her bottom lip was tucked just under her teeth. His heart jolted at the familiar gesture and he forced his eyes away.

"Neville," she shrugged, moving toward the flowers and letting her fingers trail along one of the blooms. "He brought them this morning."

Something clicked in Harry's head and he felt incredibly stupid. "It's your birthday today."

Ginny nodded and then looked over her shoulder at him.

"I didn't forget yours, by the way."

Harry swallowed past the guilt and discomfort in his throat and shrugged a shoulder. She hadn't forgotten after all. Not that it mattered.

"I had a card for you. I...I just didn't know if I had the right to send it."

"Probably for the best," Harry said, focusing on the edge of the window that looked out over Diagon Alley. It

was open and a gently breeze ruffled curtains that Ginny, or possibly Molly, had put there. "You haven't remembered in years."

"That...that can't be true," Ginny said, shaking her head. Her cheeks were pale and Harry could see the freckles standing out sharply in relief. It was then that he realized Ginny wasn't wearing makeup. In fact, he hadn't seen her wear any either time he'd seen her since she returned. "Surely I remembered..."

"You never did," he huffed, feeling incredibly tired by all of this. The frustration of the whole situation—the week from hell, the stress of preparing Teddy to leave, the uncertainty of the future now that his ex-girlfriend was back in his life—all crashed down on him and Harry's chest rumbled horribly. "You've barely acknowledged I was alive all these years, Ginny."

"I don't remember!" Her voice rose sharply and she took a step closer to him. "I don't remember any of it. And I'm sorry that I—"

"You're sorry?!" Harry roared, moving closer. They were only a foot apart now and Harry could see the flush in her cheeks, the way her nostrils flared with each breath.

"What do you want from me, Harry?!" Ginny cried, throwing her hands wide. Harry rocked back on his heels.

"What do *I* want from you?" Harry demanded, moving close enough that he had to look down to see her face. "It's you I can't figure out. You come waltzing back in here after all these years...and I don't know what you want me to do. You tell me you don't remember anything and that you want me to *talk* about it. It's not a particularly fun topic to dredge up, is it? And...and you *look* at me like...like you want nothing more than to just pick up where we left off. I can't do that, Ginny. Do you think I can just forget all the hurt, all the pain you caused me? Then again, why not?! You did."

"You're a bastard," Ginny hissed, balling up her fist and hitting his chest, just enough to knock him off balance. "You think I wanted to wake up to this...this hell? You think I wanted to think about you shagging every witch who walked by and knowing that you hate me because of something I can't even remember?"

Her words rang in his head, but Harry could only see the flush of her skin--porcelain, that his fingers just had to touch. Her lips were just as pink and perfect as he remembered. And her chest rose and fell with each out of control breath she shuddered in.

Before he could stop himself, he was kissing her. Ginny didn't fight, but wound her hands in his shirt, her nails scraping the skin. Harry sucked in a breath through his nose and thrust his tongue into her mouth as he wrapped his arms around her shoulders, drawing her tightly against him.

His brain screamed at him to stop, even as he lifted her against him. Ginny moaned in the back of her throat and Harry was transported back, almost a decade before when they had been allowed to kiss like this anytime they wished. But kissing like this had usually led to—

"Stop!" Harry roared, pulling back and forcing her away. He slammed his eyes closed so he didn't have to see her looking so...so thoroughly kissed. He knew her skin would be red and her lips would be swollen and slightly parted. Her chest would be rising and falling just as much as his own was right now. And he couldn't take it! Not now!

"We can't do this," he explained. "We...this isn't us anymore, Ginny." It was much easier to blame this on her—to forget that he'd been the one to give in to an old weakness, to want her so much that he couldn't resist her—than to admit that his feelings for her bordered on that thin line between love and hate.

"But it could be," she whispered urgently. "This *could* be us, Harry. I love you...and you feel something for me as well, otherwise..." Ginny's words died out and she shook her head. Her fingers tightened in his shirt, almost to the point of hurting, before she relaxed her fists and fell away from him.

"If you want to go...go. You walked away before. You're good at that."

The words were a slap to the face and Harry wondered, for just a minute, if she'd actually hit him.

"I wouldn't have walked away," he snapped, "but you pushed, and pushed, and pushed until I had no choice but to let you go, Ginny. You got what you wanted." Her hair seemed to stand on end when she was angry and her skin almost glowed. That probably should have been a warning to Harry to get the hell out of there before he said something he'd regret, something he really didn't mean. But he couldn't force his feet to move. So they stared at each other instead.

"And what is that, Harry?" Her softer tone, more defeated than Harry expected it to be, startled him. He wasn't sure what to do now—was he allowed to keep yelling, because the yelling was helping. The yelling made it easier not to notice the little things about her he'd always loved—the way she stood up to him, the way her whole body quivered when they argued, the way her eyes took on that blazing look.

"What do you think I have?" Ginny scoffed, moving away and wrapping her arms around herself, looking completely lost as she stared at the flat. "I woke up believing I was somewhere else—that I was someone else—only to find out that everything I've ever wanted was thrown away. And I don't remember any of it. The man I love—" Her voice broke and Harry swore, burying his fingers in his hair and turning away from her.

"Don't say it," he warned, feeling like he was standing on the edge of a cliff, looking down at the rocky shore below. He couldn't hear her say this—couldn't allow it. She didn't love him. Part of him wondered if she ever really had.

"The man I love," she continued, her voice rising over his warning, "hates me for something I can't remember. And I'm not allowed to have these feelings, because he's moved on, because he doesn't love me anymore."

Harry closed his eyes against the pain and made an incoherent noise deep inside him. It was a cry for mercy along with a scream as he flung himself over that proverbial cliff, knowing that the end was going to come soon.

"I can't love you," Harry said. "Because you didn't love me enough—if you had...you would have stayed." He took a shuddering breath, hating that he was ripping her apart. "Maybe...maybe I never really loved you."

The lie was forced out and Harry commanded his legs to take a step. The first one was the hardest, but they became easier as he moved toward the door.

The shattering of glass made him run even faster, down the stairs, forgetting all about the charms on the steps, and out the door.

He had to get away before he was forced to tell her that he had lied to her. Before he admitted that she made him feel...something that confused the hell out of him, but made him feel like he'd come home, at the same time.

So he ran.

Chapter 8: Almost Honest

Just Say The Word-Chapter 8: Almost Honest

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Admit it, you all knew I'd give in again. lol The song is another Josh Kelley one. (One of my favorites, even if it is heartbreaking.)

Chapter 8: Almost Honest

Ron whistled as he walked back into the shop, carrying bags of food that Hannah had prepared just for him. He received several strange stares on the way into the store, which made the tune in his head evaporate. *What is wrong with people?!*

The chaos inside the store was definitely not what he expected to find, and Ron nearly dropped the bags of food he carried.

Two huge displays were tipped completely over, boxes of sweets scattered all over the place. Two teenage boys were lying on their backs in the middle of everything, and staring wide-eyed at Ron.

"What did I do?" he asked, reflexively. Surely *he* hadn't caused some sort of accident; he'd just walked in, for Merlin's sake.

A rather irate woman came up to him, poking him in the chest and glaring up at him. "I ought to contact the Aurors, you know."

Ron blinked at her, his jaw dropping as he tried to figure out why it was illegal for him to get take away. "Er...I am an Auror," he clarified, feeling incredibly stupid.

"He knocked over my boy! Ploughed right into him and sent him flying into all those dangerous products. Who knows what may have happened!"

"Mum!" One of the boys on the floor groaned and pushed himself up, thankfully inserting his small, thin frame between Ron and the woman. "He didn't mean to, it was an accident."

"It was wicked cool!" the other boy crowed. "Ploughed by Harry Potter himself!"

A light went on in Ron's brain and he looked around, half-expecting Harry to pop up from behind one of the destroyed displays, proclaiming his horror at what he'd done and helping to dust everyone off.

But Harry didn't pop out. And the shocked looks on everyone's faces as they stared at both Ron and the door alerted him to the fact that Harry wasn't going to pop out. He was gone.

"What happened?" Ron asked, ignoring the spluttering woman in front of him and staring at, Peter, the spotty-faced clerk.

Peter adjusted his thick glasses and blinked several times. "Mr. Potter," he said, his voice cracking. "He came tearing down the stairs and ran through here like he was on fire."

"And there was yelling!" the enthused young boy scrambling up from the floor said with glee. Ron was sure if he smiled any wider his face might just actually split. "Do you think there's a Dark Wizard back there?" he asked, going up on his toes to try and see past the curtain that Harry had run out from.

Ron turned back to Peter to confirm this and Peter's cheeks flushed red. "There was some sort of argument."

"And breaking glass," someone added from the crowd.

Swearing, Ron let his shoulders slump. Ginny was upstairs. And if there was yelling, and breaking glass, and Harry running out...no doubt Harry was home trying to find a cure for the giant bats swirling out of his nostrils right now. Leave it to Harry to muck up a situation that badly.

"Er...Peter, can you..." Ron gestured to the displays and Peter jumped forward, nodding and waving his wand around, righting things as much as he could.

"What are you going to do about that...that menace?!" The irate mother poked him in the chest once more and Ron winced, moving the bags of food in front of him as a shield.

The idea that he could actually *do* something to the Head Auror, let alone that Harry was being referred to as a *menace*, was laughable.

"Er...are you...hurt, or anything?" Ron asked the kid, ignoring the mother.

"No!" The kid gave Ron a rather horrified look that intensified when his mother turned to him and began fussing at his clothing.

"Perhaps we should take you to St. Mungo's—"

"I won't go," the boy vowed, backing away from the whole mess.

Ron took the opportunity to begin moving away as well. "I'll er...I'll check in upstairs," he said, nodding his head in the direction of the back room. Peter gave a wary look to the front of the store and shrugged a shoulder, as if he had any choice in the matter.

Still clutching the bags in front of him, Ron bounded up the stairs. He almost slipped on the last step, which was covered in a pool of water, shiny shards of glass, and scattered flowers.

“Ginny?!”

Ron slumped against the door frame when he came in and saw Ginny sitting on the floor, her face resting on her knees and her arms wrapped around her legs. There was more glass and a heap of ruined flowers on the floor.

Ginny sniffed and turned her back to him, swiping her arm across her face, probably trying to erase evidence of her crying. She’d always hated to cry.

“Go away, Ron,” she said. The words were soft and barely reached him. “I...I can’t deal with anything right now.”

Ron sighed and stepped over the mess, setting the bags of food down on the floor.

“Neville’s not going to be too happy about your present,” he sighed, pulling his wand and repairing the vase. The flowers were still a mess and he did his best at stuffing all the ends into the opening and filling it with water. He gave a proud smile, holding up his repair job, but a small trickle of water started near the bottom and soon was leaking all over the floor.

“It was the closest thing I could reach,” Ginny shrugged, looking over her shoulder.

“Next time stretch for a pillow,” Ron advised, trying to seal up the cracks in the glass. Ginny was quiet and Ron, after giving up and setting the flowers in the sink, came to sit next to her on the floor.

“Do I want to know what happened? Or should I be tracking down my best mate and helping him remove whatever curse you hit him with?”

“Couldn’t pull my wand fast enough,” Ginny shrugged. “Threw the flowers instead.”

Ron nodded and waited for her to continue.

“He was being...” She trailed off and Ron sighed. Honestly, he could imagine how the scene went—both of them having a go at each other and then tempers erupting. “Honest,” Ginny admitted. “Which is good, I guess. I asked him...and he told me. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised he’s angry. I just wish I could say more than ‘I’m sorry’ all the time.”

“You two never did get it all out when it happened,” he shrugged. “Maybe...maybe now that it’s out there—”

“He was being a bastard,” Ginny growled, her contrite tone disappearing completely. “And I...I never thought I’d ever see him act this way.”

Ron winced, wondering what Harry could have possibly done to deserve that label. He’d certainly earned it in the past, but that was years ago, when he was still dealing with the hurt and devastation of breaking things off with Ginny. Things were better now, weren’t they?

“And the worst part is...I know he was lying,” Ginny said, sighing. She leaned her head back against the sofa behind her and blinked up at the ceiling. “I could always tell when he was lying.”

Ron swallowed and wondered if he dared ask what Harry lied about. "I, er... I don't know what to say, Ginny. He's my best mate, but..."

"I know," she defended, shaking her head. "I'm not trying to make you angry at him."

"Unless I have a right to be angry at him," Ron interjected. "If he hurt you..."

"He didn't, not really," Ginny shrugged.

"Which is why you're sitting on the floor crying," Ron quipped. His skin suddenly felt warm and tight, and he had a rather irrational urge to storm over to Harry's place and—

"I mean, it hurt," Ginny said, "but...knowing that he was lying helps. I just don't know which part he was lying about. And...and I'm afraid that part of what he said might be true."

"What did he say, Ginny?" Ron demanded, scowling.

"It doesn't matter—"

"It does," Ron assured her. He sighed, forcing a harsh breath of air out his nose when she shook her head.

"If I tell you, you'll go over there and make this mess so much bigger by—"

"I haven't done it enough for you over the years," Ron said. He couldn't quite look at her when he admitted it. "I haven't been there for you like I was there for him. And...you're my sister, Ginny. I should have been there for you first."

Ginny leaned her head on his shoulder and he thought she might be crying again, because her voice was thick when she answered. "He needed you more, Ron. I...I'm sure I was lonely at times—I really don't remember—but I managed. If he hadn't had all of you..."

The sentence lay unfinished and heavy between them.

"Time for me to stand up for you, then," Ron offered. He wasn't quite sure what he was going to do, especially since Ginny hadn't yet told him what Harry had said.

"It's not worth it, Ron," she shook her head. "He...he has every right to think the way he does. All he remembers is the hurt I caused."

"It wasn't all your fault," Ron defended. His chest felt uncomfortably tight and he remembered night after night of dragging a pissed Harry back to this same flat and listening to him lament over the things he'd done wrong in the failed relationship.

"And I wouldn't blame him for not believing me about what I remember," Ginny went on as if she hadn't heard him. "I'm not sure I'd believe me either."

"That's not..." Ron started, and then shook his head. "He believes you. I think it's worse that he does believe

you, Ginny. What did he say?" Ron pressed, getting angrier by the minute. If Ginny was holding it back this valiantly, whatever it was had upset her greatly.

"He...he said he couldn't ever love me again," Ginny admitted in a whisper, "because...because I hadn't loved him enough. And that he wasn't sure he ever did."

Ron's heart plummeted to his stomach and he swore violently. "What a... He's lying, Ginny. You have to know that." He pushed away from the floor and stood, taking a step toward the door. "He loved you more than anything, Ginny. He...he just doesn't handle things like this well and..." It dawned on Ron that he was defending Harry, who he was furious with right now, and he stopped speaking.

"Do me a favor?"

Ginny looked up at him and Ron had to suck in a breath at how small and vulnerable she looked right now, curled up on the floor. She didn't look twenty-nine at all. In fact, the heartbroken, defeated look she wore reminded him of when Hagrid had carried Harry's body out of the Forbidden Forest and they'd all thought Harry was dead. He'd seen this same look on Ginny's face in that moment.

"Take this home to Hermione," he nodded toward the sacks of food, decorated with widening spots of grease. "And stay there for a bit. Rose would probably enjoy the visit."

"I'm fine, Ron, I don't need—"

"Just...just do it," Ron commanded, praying that Ginny would listen to him and not sit around the flat brooding. "I...I won't be late."

"Don't hurt him," Ginny pleaded softly.

"You're defending him? After what he said to you?" Ron rocked back on his heels, shocked at her attitude. "No matter how he feels, he has no right to lie to you, or to make you cry, Ginny. If he really can't ever love you again...well, that's between the two of you, but he still can't blame you for everything; he was in the relationship too."

Ginny rose slowly and stood in front of him, not quite meeting his gaze. "No matter what he says...I still love him, Ron. I always have, and I always will. I just...I realize now that I took him for granted. I always just *knew* he'd be there. Maybe I *didn't* love him enough."

Ron's jaw clamped shut and the back of his eyes prickled with emotion. He nodded jerkily and forgot his vow to Hermione to keep his nose out of Harry and Ginny's business. There was a time to wait and watch, and there was a time to step into the line of fire.

"I won't kill him," he promised, knowing he couldn't give much more than that right now, best mate or not.

Ginny opened her mouth, and then closed it, nodding instead.

The sound Harry had been waiting for came much later than he expected. Truthfully, he had imagined a swift,

silent bludgeoning hex to the back of the head, when he least expected it.

Instead of turning around—only George, Ron, and Hermione could Apparate straight into his flat so he wasn't worried—Harry stared at the small bit of Firewhiskey still in his glass. What he'd already downed was churning in his stomach, threatening to reappear.

Ron didn't say anything to him at first, just went to the kitchen and retrieved his own glass, splashing Firewhiskey onto the table when he poured a generous helping.

"Anything you say to me can't make me feel any worse than I already do."

Ron was quiet for a long time, sipping at his drink and staring off into the flat.

Harry's heart thundered away in his chest and he closed his eyes against the headache that was forming. Was Ron not going to say anything? Or was he simply waiting for Harry to get pissed enough that he'd have an even shot at cursing him? But Harry wouldn't defend himself. He deserved anything Ron said, anything Ron did to him. He'd lied to Ginny and he'd blamed her for everything; things in the past and the way that she made him feel right now.

"Ginny was crying," Ron said, his voice cracking.

Harry had been wrong. That was the only phrase that could possibly hurt more when spoken aloud. He could see her in his mind, breaking down completely and her heart shattering because of a horrible, hurtful, and completely untrue, thing he had said.

"I..."

But the words—the excuses—wouldn't come. There was nothing he could say to explain the huge lie he'd told.

Harry had loved Ginny—so much so that even now, seven years after she told him goodbye, he still felt something for her. It wasn't love, but...it wasn't far from it. And it hurt.

"Is it true?"

Ron's face was etched like stone; his jaw square and tight.

"No," Harry sighed, sinking lower in his chair. "I *was* in love with her."

"I meant...that you could never love her again."

Suddenly, Ron's bright blue eyes were on him and Harry's stomach rolled once more. "I don't know," he answered with the only thing that would come into his mind. It was the truth, even if it sounded completely weak. "I want... I don't know what I want anymore."

Ron nodded. "You've lived like this a long time. Maybe Ginny coming back here is a good thing. It's making you face all that shit that happened years ago and finally deal with it, rather than shoving it all away and pretending that it doesn't still hurt."

Harry winced and looked away. Sometimes he forgot that Ron knew him so well.

“Maybe it’s not about loving her again,” Ron shrugged. “Maybe it’s about learning to live with what happened. Neither of you have moved on—at least Ginny has an excuse right now.”

Harry opened his mouth to refute that, but his throat was too thick. “I’m not sure I know how to be around her and not...not *feel* things.”

“What do you feel?”

“I don’t...” Harry grunted and forced himself out of his chair. He paced several times around the room, trying to decide what he was going to be allowed to say; this was Ron after all. “Maybe I should talk to—”

“Maybe you should just open your damn mouth, Harry, and let the words fall out,” Ron snapped. “Maybe you should forget for one damned minute that I’m Ginny’s brother and treat me like I’m your best mate.”

The words were like a knife, twisting and turning in Harry’s gut and he spun away, shaking in frustration.

“I feel...I feel confused when I’m with her—even though it’s only been the two times. Part of me wants nothing more than to reach for her again, and I think about what we could have if I let myself go back there. But then another part screams that I can’t go back there again. I can’t let myself be that close to someone all over again, only to have her walk away.

“I was so prepared to hate her,” he hissed, unable to stop the emotion that bubbled up in him. “And I just can’t. Because she’s so bloody amazing—nothing like I’d pictured her to be after all these years.

“She’s...she’s just as beautiful as she ever was. And I about had a heart attack when I saw her in those jeans, with her bare feet. And then I got so bloody aroused that I just know I won’t be able to control myself around her.

“I can’t think straight when I’m around her because I’m checking myself, making sure I’m not saying something stupid, or acting like a prat. And she’s *always* watching me, just like she used to. And it feels like she can see right through me, because she knows me so well—which she shouldn’t, because she’s been bloody well gone forever...but it still feels like she does.”

Harry wanted to stop, he really did. It was strange, feeling as if he wasn’t in control of his body, or his mouth, at all, and yet was completely aware of what was spilling out of him.

Ron shifted several times, obviously uncomfortable with what Harry was disclosing. But he sat there, taking it all in and letting Harry release.

“She shouldn’t be allowed to know me that well,” Harry continued. “It’s not fair, because I can’t seem to read her at all anymore. I always knew what she was thinking before she left. I knew when she was hungry, when she was angry, when she wanted...wanted me. But now...” He shook his head and winced at the next thought that popped into his mind.

“I...I can’t stop thinking about her, Ron. And it’s sending me around the twist. Last week...last week I was blowing off a little steam...having a good wank, you know.” He could feel his face heat, but the words were

there in his head and the filter in his brain was malfunctioning, or had been vanished.

Ron stood up abruptly and moved across the room. "If you tell me you...while thinking of my *sister!* Harry...I don't think I can talk about that."

Harry winced and shrugged. "It's not like I wanted to think about her. I was thinking about this woman I saw at a Muggle store that day and then...then she was Ginny, and I couldn't stop myself."

A full shot of Firewhiskey—shaking in Ron's hand—disappeared and Harry felt horrible. This wasn't something he should be telling anyone.

"I'm sorry," he said, shaking his head. "Forget I said anything..."

"There you go, being all bloody noble again," Ron sighed, his shoulders slumping. "I think it's time for you to put yourself out there, Harry. If you feel this way... She obviously still has feelings for you. In her mind, she's back eight years ago."

"It didn't work then, what makes you think it would work now? Or that I even want to go back there. I can't...I can't give everything I have anymore, Ron. I did that once and I lost it all—she took everything with her when she left. I don't have that much to give anymore. Even Hermione thinks I should just forget everything and just...just *be* with Ginny again."

Harry growled and ran his hands through his hair. That was a horrible idea. Getting involved with anyone—especially Ginny—was a horrible idea. Harry just wasn't the relationship type, that was for sure.

"Not forget," Ron corrected. "Move past. You're never going to forget what happened between the two of you...and I don't think you should try. But if you learn from it..."

"I don't want—"

"There's another one of your problems, Harry," Ron said, leaning against the back of the sofa. "Everything has been about you lately."

"That's a lie," Harry said, although it sounded weak. "I...I think about others. I think about Teddy, and you and Hermione...and...and..."

"Have you thought about how much Ginny risked by coming back here, knowing what she knew?" Ron asked. "She may not remember what happened, but she knew enough. Dad told her about the breakup, he told her about Susan and the others..."

Harry felt like he was going to vomit all over his living room.

"And she came back anyway," Ron continued, pushing Harry further. "She walked back in with her heart on her sleeve, Harry. She wants nothing more than to make you happy, to make the *both* of you happy."

"Hermione had this theory all these years, you know," Ron continued. Harry's head was spinning and he groped for something to sit on, sinking onto the end table and knocking a stack of Quidditch magazines to the floor. "Hermione's always said that Ginny still loved you, but she stayed away because being here, being

accepted and loved by our family was what *you* needed most. She knew she was strong enough to be away, alone out there on her own. So after things didn't work out between you, she sacrificed her own family so that *you* could have us. She loved you that much."

"That's not..." But the words died in Harry's throat and they blinked at each other. Ron looked slightly amazed at what had come out of his mouth. The idea was...unthinkable to Harry. "She wouldn't..."

"Wouldn't she?" Ron asked. "Put aside all that you *think* you know about her and remember the Ginny that you fell in love with all those years ago. Wouldn't she have given up everything for someone she loved?"

"If she loved me enough, she would have stayed." The words hurt to say and Harry saw Ron flinch. "She left."

"Maybe all these years she thought the same thing," Ron shrugged. "Maybe she thought you didn't love her enough to want her to stay, or to go after her."

The thought rattled in Harry's empty head, clanging around the interior and making him light headed. It was too much to fathom and Harry didn't know how to respond. Could it possibly be true?

"In all truth," Ron said as he drained the rest of Harry's drink and moved toward the door, "I'd be lying if I said I wanted the two of you back together. I'm not sure it can work between you anymore—you're both too damned stubborn. But...if she really makes you feel all those things, Harry, you need to do something about it, instead of just perving on my little sister."

Ron's leaving Apparition crack startled Harry and he looked down at the magazines spread around him.

"It can't be true," he mumbled, shaking his head. He wasn't sure what part of the conversation he was disputing...maybe all of it.

Hermione watched as Ginny picked at the food in front of her, not really eating any of it. Not that Hermione blamed Ginny. She was torn—part of her wanted to Apparate over to Harry's flat and beat him with something sturdy—soft, but sturdy. And the other part of her knew that Ginny could really use her here to simply listen.

"Have you found anything out about what might be happening to me? Why I can't remember anything after..." Ginny asked, finally pushing the plate of food away.

Hermione sighed. "I wish I could say I'd found something more positive, but I just can't lie to you, Ginny. I've looked into magical accidents and injuries, into spells that steal memories... And I've come up with nothing. I'm so sorry, Ginny."

Ginny bit her lip and nodded, looking away. She was trying to be strong—Hermione could see—and not break down into tears. There had already been enough of that Ginny had informed Hermione when she walked into the house, setting the bags of food onto the table.

"I think it may be a lost cause," Ginny shrugged a shoulder, blinking suspiciously bright eyes.

"I didn't say I was ready to give up," Hermione shook her head. "I just said I haven't found anything yet."

Ginny nodded and stared out the window, watching two birds flit around the small tree next to the house, hopping from one branch to the other and snuggling closer for a moment before one would move to another spot. Hermione winced at how appropriate that scene was right now.

"I had another idea," Ginny said dully. She stared at the window, but Hermione wasn't sure if she was seeing anything at all. "Just Obliviate me," she whispered, the corner of her mouth lifting into a small smile that died moments after being born. "Then he won't have to worry about anything—he can go on being with whomever he wants and he won't feel guilty or angry, or whatever the hell it is he feels."

Hermione bit her lip, holding back her immediate harsh response. The idea made her feel queasy.

"And I wouldn't have to feel anything. You could leave me a slobbering mess, tucked away in the guest bedroom at the Burrow. Mum would love to take care of me."

"Ginny—"

"Forget I said anything," Ginny dismissed, a false smile stretching her face.

"This must be unbelievably hard for you," Hermione sighed, shaking her head. "And not many people have really listened to how you're feeling, have they? We've all been so worried about how Harry is dealing with this."

"Everyone has actually been good—Neville and Teddy, the whole family—you've all been wonderful. And I don't blame you for worrying about Harry," Ginny shook her head and Hermione knew she wasn't lying. "Harry always did better with you lot around. He's come to depend on you over the years. "

"While you've been alone," Hermione guessed the end of that sentence.

"I guess," Ginny shrugged. She stood slowly and rubbed her hands on the thighs of her jeans, making a soft swishing sound. Her arms wrapped around her as if she was cold and she moved to stand near the window that looked over the back garden. "I've been alone before, even if I don't remember it. I'll be fine now." Her words didn't sound convincing and Hermione moved to stand next to her, unsure if she would be allowed to hug Ginny or not. The old Ginny didn't seem comfortable with any sort of physical affection.

"Are you giving up?" Hermione asked, watching her closely.

Ginny sighed and rubbed her face. "I wish I could believe that I could ever give up on Harry Potter. Something in my brain doesn't ever allow that. It's my curse."

Hermione couldn't help but snort. Hesitantly, she lifted her arm to Ginny's shoulder and almost gasped when the younger woman turned into her embrace. "There are worse curses," she said, her own eyes filling with tears. Why did everything for Harry and Ginny have to be such a fight? Why couldn't they seem to have happiness handed to them?

"Not sure if I believe that right now."

“Harry was lying to you, Ginny,” Hermione confirmed, even though they’d gone over this time and time again since Ginny had come. “I...I haven’t seen him happy since you left.” It felt a bit like betrayal to say something so sure about Harry right now, because Hermione was so used to protecting Harry from everything. But it was time he got his head out of his arse and did something about how he obviously felt. If he didn’t love Ginny anymore, then it was time to grow up and stop holding everything against her. If he did feel something...then it was time to act on whatever those feelings were.

“He’s certainly not happy right now,” Ginny sighed. She pulled away and shook her head, as if shaking away the thought from her mind. “I...I was thinking about taking Rose for a day this next week. I’ve got all the time in the world right now and...I should get to know her.”

Hermione smiled tightly, accepting the change in subject for now. “I think that’s a grand idea. What did you have in mind?”

Ginny brightened slightly, although her eyes were still red and puffy. “Maybe I could take her to the zoo. I’ve never been to the London Zoo—do you think she’d like that? You could come too, if you like—or if you, you know, aren’t sure I could handle it.” She made a face and Hermione laughed.

“I think the zoo sounds wonderful. And I think a girls’ day out sounds like just what we need.”

“I’m taking Victoire for the day on Friday,” Ginny nodded, “but we can go another day. Let me know when you can get off and we’ll meet up.”

Hermione couldn’t help the urge to hug Ginny, and surged forward, wrapping her arms around her sister-in-law. “I’ve missed you so much over the years, Ginny.”

“I’m sor—”

“Don’t say it,” Hermione warned with a laugh, “because I don’t want to hear it anymore.”

Ginny laughed and returned the hug. They stayed like that for a long time before Ron’s entrance into the kitchen broke them apart. Ginny spun on her heel and wiped at her eyes.

“You’re not covered in blood,” Hermione complimented, trying to sound light. She searched Ron’s face, trying to decipher what had happened between him and Harry.

Ron’s eyes darted to Ginny who was pouring left-over fish and chips onto a plate. She warmed it up with her wand and set it in front of him.

“We saved you some.”

“Thanks,” he mumbled, staring down at the food. It didn’t look nearly as appetizing as it had an hour ago, but he began to eat anyway. Not much put him off his appetite. “I didn’t kill him. Even though he had no right to make you cry.”

Hermione nodded thankfully and sighed, watching as Ginny moved away, cleaning up paper napkins and wiping the table with a moist flannel. She knew Ginny was still listening.

"Is he..." Hermione trailed off, not quite sure what to ask. It was quite obvious the neither Harry or Ginny was alright.

"Well on his way to being pissed," Ron shrugged, talking around a large chunk of potato. "He'll be fine once he gets it all out."

"Good," Hermione said, widening her eyes at Ron and then nodding at Ginny, hoping he'd catch the hint. But he just stared at her and then Ginny, unsure of what to say.

"Er...he didn't mean it, Ginny. He was lying."

Ginny turned and looked at him, her eyes glassy again. "I know."

"You just...he's had a shit week and you pushed the wrong button," Ron excused. "Not that I think he should have yelled at you, or lied... But at the same time, I understand why he did."

"I don't blame him," Ginny said, sounding very tired. "I really don't."

"You should," Hermione huffed indignantly. She ignored Ron's squawk of protest and Ginny's shocked look. "He was being a child and that sort of behavior is inexcusable." She crossed her arms and glared at the thought of Harry acting the way he had.

"Hermione, I—"

"Do not defend him, Ginny," Hermione scolded, feeling her heart twist at the pain on Ginny's face. To her, Ginny's defense of Harry just confirmed how much she still felt for him and how easily she was able to set her feelings aside for what she felt was his good.

"I'm not," Ginny protested, scowling. "But I don't want you mad at him over something that is my fault. You warned me he needed time. And I could tell he was getting angry...I just kept pushing because I'm tired of waiting for him to give me answers."

"If you had acted the way he just did, Ginny, I'd be yelling at you right now."

Ron snorted out a laugh and Ginny's expression betrayed amusement. Hermione shook her head and let her annoyance drain away.

"Do you remember when I was thirteen," Ginny said, sinking down into a chair and nicking one of Ron's chips, nibbling on the edge of it, "and I came to you, telling you how I'd given up on Harry?"

"I remember," Hermione said fondly. It was one of those conversations that had really cemented the two girls in friendship.

Ginny nodded thoughtfully. "I think I need that conversation again." She tried to smile, but it never really reached her eyes.

Hermione sighed and reached across the table for Ginny's hand. Ron shifted and looked as if he might excuse

himself, but then stayed seated anyway.

“Find something you love to do, Ginny,” Hermione said, trying to remember just what she’d told a wide-eyed, lovely young girl all those years ago. “Don’t let waiting around be what your life is all about.”

“There is more to life than silly boys who don’t even know when a girl is looking their way,” Ginny quoted, casting a glance at Ron who squawked indignantly.

Hermione laughed and shook her head. “Just be yourself, Ginny,” she added softly. “Because then, even if Harry’s too bloody thick to notice, at least *you’ll* be happy.”

Ginny nodded and took a deep breath. Her eyes were still red and puffy, but they had a small spark in them that hadn’t been there when she’d first arrived. And that, more than anything, told Hermione that Ginny was going to be alright. She was good at picking up the pieces and moving forward. Just like Harry usually was.

Hermione sighed and wondered if she needed to be the one to put Harry’s head back together for him, or if Neville would be the one. Maybe it was time to let Harry put himself back together on his own. They’d probably allowed him to rely on them all too much over the years, crippling his ability to manage on his own.

Whatever they did, or didn’t do, Hermione knew Ginny would make it through. She might not be as happy as she deserved to be, but she’d find her own path in the world—just as she’d been doing for years.

Chapter 9: If You're Gone

Just Say The Word-Chapter 9: If You're Gone

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Time for the uphill swing, yeah? The chapter title comes from Matchbox 20 this time. I adore this song and there are some lyrics that fit so well in this case.

Chapter 9: If You're Gone

Harry Potter's Heartbreak

*Is it possible for him to ever find love again?
Witch Weekly Staff Reporter, Floretta Petronelle*

It seems our poor, if not reluctant, hero, Harry Potter, is doomed to be jilted his entire life. With no successful relationship in his past, and no prospects for a future Mrs. Potter, one wonders if his tragic past has left Harry Potter so scarred that he may never find that special someone.

Mr. Potter has had a string of bad luck relationships, starting in his early Hogwarts years when his best friend, Ronald Weasley snatched his first love right out from under Harry. Ronald later married Hermione Granger and the three continue to remain friends, despite hostilities that sometimes flair between the two suitors for Mrs. Weasley's attentions.

Cho Chang, now a successful Healer at Hong Kong Hospital for Witches and Wizards, was Harry's second conquest. Poor Ms. Chang, however was still mourning the loss of her first, and truest love, Cedric Diggory. Diggory was hardly buried before Harry Potter set his sights on the beautiful young woman. The relationship only lasted a few weeks when Potter was rumored to return to Miss Granger's affections.

We all thought the pattern would be broken and Harry Potter's luck had changed when he began dating Ginevra (Ginny) Weasley just after the war ended. Indeed, it looked as if Britain's Most Eligible Bachelor was off the market for good. But the three year relationship would prove to be a most painful catastrophe.

Weasley left the Holyhead Harpies and moved to France for a position on a team there, dragging Harry's poor heart behind her broom. The relationship limped along until rumors of Weasley's torrid affair with handsome and charismatic Brogan Quinlan forced Potter to end the painful ruse.

"It's a shame someone who seems to be so nice can really be capable of such deceit," Romilda Vane, a classmate of both

Potter and Weasley had to say about the whole thing. “Ginny had everything we all wanted, and she tossed it away. Not that Mr. Quinlan isn’t simply wonderful, but...we’re talking about Harry Potter, here.”

The end of that relationship marked a low in the social life of Harry, as he unashamedly dated witch after witch, leaving a trail of broken hearts all across Britain. He finally found one witch to hold his interest for more than a few dates.

But even a year with Susan Bones, a pretty witch who works for the Muggle Liaison Office at the Ministry, couldn’t heal Harry’s broken heart, and the relationship ended.

And now, after years of being alone, Harry’s longest love has returned again to England.

“Ginny Weasley being home changes everything for Harry,” Ms. Vane explained. She cites her schooling in Divination for being able to predict nothing but grief and ruin in Potter’s future. “Now he’s faced with her betrayal and deceit every single day. How is he ever to recover when she’s seen walking down Diagon Alley and has even been spotted in Potter’s company in public? It’s not healthy, I tell you.”

Indeed, evidence supports Vane’s inner eye. While Potter has always been seen as a sturdy, pillar of our society—indeed, he’s the Head of the MLE—his mental stability has recently come into question with several questionable incidents.

Mrs. Gladys Barclay, of Kent, has filed an official complaint with the Ministry about Potter for what she calls ‘reckless behavior.’ It was just this week, while she and her son were in Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes, that Potter barreled into young Master Barclay, knocking him and another boy into several display cases and finally to the floor. The boys were both taken to St. Mungo’s and treated for severe injuries.

“He never even looked back,” Mrs. Barclay tells, indignantly. “Just went right on running as if he hadn’t gravely injured people. He’s a menace, I tell you. And the fact that he was arguing with a girlfriend right before makes it even worse. Someone ought to do something before he injures someone beyond repair.”

Several witnesses claim that Potter was arguing loudly with someone right before he ran through the store. A source that prefers to remain anonymous has confirmed that Ginny Weasley is currently living above her brother’s store in a small flat. Perhaps the argument led to a break in Potter’s mental health.

Could that be who Harry was yelling at? Have the two lovers tried to reunite, only to have it torn to shreds again?

Will Harry Potter ever find the love that his heart pines for? Hundreds of eligible witches wouldn’t mind trying for the coveted spot, Mr. Potter. Don’t discard the whole shoe store simply because a few pairs didn’t fit.

“...and then I told Gran that I had all my supplies, that I didn’t think I needed to come for anything more. But she thinks that I need a...”

Harry shook his head, trying to catch up to Teddy’s happy chatter. He felt horrible for losing focus, but it had been a long day and Harry was just glad to sit down and take a minute to rest. He licked at his quickly melting ice cream cone and slurped at the Chocolate-Peanut Crunch dripping onto his fingers.

Teddy somehow managed to speak at an alarming rate all while keeping his Wacky Marshmallow Goo well contained in the sugary cone.

“If there’s something more you need...”

“I’m fine, Harry,” Teddy waved his hand, making his bright blue and pink swirled cone tip precariously. “You and Gran will end up making me need two whole trunks by the time you’re done fussing.”

“I do not fuss,” Harry protested, grimacing. He probably did fuss. Well, that was going to stop now. “Er...if you need something, you know how to get a hold of me. Or...do without.”

Teddy grinned, showing off his purple-stained tongue as he licked at the cone. “Oi! It’s Victoire!”

The boy, who had grown another three inches this past week in Harry’s estimation, stood and waved his hand enthusiastically just as Harry realized who Victoire was walking with. It was Ginny.

Shit!

He hadn’t seen her since his little temper tantrum last week. This was not going to be good. Harry really didn’t need to spend the day ridding himself of bat bogeys, or explaining to Kingsley why the Head of the MLE was pictured on the front of the Daily Prophet being eviscerated by an ex-Quidditch player, who just happened to be an ex-girlfriend as well. There had definitely been enough bad press about the two of them lately. Some of the articles had been...well, Harry was just grateful he hadn’t met any reporters on the street lately. They’d surely question his mental stability if they happened upon him.

“Er...” Harry’s mind scrambled trying to think of a graceful response to let them escape the situation without seeming like a pathetic loser to his godson.

“Come and sit with us, Victoire! And Ginny!” Teddy’s enthusiasm drew everyone’s attention and Harry winced.

The only good thing was that Ginny’s expression betrayed her own desire to escape the situation just as much as he wanted to. Their eyes met and Ginny shrugged a shoulder, sighing at the animated way Teddy and Victoire greeted each other with embraces and laughter.

“You can sit with us! Can’t they, Harry?” Teddy’s expectant face, with his purple lips and blue hair, turned upward and Harry blinked at him.

“Er...”

“Maybe we should...” Ginny started, staring dubiously at the two empty chairs at the table, probably wishing she could vanish them. It was a brilliant idea, but Harry knew he couldn’t do it without turning himself into a complete bastard in the process. And he really had already earned that title enough lately.

“I don’t mind,” he protested softly, moving so that Ginny and Victoire could scoot past him.

Ginny stared at him for a moment, ignoring the way her own cone of ice cream—most likely Raspberry Fudge Dream, if her tastes were like they used to be—melted in her hand. “We really don’t—”

“Please, Aunt Ginny?” Victoire pleaded. “Teddy’s leaving in a few days and I won’t be able to see him for

months."

The argument sunk Ginny's ship right there and she nodded, jostling her shopping bags past Harry and into the open seat. Victoire was already seated next to Teddy, offering him a taste of her cone while she licked his. Harry forced a chuckle and scooted his chair further away from Ginny, hoping she wasn't offended by the move. He just needed to put some space between them.

Ron's words before he left last week hadn't made sleep—or anything else, for that matter—easier. The urge to come right out and ask Ginny if she'd stayed away on purpose was great, but he knew he couldn't do it right now. They were in public, after all.

Harry cleared his throat and concentrated on his cone, casting his mind about for something to say. "So... what're you two up to today?" He looked at Victoire, but he could see Ginny out of the corner of his eye, concentrating on eating her ice cream as fast as she could.

"Aunt Ginny and I are spending the day together," Victoire beamed brightly.

"Just running errands," Ginny shrugged, smiling at the two kids. "Completely boring things for a young lady, I'm sure."

Victoire giggled and Harry smiled.

"In fact," Ginny said, shifting in her seat to look at a watch strapped to her wrist, "we only have a few minutes. I need to get over to the store—"

"Oh," Victoire groaned, "can't I stay here, Aunt Ginny? I'm sure Uncle Harry won't mind at all, and Teddy's leaving so soon."

"I promised your mother," Ginny protested, shaking her head, "that I wouldn't let you wander around Diagon Alley alone—"

"I really don't mind, Ginny," Harry softly inserted. He chanced a glance at her and almost laughed at the shocked look on her face. It took a moment for her to decide, but she finally shrugged, looking at the kids' bright faces. "I'm sure I can manage to keep an eye on both of them," Harry assured her. "I've done it enough over the years."

Ginny opened her mouth to protest one last time and then her shoulders sank. She nodded, forcing a tight smile before standing and hanging the bags she was carrying on the back of Victoire's chair. "Remember to wrap that gift for your brother."

"I'll pay you back, Aunt Ginny, I promise. Christophe will love the shirt!" Victoire beamed and spun back to Teddy. "You won't believe what Aunt Ginny and I found for Christophe's birthday. You remember how he loves Montrose?"

Teddy perked up and grinned. "Did you see that new poster they have in Quality Quidditch Supply? With the new lineup? They all have these wicked awesome brooms..."

"I wanted to get Christophe one of their new uniform shirts, not a real one, but like all the kids wear, but it

was too expensive so I talked to Aunt Ginny and she arranged for me to come and help in Uncle George's shop for two Saturdays and she would loan me the money. Uncle George said it was alright and because Aunt Ginny will be there, Mum agreed that I can do it!"

The entire conversation poured out of both children at the same time, and with surprisingly few breaths. Harry had to laugh and was surprised when Ginny's own rich chuckle joined his. They shared an awkward look before Ginny shifted from behind the table.

"You...you really don't mind?" she asked, eyeing Harry uncertainly.

"Not at all," Harry said. "I'll send a message to Fleur letting her know I have Victoire."

Ginny nodded. "I appreciate it." She turned to go and Teddy jumped out of his seat.

"Don't forget about Wednesday!"

Harry almost asked what Wednesday was, but the date had been looming for a long time. September first. Teddy would be leaving for Hogwarts.

Ginny grinned over her shoulder. "I'll remember."

And she was gone, melted into the crowd like she'd never been there, leaving Harry feeling both relieved and desolate at the same time.

"Harry, can Victoire come back to Gran's house with us?" Teddy asked, shaking Harry from his stupor. "I'm sure her mum won't mind. Gran invites Victoire over all the time."

Harry shook his head slightly at the wild enthusiasm the best friends were showing. "How about we give your Gran a break and see if we can catch Neville at the Leaky?" He spoke the idea as soon as it entered his head, feeling that it was imperative that he speak to Neville right now. If he wasn't there...well, Harry didn't know what he'd do, but he really needed to speak to someone. He'd been avoiding Hermione and Ron all week. It was a horrible habit, and one that he'd clung too entirely too often lately.

Teddy and Victoire cheered and Harry laughed. "Come on, we'll head down there and I'll floo Shell Cottage to let your parents know where you're at."

Neville and Hannah were thrilled to have three guests for dinner and even offered it in their private quarters upstairs—something that put Harry much more at ease. Dining in public wasn't Harry's favorite thing; someone was always stopping by for an autograph, or to stare at him—even now!

After a huge, wonderful meal Hannah offered to let the kids help her down in the kitchen, something Harry thought she was incredibly brave to do. And he was grateful.

"I'm going to begin charging prime rates soon," Neville chuckled, "for counseling sessions."

Harry winced. "I don't have to..."

“Harry,” Neville sighed, “do me a favor and just...talk?”

“I don’t want you to think—“

“Harry!” Neville warned. “Shut up and talk, yeah?”

Harry laughed and took the Butterbeer Neville offered. “I’m sure by now you’ve heard—“

“More than you probably want everyone to know,” Neville nodded. “Although it’s doubtful you threw dark curses at everyone along Diagon Alley as you ran.”

“Urgh,” Harry grimaced and sank lower into the chair. He hated it when the press blew things out of proportion. “Not my finest hour, even if I never raised my wand.”

“We all have our days,” Neville shrugged.

“Then Ginny told you about—“

“Ginny didn’t say anything,” Neville defended, surprising Harry. “She and I talked about...other things, actually. But Ron came in the other day.”

Harry blinked, not sure what that meant. He was sure Ginny had talked to Neville about him. It just seemed... like something she would do.

“Oh, I...”

“Why don’t you start with how you’re feeling?”

Harry growled and glared at his friend, who only smiled and shrugged.

“...turning into bloody Hermione...” he sighed, thinking that Hermione had been hanging around Neville far too much lately.

“I’m a good listener,” Neville shrugged.

Harry sighed again and took a long drink from his Butterbeer. “I don’t know what to feel. I’m sorry I yelled at her, because... Because it wasn’t nice.”

“And because what you said was a lie,” Neville prompted, earning a scowl from Harry.

“Yeah, that,” he admitted. The label on his bottle was peeling at the corner and Harry slid his fingernail underneath it, tearing it away from the glass. “And being around her is hard.”

Neville nodded. “Because, even though you hate the idea, you feel something for her.”

Harry shrugged a shoulder. “I don’t know what I feel. It’s...confusing. And she’s not helping matters because I can’t figure out what she wants.”

“Has she asked you for anything?”

The question stunned Harry and he opened his mouth to reply, only to realize that she *hadn't* asked him for anything.

“She...I... Just answers, really.” It was true. Even though Ginny had come right out and told him she was in love with him, she hadn't demanded that he love her back. She hadn't insisted that they get back together again or that he forget everything that had passed between them. She simply wanted answers to her questions about what had happened between them.

“It seems to me,” Neville said, “that you need to take some time to figure out what *you* want from *her*, Harry. Even if you just want to be friends, or not even that. That's alright. But going on like this—arguing, or ignoring each other completely—isn't going to work for long.”

Harry chewed the inside of his lip in thought. “I honestly don't know what I want from her.”

“That's okay,” Neville shrugged. “You've got time.”

“What if I never figure it out?”

Neville smiled and shook his head. “Then you're in for a long life, Harry. Ginny's not going anywhere. She's here to stay.”

Harry grimaced, remembering the way she smiled earlier while watching Teddy and Victoire talk and laugh. He had missed that smile—it seemed like forever since he'd seen it.

“What's she going to do?” Harry asked before he could stop himself. “I mean...”

Neville's knowing smile was easy to ignore as the label gave way and peeled all the way around the bottle.

“She's working at George's right now. Looking for something better, but her Quidditch days are over.”

Harry scowled. No offense to George, but Ginny was entirely too talented to be ringing up spotty faced kids buying pranks.

“I know she feels a bit useless at times,” Neville offered. “She had an interview with the Harpies as a trainer, but hasn't heard back about it yet.”

“She'd make a good trainer,” Harry said, sitting up straighter. “Teddy's game improved immensely when she gave him just a few pointers. She's got him convinced he can make the team in the next couple of years.”

Neville chuckled and Harry felt his cheeks heat. Honestly. Everyone thought they knew what was in Harry's head, but none of them really understood anything.

“We'll see what happens,” Neville shrugged. “In the meantime, you need to figure *you* out.”

Harry nodded, knowing he was right. “I'm not sure I can be around her enough to figure it out. It hurts, and

makes me crazy at the same time." His cheeks heated when he thought of all the horribly erotic dreams he'd been having lately. In fact, a full night's sleep was a thing of the past right now. He was as randy as a teenage boy, yet as grouchy as a thirty year-old with no relief in sight. His hand was looking more and more pathetic every day.

"Maybe...maybe spending time with her isn't the best idea," Neville said, and Harry wondered how much of the last encounter between he and Ginny was now public knowledge, besides the rubbish the papers had printed. Ron hadn't said anything about Harry kissing her, maybe that wasn't something Ginny wanted people to know. "Maybe you should just...watch."

"Watch?" Harry asked, raising an eyebrow. "Like...go to where she works and...watch?"

"Not *stalk* her," Neville rolled his eyes. "Just...watch; how she is with others, how she acts. You can tell a lot about a person from how they treat others."

Harry's face burned and he looked away, the silent reprimand felt all the way in the bottom of his belly. He could do that. He could manage to...watch her, without making a complete prat of himself. Couldn't he?

"I'd better get the kids home," Harry said, realizing just how late it actually was. "Bill will skin me if I keep Victoire out too late."

"He knows she's safe with you," Neville laughed clapping Harry on the back. "Who better for his daughter to be with than Head of the MLE?"

"The Aunt she so obviously adores?" Harry asked, hating the bitterness that seeped into his voice.

"Jealous much?" Neville quipped, laughing when Harry looked away. He hated to admit it, but he was.

"Give her some credit, Harry. Ginny's not trying to steal the kids away from you."

"I don't—"

"For years you've been cool Uncle Harry," Neville said, waving his hands dramatically. "I mean, how brilliant is it to have Harry Potter as your uncle?"

Harry felt his face heat, but couldn't deny that he'd loved playing the role—but only for the kids. He got to spoil them, sugar them up and send them home. He got to take them on holiday, and cheer at their triumphs, while thrilled he didn't have to change nappies (too often) or clean up sick. Then again, part of him craved the whole package—a part that Harry was quick to squash back into the past.

"Don't begrudge Ginny the chance to get to know the kids," Neville cautioned. "Maybe she has some insight to offer that being Harry Potter can't provide."

Harry nodded, knowing he was right again. "You *should* get paid for this, Neville."

Neville laughed and motioned them down the steps. "I think it's pretty funny that you come to me for girl advice, Harry."

The thought was incredibly ironic, but Harry couldn't help but admit it was true. Neville had everything that Harry had always wanted.

"Are you and Hannah thinking of having kids?" he asked out of the blue, and then flushed, knowing he'd probably stepped over what was acceptable to ask. "Forget I said anything. It's none of my—"

"One day," Neville shrugged. "We're only thirty, after all."

Harry opened his mouth to refute waiting. After all, starting a family seemed like something that needed to be done before one was too old—

"We have time," Neville shrugged. "Wizards live for a lot longer than Muggles, remember."

Harry nodded, although the thought hadn't really registered. He'd always rather seen himself as a failure because he hadn't achieved his dream of having a family. Time marched on, dragging his dream onward until it seemed unreachable.

But, maybe... If Neville thought thirty wasn't too late...

Harry shook his head, banishing the wishful thinking. One step at a time, he cautioned himself. Get past this thing with Ginny, and then you can even think about some sort of relationship with a woman.

The crowd in front of her was thick and Ginny had to stand on her toes to be able to see anything.

The large clock on the wall showed she still had ten minutes, and the Hogwarts Express had just barely started to billow steam, giving everyone final warning. It wasn't too late.

Today had been insane. Ginny wasn't even scheduled to work, but Angelina flooded first thing this morning and asked if Ginny could take her shift; Gideon was sporting green spots and they weren't sure if it was something he'd gotten into or more serious; a trip to St. Mungo's was needed. Ginny had offered at once, with the stipulation that she be able to open late so that she could run to King's Cross and see Teddy off.

And now it looked as if she might miss him if the crowd didn't bloody well thin out some and allow her to see anything.

Finally, Ginny was able to push through and stumbled upon an extremely nervous looking Teddy, getting last minute advice from his Gran while Harry looked on, a proud smile on his face.

Ginny's breath caught in her throat and she had to swallow back the awe that she always felt while watching Harry. He was too damned attractive for his own good, with his broad chest (he must have been working out lately) and his perpetually messy black hair.

She took a moment to smooth her robes and then moved forward.

"...she might not be able to make it..."

“Ginny!” Teddy’s face brightened upon seeing her and he flew into her arms before straightening, looking around at his classmates.

Ginny hugged him back and then pulled away, giving him proper distance for an eleven year-old young man. “I knew you’d make it!” he crowed. “Harry said you were too busy,” he accused, glancing at Harry who tugged at his collar and looked away.

“I said she *might* be too busy,” he defended.

Ginny laughed and rubbed Teddy’s blue hair fondly. “I made a promise, didn’t I?”

“I knew you’d come,” Teddy beamed. “And just in time, I’m about to get on.”

The last sentence was said with a bit of trepidation and he glanced at the train, his eyes traveling over the students hanging out of windows and waving to their families.

“Remember what I told you?” Ginny asked quietly, winking at Teddy. He glanced at Harry once and nodded stiffly. “And don’t worry about writing, yeah? You’ll be far too busy.”

Teddy grinned and scuffed his shoe. “I’ll write when I know about tryouts,” he promised. “And you have to write when you hear from the Harpies.”

Ginny’s face fell, but only for a moment before she laughed. “It’s a deal,” she nodded. “You’d better get going, find a compartment.”

Teddy chewed his lip for a long minute before nodding once and moving forward to grab his owl cage off the trunk with his initials stenciled on it in gold paint.

“I’ll get the trunk,” Harry offered, looking a bit red in the face. Ginny wondered just how much this was costing Harry to say goodbye to Teddy. It had to hurt to watch someone you loved go off on his own, to grow up so quickly.

Teddy flashed such a bright smile when he stepped onto the train that Ginny had to look away. He looked so much like the little toddler boy, running around her knees, begging to ride on her broom and cuddling in her arms late at night that it hurt. Those years she’d missed—either through her own choices, or some cruel twist of fate—burned in the back of her mind, making her eyes water.

“It’s hard to say goodbye,” Andromeda said, wrapping her arm around Ginny’s shoulders. Her eyes were red and puffy; she’d already been crying for hours, Ginny guessed.

“It seems funny—he’s not mine.”

“Teddy belongs to everyone,” Andromeda said wisely. “He’s had so many parents through the years. Nymphadora and Remus would be proud.”

Ginny couldn’t do anything but nod at that and wonder what her friends would think of her life right now. They’d probably chide her for wasting time and not doing something that she truly loved.

"I need to go," she mumbled, watching as Harry backed off the train, his hand held up in a still wave as Teddy's face pressed against a window. But her feet wouldn't move, even when everyone around her started to leave, crowding toward the barrier and the Apparition points. Ginny continued to watch the train disappear out of the station.

"You didn't tell him about the Harpies."

Harry's soft words startled her and she turned to see him standing right next to her. His eyes were suspiciously bright and he stared in the same direction she had.

Ginny chewed her lip and cursed softly; Harry knew her too well sometimes. He'd been able to read the answer in her expression. The letter telling her that the training position for the Harpies had already been filled had come just yesterday. "No point," she shook her head and wrapped her arms around herself. "He wanted it so badly."

"More than you?" Harry asked.

Ginny shrugged and watched as more people moved away from them, leaving them standing on the Platform alone. Even Andromeda had left them there together. "I never set my hopes on it like he did."

"For what it's worth...I'm sorry," Harry said. His tone sounded genuine and she nodded. She really should be going—George would have a fit if she opened much later—but her feet didn't seem to want to move.

"S'okay," she sighed. "There'll be something that interests me soon."

Harry nodded and they lapsed into silence. Just as she was about to give it up and turn to walk away, Harry cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry for...on your birthday, too." He sounded incredibly uncomfortable and, for just a minute, Ginny was glad. He had been an arse and now he was actually admitting it. But she also understood how hard this was for him. "I shouldn't have said what I did."

Ginny opened her mouth to respond, but could only really nod. Anything she said might push him again and she didn't want that. Standing here next to him hurt enough, but there was also a numbness that his presence brought now. She remembered this from when she was fourteen and trying to forget that her heart beat only for him—it was a similar feeling.

"Merlin, I'm going to miss that kid," Harry sighed, stuffing his hands into the pockets of his robes. "I..." He trailed off and shook his head.

"He's a hard one to let go," Ginny agreed, staring into the empty platform. "He was so nervous about going."

Harry scowled for a minute. "Really? He seemed...fine to me."

Ginny sighed and shook her head lightly. "Just...just make sure to congratulate him no matter how he gets sorted, yeah?" She said, turning to go. The coldness between them was wearing through the numbness and making her shake. She couldn't do this right now, it was still too fresh. If she closed her eyes she could still feel the powerful emotion in his kiss, and then hear those crushing words that he'd used.

“What do you mean?” he asked, sliding his hand around her bicep. He squeezed lightly, enough to get her to stop, but it didn’t hurt. Ginny stared down at his hand and Harry hastily pulled it away, fidgeting in place. “Did Teddy say something to you?”

Ginny looked at him for a minute, deciding that he did look years older now. The lines around his mouth and eyes looked more prominent today and there were dark circles under his eyes.

“He’s worried about being sorted,” she shrugged finally. “Worried about being faithful to his parents’ memories, and honoring what you want for him. That’s a lot to put on a kid, Harry. He’s bound to be nervous.”

Harry opened his mouth to protest and then closed it, turning his head to gaze at where the train had been.

“He never said anything to me.”

“He wouldn’t have,” Ginny shook her head. “He idolizes you, Harry, he’s not about to disappoint you.”

“He never could,” Harry snapped back, but Ginny knew the bite was more for himself than for her. “I would never think badly of him because of the house he’s in. I…”

“You and Ron have always talked about Gryffindor,” Ginny explained. “But Teddy knows Tonks was in Hufflepuff. He’s worried about fitting in up there. He’s worried about your reaction if he ends up in Hufflepuff instead of Gryffindor. And I think he’s got a very even chance of doing just that,” Ginny added. “But if it’s going to disappoint you, he’ll change everything he is for you, Harry.”

“I don’t want that,” Harry cried, sounding like he was in pain.

“That’s what I told him,” Ginny nodded. “I told him you wouldn’t want him to change for you. He needs to learn to be who he is, not who others want him to be.”

Harry nodded and opened his mouth, standing there for a second before he let a harsh breath out. “I…thank you, Ginny. I obviously didn’t see that, and you said the perfect thing to him. I…”

“Don’t worry about it,” Ginny said. The urge to touch him—to lay her hand on his arm, or thread their fingers together, or even to gather him into her arms—was great. Ginny clasped her hands together to keep from doing anything. It wouldn’t help things right now to show the affection she still felt for him. “I was an outsider who he felt he could talk to.”

Harry nodded jerkily, his jaw working as he thought about what she’d said.

“I have to go,” Ginny said finally.

“Thanks,” Harry said, just before Ginny Apparated away. She looked intently at him a moment too long, however, and the dull ache inside her returned in a wave, making her throat tighten and her chest hurt.

He looked so vulnerable, standing there with his robes open and his hands tucked in the pockets of his jeans. His hair was standing on end in the back and Ginny’s hands itched to be buried there. She remembered how

soft it actually was and how the strands felt between her fingers.

They stared at each other for a long time before Ginny finally took a deep breath and turned, forcing herself to Apparate to George's shop.

Teddy's first letter to Harry was full of exclamation points and just as enthusiastic as the boy himself was. The handwriting was scratchy and all over the place. It made Harry laugh. How well he remembered the awe of having an entire castle to explore and so many people to meet.

Harry dashed off a quick reply, praising Teddy for being sorted into Hufflepuff, but also explaining that Harry wouldn't have cared where Teddy ended up—he would have even run right out and bought a green and silver scarf if necessary.

While Harry wanted to slip Teddy the Marauder's Map—rightfully, it was just as much Teddy's as it was Harry's—but he held off. Perhaps when Teddy was just a bit older he'd bestow that knowledge on him. No need to have his Gran sending *both* of them Howlers.

Of course, Teddy had asked if Harry heard anything about Ginny's job with the Harpies. Harry winced when he read the question and actually set the letter aside. He wasn't sure what to say about that really; it was up to Ginny to tell Teddy, in his mind.

He'd been thinking entirely too much about Ginny lately anyway. General thoughts, and then the ones that came late at night, or in the shower—or even in the middle of his afternoon nap, he thought with a blush—seemed to consume him lately. And everywhere he went, everything he did was a constant reminder of her in some way or another.

If the fantasies hadn't been founded in memory, if they'd been nothing but his overactive imagination, Harry thought he might be able to treat them far differently than he'd been doing. But he couldn't simply discount them, because they were real. At some point, most, if not all, of them had happened between him and Ginny. And that was so much worse than imagination.

The way she held him, caressed him, spoke to him in his visions was more real than anything he'd felt since they'd parted and it unnerved him. No one else had ever simply loved him for who he was inside. Susan had been the closest, but she wasn't anything like Ginny—that had rather been the whole point—and she and Harry hadn't shared the basic connection that had come so easily between him and Ginny.

It was something that he'd always missed with anyone else. And apparently something he was doomed to live without.

Of course, his traitorous mind seemed intent on drawing out those memories, beating him over the head with them at every chance.

Harry picked Teddy's letter back up and stared at the number of times that he had mentioned Ginny's name. It was scattered periodically throughout the whole letter and Harry rubbed his eyes under his glasses. He could honestly understand the affection that Teddy had for Ginny—at least the Ginny that he'd been seeing over the past two months. She seemed a genuinely warm and caring person, as opposed to the colder, career-obsessed

Ginny who had been splashed all over the pages of the papers over the past seven years.

Could Hermione's theory be right?

Would Ginny have cut herself off from everyone she knew, simply because she thought he needed her family more than she did after they broke up? And, if so, was her whole attitude a front to keep herself from seeming like she really needed her friends and family?

Something inside him whispered that it *could* be true, and Harry winced. If he'd been the reason she stayed away all these years...did that mean that she'd actually *always* loved him? If so, the idea that she hadn't loved him as much as he loved her was rather...wrong. Harry knew he wouldn't have been able to show that kind of courage—walking away from something you loved so that someone else could have it.

What about Brogan Quinlan? She'd certainly jumped right into his bed after breaking things off with Harry—or perhaps even before, if the papers were to be believed.

"She's not like that," Harry denied aloud, folding Teddy's letter once more and tucking it away inside his desk.

He really should be working on the case on his desk, he knew. The influx of illegal potions streaming into the country was driving him insane. And so far, their only connection was the man who had gotten away weeks ago. Very few leads had been scared up and Harry's Aurors were down to walking the streets again, trying to find any scrap of information that might lead them to stopping not only the man, but whatever organization he was with as well.

But Harry's mind kept flashing back to Ginny's face as she stood on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, putting on a brave face for Teddy, all the while disappointed that she hadn't gotten the job with the Harpies.

Ginny was born to play Quidditch. Harry remembered well the intense look she always wore at games and how exhilarated she seemed while flying. It was almost a crime that she was separated from something she loved so much.

Making a snap decision, Harry fumbled for a piece of parchment and began to scribble out a note.

If Ginny *had* sacrificed for him all these years—the idea boggled his mind still—it was time Harry did something nice for her. Even if she hadn't...it was the right thing to do anyway.

Ever since his talk with Ron, and then Neville, Harry was always catching himself—trying to make sure he wasn't so focused on how things impacted him, and more how they impacted everyone around him too. The realization that he'd been a selfish arse was harsh, but definitely needed.

How long had he been like this?

Years probably. It was amazing to him that none of his friends had pointed it out before now. It took Ginny coming home for them to all start saying the same thing. Or, perhaps, it was just now that she was home that Harry really started listening.

Besides, he justified as he scribbled his name to the letter, Bernard owed him one.

Outtake 1: Sweetest Torture

Chapter 10:

Just Say The Word-Outtake 1: Sweetest Torture

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R (this chapter NC-17)

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Mature Outtake for Chapter 9.

Outtake 1: Sweetest Torture

For the first time in a long time, Harry was actually disappointed that he had a day off.

Seeing Teddy off at the train this morning was exciting and heart-wrenching...and all that even before Ginny had walked onto the platform. Being there with her simply made it all more confusing and muddled.

Ever since his talk with Ron, and then Neville, Harry was always catching himself—trying to make sure he wasn't so focused on how things impacted him, and more how they impacted everyone around him too. The realization that he'd been a selfish arse was harsh, but definitely needed.

How long had he been like this?

Years probably. It was amazing to him that none of his friends had pointed it out before now. It took Ginny coming home for them to all start saying the same thing. Or, perhaps, it was just now that she was home that Harry really started listening.

Having nothing to do all day was a curse as well as a pleasure. He spent a few minutes tidying the flat, getting out of Stupid Cat's way and generally making himself feel incredibly bored.

Everyone else was working or had other plans and couldn't be bothered to childmind Harry all day long.

He sank down into the sofa, opposite Stupid Cat's place, and stared as the animal hopped gracefully onto the cushion, and made himself at home. Harry could feel the low rumble of the cat's contented purrs and scowled at the thing. It was completely unfair that the cat had a better, less complicated life than Harry's was right now.

In fact, if Stupid Cat had a lady friend out there, his life *would* be completely better than Harry's.

"Your own fault, mate," Harry scolded himself softly. "You had to go and turn down Janice Thueson the other

day. And she wanted you...bad."

He grimaced at even the thought of the giggly receptionist at the Ministry who was always shoving her breasts into Harry's line of vision. He certainly wasn't *that* desperate.

Harry sighed again and propped his leg on the sofa, ignoring the warning growl of the cat. His head rested on the back of the sofa and he stared at the cat, who stared back.

"I should take you over to Ginny's and drop you on her doorstep, you know," he warned the cat, shaking his head when the cat simply blinked its large eyes at him. "Would serve both of you right."

He yawned widely and shook his head, realizing how tired he actually was. Sleep had been rough the past few days, with him worrying about Teddy, worrying about the case at work that they just couldn't seem to catch a break in, worrying about Ginny and how he was supposed to act around her...

It was a wonder he'd slept at all.

"If someone floo calls, take a message," he informed the cat with a smirk and heaved himself off the sofa, stumbling down the hall, shedding his robes, shoes and jeans along the way.

The messy bed never looked more comfortable as he crawled under the covers, burrowing into the pillows and thick duvet. Harry sighed in relaxation as his body melted into the mattress. Maybe a day off was just what he needed.

The mattress next to him dipped down and Harry shifted, moving toward the warmth of the body that was behind him. He sighed in happiness when an arm slid over his stomach and splayed along his belly. Soft kisses traced his shoulder and a wet tongue traced the shell of his ear.

Harry mumbled something, completely content to stay right here in his perfect little dream. If he opened his eyes it might fade away into nothingness.

The hand, soft and thin, played with the hair near his navel and then dipped below the waistband of his boxers, missing the tip of his excited penis and sliding along the band until it rested, cupping his hipbone perfectly.

Ginny had always liked to do that. When she'd come in late from traveling after a match, she would always be randy and wake him in just this same way.

"Love you, Harry," she whispered into his ear as her hand continued around, fingernails gently scraping the skin on his bum, sending goosebumps all over his body.

Harry grunted and smiled into the pillow. Ginny had wicked hands that knew all of the best places to explore. She walked her fingers down the back of his thigh, barely touching between his legs. Harry's penis stood at full attention then and his low back began to tingle.

He'd missed this. No one else had ever paid the type of attention to his body that Ginny had. No one else

took the time to touch and tease him until his entire body was shaking with desire.

“More,” he sighed, lifting his leg slightly and hissing in satisfaction as her warm hand slid his boxers down, and then stroked him from behind. Her fingers rolled his balls expertly, making his feet go numb as he focused everything he had on where she was touching. One perfect finger traced his perineum, pausing at his bum just slightly before coming up and drew a line along his hip once more.

Harry clenched his teeth and his behind, trying to hold off the raging orgasm that was threatening. He shuddered when she attached her lips to his neck and shoulder, leaving small, stinging bites on the skin and humming into his ear—a tune that was all their own from so many years ago.

“Missed you,” he mumbled, capturing her hand in his and bringing it up to lay kisses on the fragrant skin before he held it over his heart. His bum ground back into her, rubbing on her lap. He smiled when Ginny gasped into his ear, and did it again. Her nipples, pressed on his back, hardened and Harry felt a bit of moisture leak from his penis. He wanted to roll to face her, to see her fully as they made love, but he knew that wasn’t the game. Ginny liked to get him all hot and bothered before she let him touch her. It was an old familiar game that they hadn’t played in far too long.

“Missed you,” she answered back, her leg lifting onto his hip as they rocked together. Her hand traced his nipples, tugging gently at them and rolling them between her fingers.

Harry whimpered. “Touch me, please. Need you to touch me.”

“Not done yet,” she giggled softly in his ear. The hand behind him cupped his bum, massaging the muscles there as he flexed, holding back his release until she touched him fully.

What he really wanted was to roll on his back and let her take him into her mouth, but her body was preventing that right now. She was much stronger than she looked, and Harry wouldn’t think of depriving her of the pleasure of torturing him. It was the most exhilarating, sweetest torture he could ever imagine. Sex with Ginny had always been like this—even their fumbling first times had held so much raw emotion that it always took his breath away.

And in their years apart, Harry had never found anything to match the feeling. Every touch with Ginny communicated how much she loved him, how much she worshipped his body. And he tried, with every touch he gave her, to give that back a hundred-fold.

This is what he’d been missing all those years.

Her hand finally descended below his waist and Harry groaned in satisfaction as her finger circled the head of him, spreading the moisture and pressing down on the slit, eliciting another hiss of satisfaction from him.

“It’s always been you, Harry,” Ginny whispered in his ear, stroking him fully now. Her toes—how the hell could *toes* be erotic?—rubbed the inside of his thigh as she ground her hips into his bum.

Harry reached behind her, cupping her behind and helping to grind them together as her hand picked up pace, sliding up and down the length of him until his release was imminent. He grunted, trying to warn her.

“Almost...almost there,” he mumbled, rolling just a bit until he was rocking his hips, and her hand, against

the mattress. He came with a roar of satisfaction, spilling himself all over the sheet and Ginny's hand. Ginny kissed his neck, just under his ear.

"This is what we could have, Harry," she whispered.

"I want this," Harry answered back, rolling so that he could now reciprocate.

But Ginny was gone.

Harry blinked into the overly warm room—the empty room—and then stared down at himself. His boxers were around his knees and the front of his shirt was sticky and wet.

"Shit," he groaned, flopping back against the bed. It had been a dream.

Chapter 10:

Just Say The Word-Chapter 10: Can't Let It Go

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Sorry I haven't been around much this week. This original story has really grabbed hold and I've been typing away on it, getting more and more excited. I'll do my best to get to your questions and comments very soon. In the meantime, enjoy the next chapter. And, while you're at it, name it for me, would you? ;)

Chapter 10: Can't Let It Go

"He'll see you now, Miss Weasley."

Ginny started, blinking up at the receptionist and tucking the letter away in her pocket. She was still in shock that it had come at all, completely unsolicited. And now here she was, in the waiting room of Quidditch Weekly, waiting for Bernard Latham, Editor-In-Chief, to see her.

"Thank you," Ginny nodded to the woman and straightened her robes, taking a deep breath.

"Morning, Miss Weasley," Latham greeted her when she entered his office.

"Call me Ginny, please," Ginny said as she shook his hand.

"How about Weasley?" Latham grinned and winked. His laughter put her at ease immediately and she nodded.

"I've answered to worse," she shrugged.

Latham, once Keeper for the Montrose Magpies, had a reputation as a hard-nosed sports enthusiast who ran a tight staff for his little publication. Quidditch Weekly had started out as a simple, single-sided parchment recording of games that was inserted into the *Daily Prophet* once a week. It had since grown to cover all the professional leagues as well as reporting on the international teams, and was now produced independently of the *Prophet*.

"I'm sure you have been called worse names," Latham gestured for her to take a seat. "I'll get right down to it, Weasley. No sense in wasting both your time and mine. I wasn't really looking for a new reporter, but it's been pointed out to me, several times over the past little while, that Shaw Jackson is getting a bit...dry."

Ginny opened her mouth to refute it, but she couldn't really do so. She'd grown up reading Shaw Jackson's reports of Quidditch games, and while he was always accurate, his writing style seldom varied, making for boring reading. Ginny had begun simply skimming his articles back at Hogwarts. She'd been interviewed by the man several times when she played for the Harpies and remembered him as being rather harried.

"And you're..."

"I'm offering the position to you," Latham grinned, his wide, round face showing off perfectly white teeth. Absently, Ginny wondered if he charmed them, and then remembering he was a Keeper, wondered if they weren't created specially to replace the one's he had lost while playing.

"I..."

"Shaw has been mumbling about retiring for ages. He's not completely ready yet, but I'd wager he's ready to slow down."

"And I..."

"You'd go to as many games as you could in a week, and write up an unbiased report of them. If you want to write opinion, we offer a few speculation issues a year that I'd welcome your articles in."

Ginny felt as if she'd been run over by a pair of Bludgers. She hadn't even considered when the letter came, asking to meet with her, that it would be a job offer. And that she wouldn't even have to interview for it!

"Not to be rude," she interrupted Latham's speech, "but you haven't even seen a sample of my writing."

"Oh." Latham's face fell and he blinked at her several times. "I guess, if you'd like...you could maybe write something up for me. I just assumed..."

"Don't get me wrong," Ginny held up her hand, "I'm flattered by the offer. I just wonder where it came from. I mean, if you weren't looking..."

Latham's face flushed pink and he leaned forward on his desk, placing his thick forearms on top of a stack of papers, wrinkling them horribly. "You're a damned good player, Weasley. I told Jones she was a fool to let you go all those years ago, and she was a fool again for not taking you on as a trainer."

Ginny's face heated but a stab of pride shot up in her; being recognized for her talent always felt wonderful.

"But why now?" Ginny asked, feeling as if she were missing something.

"I've been thinking about it for awhile," Latham said. "The Quidditch community is pretty close here in England, Weasley—you may or may not remember that—and when I heard that Jones hired someone else for the training position...well, I knew that was my shot."

Ginny smiled widely, glad that she'd been noticed somewhere at least.

"I think having a real player do the commentaries will help immensely."

"Which league do you want me to cover?" Ginny asked. She really didn't want to travel and be away from home at all. Jackson covered the leagues here in England, but Ginny wanted to be sure.

"You'll be here," Latham nodded. "Occasionally we might ask you to help cover another circuit, but it won't happen often."

Ginny chewed the inside of her lip for a minute, trying to weigh everything in her mind. It actually sounded like a dream job, if she couldn't actually play Quidditch any longer.

"Well?" Latham smiled, showing off his teeth. "What do you think?"

"I think..." Ginny started. "I think that you may have yourself a deal."

Latham laughed and clapped his hands down on the desk with a deafening sound. "Brilliant! We'll have the best selling publication in no time."

Ginny grinned and reached across the desk to shake the man's large hand. "When do you want me to start?" she asked.

He stood and motioned toward the door; Ginny followed. "I'll forward a press pass to you this next week and divide up the schedule of games between you and old Shaw. He prefers to sit on the sidelines, rather than in the box—if you ask me, that's just his rheumatism talking—but I'll put you..."

"In the box would be best," Ginny nodded. "Unless you can get me into the locker rooms."

Latham laughed mightily and clapped her on the back, making Ginny take a step forward. "Potter said you had a sense of humor. I suppose at the end of all of this I'll end up owing him even more."

All the excitement drained out of Ginny as if someone had pulled the stopper. "Potter?" she asked, feeling incredibly sick all of a sudden. "Did Harry have something to do with you offering me this job?"

Latham's face reddened and he looked around the office, perhaps contemplating his chances of getting behind his desk. "Oh, er...Harry simply mentioned that he thought you might be a good fit for the position. I'd already been talking about having someone."

Ginny swallowed thickly and rubbed her forehead with her fingertip. She wasn't sure what to make of this new information. If Harry had been responsible for getting her the job... Why had he done it? Didn't he hate her?

"I'm not sure what to say," she admitted.

Latham jumped forward again, grinding his jaw and possibly wishing he could recall the last five minutes. "Weasley, rest assured I was going to be contacting you eventually. Harry's letter just...spurred me on, as it were."

"You owed him a favor," Ginny nodded, finally understanding. That's all this was. Harry was always taking care of people, apparently even people he didn't care for.

"Owe him my life," Latham corrected. "But that's not really here or there. You're a damned good player, Weasley. And you deserve a chance to work where you're appreciated, rather than doing something to just get by."

She certainly couldn't argue with his reasoning, even if she hated the fact that Harry had come to her rescue. She damn well didn't need him in every aspect of her life, especially when she was trying to *find* a life outside of loving him.

"This breaks the deal, doesn't it?" Latham sighed. "I should have bloody well kept my mouth shut."

Ginny sighed and shook her head. "Almost," she agreed. "But I want the job more than I'm angry."

Latham let out a shaky breath and swiped beads of moisture off his forehead. "That's good to hear."

"Next time Harry wants to interfere in my career, you pass along the message that he can keep his bloody nose out of my business, or I'll break it for him."

A laugh bubbled up from inside Latham's large body and he tried to hold it back, only succeeding in making his shoulders lift and fall rhythmically. "I'll pass that along."

Ginny stared at him for a long minute before nodding. "Then I think we'll get along just fine."

"Indeed we will, Weasley," Latham said, clapping her on the shoulder once more.

It felt strange to be standing in front of the door to the same flat she'd shared with Harry. The door itself bore evidence of time passing, even if Ginny couldn't account for any of it.

The black paint was peeling along the bottom, little slivers of grey wood peeking out. The gold doorknob was tarnished also. Her fingers lifted to trace the small gold number fifteen set in the middle of the door.

So many memories contained in this one place.

Part of her wondered why Harry had never moved out and found a different flat. Ginny was glad, in a way, that he had stayed. The thought of the flat being alone, or worse, with someone who didn't appreciate all the quirky qualities about it (like the window in the loo that stuck open at times and you had to bang on to get down, or the squeaky floor board in the kitchen that Harry had enjoyed bouncing on to make music) made her sad.

She took a deep breath and prepared to knock, half-hoping that Harry wouldn't be here. But what she'd come to say needed to be said, even if it aggravated the situation between them.

Her knock sounded hollow and Ginny almost turned away, but forced herself to stay there. Harry swung the door open and his eyes went wide at seeing who it was.

"Sorry to come over unannounced," she said, fidgeting in place. "I...I just needed to tell you something."

"Oh, er..." Harry stood in the doorway, one hand still on the knob. He looked incredibly ruffled and Ginny had an instant flash of fear, hoping some shapely woman didn't come out of the bedroom to see what was keeping Harry. "Come in." He swung the door wide and blinked at her when she didn't move.

"I don't want to interrupt anything," Ginny shook her head, peering into the flat. It looked so much the same as it had all those years ago—although to her it was only months—that it shocked her.

"You're not," he defended. "Just going through some case files, actually." He gestured toward the small kitchen table that had one shorter leg than the others—Ginny remembered finding a rather...creative use for that rocking table once—and was now covered in paperwork.

"Oh, good," she said, taking her first full breath since he'd opened the door. "I just...I just came from Quidditch Weekly."

"Oh." His eyes widened and she almost laughed when he stepped so that the sofa was between the two of them. "Er... And?"

"And I took the job," she answered, watching him closely.

Harry's cheeks turned red and he looked away quickly. "That's good to hear, I didn't know Bernard was—"

"Save it," Ginny sighed, crossing her arms. "While I appreciate what you did for me, don't ever do something that stupid again." Harry opened his mouth and then wisely snapped it shut. "I don't need you to succeed, Harry Potter. I do well enough on my own."

"That's not why I did it," he snapped back. "And I bloody well know you don't need me, Gin. You've proved that year after year."

"Don't call me that," she winced automatically. Hearing him call her 'Gin' just hurt too much. The urge to either slap him, or kiss him, welled up inside her and Ginny hissed, clenching her fists and her jaw. She hadn't come here to fight with him. His flustered state and the stacks of papers he was going through certainly explained his frustration.

"You let *him* call you that," Harry sulked. There was no question in her mind who Harry was referring to. In all her entries in the diary—which she had read completely now—there was only ever a mention of Brogan as another man in her life. And the latest article in Witch Weekly had been an "exclusive interview with Brogan Quinlan" where the Beater had been particularly vocal about his lingering feelings for Ginny.

"Maybe he earned the right," Ginny shrugged, hating herself just a bit for falling into this trap. NO! She wasn't going to do this. She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of an argument when she'd come here to thank him for doing something nice for her, whatever his motivations were.

Harry's fists gripped the edge of the sofa cushion, crushing and twisting the leather until it protested.

"You still have the cat," Ginny observed, seeing the flash of black as it darted into the kitchen.

"Stupid Cat," Harry growled, sounding incredibly harsh.

Ginny sighed and folded her arms in front of her.

"If you want him..." Harry said, throwing his arm wide. But the fight drained out of him and Ginny could see how tired he looked. He hadn't been sleeping, that was for sure. She wasn't sure if it was work that was distracting him, or something more.

"No," she shook her head. "He's been with you a long time."

"Stupid Cat," he said again, this time much more fondly.

As if called by name, the cat appeared, sitting down in the doorway of the kitchen and yowling loudly.

"I haven't fed him yet," Harry shrugged.

"Does he still hate it when you're—"

"In the kitchen," Harry finished nodding.

Ginny crouched down and smiled at the cat. "Midnight," she called, almost laughing when the cat sauntered over to her, arching his back into her caress and purring loudly.

"He always was beautiful," Ginny said, picking the cat up and nuzzling into his fur. The memories suddenly felt thick around her and her throat closed, tears burning into the back of her eyes.

"He's nearly useless," Harry sighed, ruffling his hair. "Good for getting under my feet and leaving a mess everywhere."

Ginny sighed and let the cat down, watching as it sauntered past Harry without even looking at him and jumped onto the sofa, curling into a ball.

"I...Thank you, for talking to Latham," she said. "Even though you only did it because you felt guilty."

Harry nodded and shrugged. "That's not the only reason I did it. So, I'm guessing you'll be covering the European circuit?" he asked.

Anger shot through her and she glared at him. "Is *that* why you talked to him? You want to get rid of me so badly that you'll call in favors to get me to leave?"

"Er...no!" Harry spluttered. "I just...assumed."

"You're an arse, Harry," she sighed, shaking her head.

"I didn't do it to get rid of you," he protested, moving forward just a bit. "But...if you want to go...don't hold back on my account."

"Are you finished yet?" she asked dryly, staring at him.

Harry stared at her, his jaw locked and his shoulders rigid.

This wasn't how it was supposed to be. They weren't supposed to fight like this and say hurtful, horrible things to each other. They were supposed to act like adults and not bring up the past just to see each other squirm.

"You've made it quite clear you don't want to be in my life, Harry," Ginny said, moving toward the door. "So stay out of it."

She slammed the door behind her and pressed her back to the peeling paint, cursing herself for even coming.

It had easily been a week since Harry had a full night's sleep. This latest argument with Ginny did nothing to help the situation. And, to add to the pressure, Kingsley was riding his arse, wanting an answer as to why they could not seem to locate one wizard in all of Britain. What Harry really needed—besides a huge break in the case—was a night away from everything. An evening with just him and his mates, laughing and drinking and pretending nothing else existed so that he could fall into bed completely pissed and maybe sleep for more than a few hours.

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes was busy when he got there and Harry jumped behind the counter trying to help as Ginny rang people up. He felt extremely awkward with his shoulder pressed to hers, stuffing purchases in bags with the bright WWW logo on them, but Ginny seemed grateful to see someone there to help.

"Thanks," she mumbled in between sales, "Peter had to go to St. Mungo's. Some woman let her toddler run around in here and Peter ended up with one rabbit ear and one antler." She shook her head and scowled.

Harry almost laughed at that, but quickly concentrated back on sliding things into a bag for the man who looked rather impatient. "That, er...that sounds painful."

Ginny sighed and nodded distractedly.

Harry took a moment to really watch her, without trying to do so, and was shocked to see that besides looking nearly as tired as he felt, she still managed to keep a smile on for the customers. She laughed with them and gave advice about products. It amazed him that she could keep it all straight, really.

Her hair was starting to grow now; where it had been at her chin when he'd first seen her this summer, cut in some incredibly stylish and practical way, it was now down to her shoulders. Harry liked it longer; it seemed to him that the gold and orange highlights showed off better when it was long and full.

"Why didn't you floo me?"

Harry blinked up as George reached over to take the bag from him and nudged him out of the way, all the while staring at Ginny.

"I would have come over early."

Ginny shrugged. "It wasn't this bad until just now."

Harry, feeling incredibly useless now that his hands had nothing to do, moved over to stand out of the way. His back pressed against the wall and he leaned there, watching the chaos that was before him. Ginny and George made a very efficient team and George happily chatted away with customers while Ginny rang people up.

It was strange, but it almost seemed like nothing had passed between Ginny and him last week. She hadn't seemed distant or grumpy to him, despite their argument; the one in which Harry had been a complete arse. Again.

He felt horrible, really, but she'd come at just the wrong time. He'd been...busy in the other room, trying to relieve a little tension and taking a break from his casework, and then her knock had sounded through the flat, disrupting it all.

And when he opened the door, her cheeks were flushed and pink, and her hair windswept, Harry's earlier activities, and the fact that he'd been thinking about her while doing it, had rushed into his mind, arousing him further.

So he had picked a fight with her, knowing it would help to ease his own tension.

It was childish and extremely immature; but Ginny had yelled back just as much this time. And then she'd uttered those words. *Are you finished yet?* For just a second he'd worried that she could see through the sofa and see that he was...well... But then he'd realized she was talking about the arguing.

Was it completely horrible that now that she'd ordered him out of her life, he seemed inexplicably drawn to see her more often?

Maybe his head was completely ruined.

"How long have you been here?"

Ron came through the back curtain and blinked at the customers in front of him.

"Not long," Harry grunted, pulling his eyes away from Ginny's bum. He hadn't meant to be staring there. Really. It's just that she wasn't wearing the normal magenta robes that they all wore in the shop. Maybe hers had been ruined in the same accident Peter had been in. Or maybe this was just her silent way of defying George's rules—that would be just like her, actually.

She was wearing jeans again today; jeans and strappy little sandals that she lifted her foot out of periodically and rubbed at her calf. Harry shuddered as she did it again; that perfectly shaped foot arching against the worn denim.

Ron groaned next to him and Harry tore his eyes away again, silently cursing himself, worrying that Ron had seen his wandering eyes. But it didn't seem like he had.

"Merlin, I need a drink," Ron hissed, yawning widely. "Hermione's been sick and we—"

"Wait!" Harry spun. "Hermione's sick? Shouldn't you...er..."

A large grin spread over Ron's face and he shook his head. "She's pregnant."

Harry blinked at his friend, stunned at the news. He hadn't even known they were trying again. "Wow, er..."

"It's ruddy brilliant, mate," Ron said, clapping him on the back. "Er, not the throwing up part, you know, but the part where I know I'm going to be a dad again."

Harry laughed and leaned forward to give Ron a half hug, complete with back slaps and awkwardness. "Brilliant," Harry agreed, feeling his heart twist just a bit more.

He was thrilled for his best friends, but something inside him whispered harsh and horrible things about how *that* would never be Harry's. He was slated to be just fun Uncle Harry who let the kids stay up late when he minded them and filled them with ice cream and sweets, and forgot about bath time. Hermione's admonitions back on his birthday that Ginny was there, ready to help him fulfill that dream came back, but Harry forced them away to deal with later.

"Hermione's alright, though?"

"She'll be fine," Ron nodded. "Rose was just like this; made her sick until about half way through and then she was fine."

"I remember," Harry nodded, grimacing. Hermione had once vomited all over his shoes when he brought her some flowers.

"She was the one who told me to get out tonight," Ron chuckled. "Said I'd earned a night away. Her mum is watching Rose."

Harry grinned again and shook his head. "It's strange, thinking of you two having kids."

"I just wish..." Ron trailed off and Harry panicked, knowing what he was going to say.

"So, er...where should we go tonight? There's always the Leaky, but it gets too crowded. We could hit the Three Broomsticks, or maybe even go somewhere Muggle."

Ron took the hint and nodded, pressing his back against the wall and watching as George flipped the sign on the door to read 'bugger off, we're closed.'

Ginny sighed loudly and stretched, pushing her arms up above her head and making her shirt raise just a bit, showing off a band of porcelain skin at her waist. Harry's eyes bulged when a small flash of dark showed at her hip. She had a bloody tattoo! When the hell had she gotten that?! His mind was forcing his mouth to ask, but George intervened by commanding that they were not going to straighten the shelves tonight.

"Thank Merlin," Ginny said, hopping onto the counter and swinging her legs a little.

Harry's mind was still on the tattoo—was it a...Snitch? Or perhaps a Quaffle—and his friends stared at him.

"Sorry," he muttered, "long week." He shook himself, knowing that little piece of artwork would probably

feature prominently in the next few horrific, erotic fantasies he had. Yep. He was thoroughly a pervert. And he was beginning to accept the title.

“Just think, Ginny,” George laughed, nudging her legs, “next week you won’t have to worry about closing rushes and product mishaps. You’ll be watching game after game of Quidditch.”

Harry smiled just as widely as Ginny did. “I know,” she sighed, stretching again happily. “It’s going to be ruddy brilliant.”

“What’s your first game?” Ron asked.

Ginny gave a graceful little jump and landed on the floor. “Cannons and Arrows,” she laughed. “And it’s horribly sad that I *can’t* be biased when I write it up. Can’t even make a joke at your expense about it,” she said, patting Ron on the chest as she walked by. “I have to be completely objective until after I’ve finished reporting on it.”

“And then you can rub it into his face,” Harry laughed. He dodged Ron’s swing and playfully moved behind Ginny, waggling his eyebrows at Ron. “Because you know the Cannons are going down.”

“Why you...”

“Enough!” Ginny called, stuffing her fingers into her ears. “I can’t listen anymore. It’s going to be hard enough to be unbiased as it is.”

“That’s because this is the Cannon’s year,” Ron nodded, tossing a Canary Creme at Harry. Harry snatched it and tossed it back, going right down Ron’s robes. He did a funny little dance to get it out, making them all laugh.

“Come on, we can talk about the game at the pub,” George urged them forward, “where Ginny can’t ruin all our fun.”

Harry turned when George’s hand prodded him toward the door. He had the strangest desire to ask Ginny to join them.

“Enjoy,” Ginny called back, lifting the curtain to the back room. “I’m going to enjoy a nice, long bubble bath.” And she was gone.

Harry groaned inwardly, knowing that he now had more fuel for his fantasies. Yep. Just slap a flashing, neon label on his forehead. Complete Pervert.

“You alright, mate?” Ron asked, peering at him.

“Just been a long week,” Harry said, rolling his shoulders. “And I could really use a pint.”

Ginny felt like she was on top of the world—mostly. There was still the issue of Harry Potter to deal with, but she wasn’t going to let this strange behavior get her down. Not right now when she was doing so well.

The three games she'd covered this week had been amazing, and writing about them was exciting. Latham praised her articles and had announced to the whole staff—all five other members—that she was a rising star in the publication world.

And people were talking about her commentaries. Several people stopped her in Diagon Alley to ask her about the games and Ginny was thrilled to be a part of Quidditch again.

The shop wasn't overly busy, and Ginny stuck her head into George's office, grinning when he whipped the reading glasses he didn't want anyone to know he needed off his face and stuffed them in the drawer.

"Hi, Ginger," he grinned. "How's life treating you?"

Ginny laughed and leaned against the door. "Can't complain, I guess," she shrugged.

"You've had a couple of owls today," he said, squinting down at the paperwork. "Ruddy birds pecking at the windows. Two carrying a package of some sort."

Ginny scowled, trying to think of who would be sending her a package. "It may be something from Latham," she dismissed. "He mentioned sending me a schedule of upcoming games."

George grunted and scribbled something illegible on his papers.

"I'll let you get back to it," Ginny sighed. She knew he wouldn't pull out his glasses until she was gone and he knew he was alone. George was a bit silly that way.

Her small flat was wonderfully inviting on the bright, yet chilly day. Ginny was impressed with how homey it had really become in the few short months she'd lived here. Honestly, she could afford to move out and find a bigger place, but something about this silly little, strange shaped flat seemed perfect. There were cupboards in odd places and the pictures hung crooked—she suspected George had something to do with that, but hadn't caught him at it—and the wardrobe door didn't quite close perfectly. Somehow, it fit her just right. Her life right now was comfortable and adequate, even if it wasn't perfect. Perfection was highly overrated, she told herself often.

The window stuck when she tried to open it and Ginny simply charmed the glass away temporarily, gasping when two large owls flew in carrying a large, oblong box between them.

A soft fragrant smell wafted from it and Ginny shook her head. "Neville, you didn't have to." That man was really a gem. And Ginny decided she was going to march right over to the Leaky Cauldron and tell Hannah that she'd better keep Neville close or else—

Ginny opened the box to find two dozen blood-red roses. They were perfectly formed and absolutely flawless.

"Not from Neville," Ginny said, her eyes going wide. Her heart raced as she searched for a card. Surely Harry wouldn't...

But it wasn't Harry's handwriting on the card. Instead it was loopy and scrolled, precise lettering, and Ginny's heart sank a bit.

Sweetheart,

I just wanted to say congratulations on the new job. It sounds like you're really making a life for yourself over there and I wish you nothing but happiness.

I know you don't want me coming around—but I just had to let you know I can't stop thinking about you. If things don't work out, I'll be here, Gin.

I love you.

Brogan

Ginny groped for the chair behind her, sinking into it as her eyes traced each looping letter. The words had stolen the breath from her and she set the card down, her chest aching. Why couldn't they have been from Harry?

Brogan was...well he was a complication that she didn't need in her life right now. She actually had nothing but respect for the man, considering what was written in the diary. He had really been her best friend before their relationship had turned into something more. And he'd done it all still knowing that she was in love with Harry.

The flowers actually made her smile. Even if she would never feel anything for Brogan—and, really, it wasn't *her* he was in love with, it was the other Ginny that he'd known—at least there was someone out there who wanted her around.

It felt good to be desired, even if nothing would come of it.

Ginny levitated the flowers into the kitchen and arranged them in a vase, enjoying the beautiful fragrance that filled the flat. They looked wonderful all displayed in the middle of her table and Ginny quickly tucked the card away inside the diary—put away with the past, where it belonged.

The other owl had dropped a small scroll while she was dealing with the flowers, and was gone before she could get an owl treat.

Perhaps this was the schedule of games that Latham had promised to send.

Instead, it was a note inviting her to a small party at The Three Broomsticks. 'In honor of it being Thursday,' Seamus had written at the bottom. Ginny laughed and decided that getting together with a group of friends sounded wonderful. She hadn't seen anyone really since she'd been back in England, and there weren't any games tomorrow.

"Why not?" she asked herself. "Get out and enjoy yourself, girl, you've earned it."

In the back of her mind, she knew that Harry would probably be there. Maybe he would have himself figured out and would simply act normal—well, as normal as Harry Potter ever acted.

He had been pleasant in the shop last week and Ginny had forced herself to focus on the customers, instead of

the way his arm brushed hers when he put items in the bags. And she could feel his eyes on her several times in the few minutes they were together, but at least there hadn't been any yelling.

It was a pity that Hermione probably wouldn't come; if she did, Ginny knew she wouldn't stay long. The pregnancy was really taking a toll on her friend. Ginny made a mental note to drop by in the morning and see if there was anything she could do to help out around the house. Even if Hermione only wanted to sit and talk, Ginny thought it sounded like a wonderful way to pass the day.

Still having a few hours until meeting her friends, Ginny decided to pamper herself with a nice, long bath. Maybe she'd even find a skirt to wear today—something she hadn't done in a long time. There were some rather nice things she'd saved from the place in Spain. Maybe one of them would make Harry's eyes pop out of his head. The thought made her laugh just a bit. It would serve him right, considering the way he was staring the other day.

Chapter 11: Slow Dancing In A Burning Room

Just Say The Word-Chapter 11: Slow Dancing In A Burning Room

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Thanks for the comments, everyone. I am reading them and will respond soon. *holds up hand* I promise. I've enjoyed that this little, not-very-thought-out-story has you all reeling with emotion. lol Last chapter is now titled, thanks to mibebo**girl**. She must have known the quickest way to my heart was a good angsty love song, and then you throw in the Goo Goo Dolls too... *dies* So, Can't Let It Go is the title. I will be waiting for your one-shot/scene request. Feel free to PM me if you prefer the idea to be a surprise. Either way, that works.

This chapter, however, has an extremely delicious name. If you have not heard the John Mayer song, shame on you. Run and find it right now. And then buy the album, because it's angsty/bluesy/wonderfulness of the best kind. ;) Ella is currently shocked that I would listen to something so angsty. lol She's laughing at me as I write this. So, enjoy everyone.

Chapter 11: Slow Dancing In A Burning Room

"I'm only going to stay a few minutes," Ron reiterated, taking a long drink from his pint.

Harry shook his head and sipped from his own. He hated Thursdays. They used to be his favorite day of the week because he'd spend them with Teddy. But now Teddy was up at Hogwarts and Harry was working every hour he could possibly work. It helped with the loneliness.

Finally they were making some progress on the case, even though Harry had been forced to pull the Aurors back to the cases they'd been neglecting for long weeks. They now had an Auror undercover, working to infiltrate the Potions ring. He checked in with Harry periodically, giving progress reports. It was a delicate job, but progress was progress.

"You've been saying that since you got here, mate," Harry teased, laughing when Ron gave him a rude hand gesture.

"You try being at home, holding back your wife's hair while she vomits all over everything."

The humor drained out of the situation and Harry fiddled with his pint.

"I didn't mean... Shit, Harry, I'm sorry," Ron winced, stumbling over his apology.

“Don’t worry about it,” Harry shook his head. Ron, more than anyone, knew how much Harry longed for a family. He was usually very careful what he said around Harry—which almost made it worse some days.

“You know I—“

“I said, don’t worry about it,” Harry shrugged, forcing a smile. “We’re here to relax, remember?”

“Everyone else is late,” Ron grimaced as he looked down at his watch. “I’m going to miss everything.”

Harry shook his head. “You won’t miss much. Seamus and Dean getting pissed, and me having to Apparate them home. Neville laughing at all of us while trying to reassure me that Teddy’s doing well in school. It’s the same all the time.”

“Is he?” Ron perked up. “Teddy, I mean.”

Harry couldn’t help the grin that spread over his face. “He’s doing great, actually. He loves being in Hufflepuff. Says Potions is alright, Herbology is fun, Transfiguration is wicked cool...” He laughed trying to remember the exact phrasing Teddy had used. “He’s down about not making the team, but the Captain said he showed real promise. He lets him hang around practice even, which Teddy thinks is just about the best thing ever.”

Ron grinned. “You sound like he’s your kid.”

“I do,” Harry said, laughing. “In a way, I guess he is. As close as I’ll get anyway.”

Ron’s face turned into the painful one again; the one he reserved for when Harry made some comment about being alone.

“You haven’t been out with anyone in a while,” Ron observed. Harry bristled and rolled his shoulders. “I know you keep saying that there’s no one—“

“There’s not,” Harry denied. It didn’t help that his mind flashed to Ginny at that moment. He still hadn’t figured that out, so he pushed it away.

“Then...at least find someone to go home with tonight, Harry,” Ron sighed. “You’re alone too often.”

“You want me to get laid?” Harry laughed, glad that they’d put a Muffliato charm on the booth they were sitting in.

“Why not?” Ron grinned. “If you’re not looking for a relationship, why not at least get a little relief on the side.”

Harry grimaced. Honestly the idea of a one night stand made him a little sick. He’d done that in the past, and even if he’d only slept with two of them, even snogging someone he had no connection to wasn’t fun.

“I don’t know,” Harry said, taking a long drink of his pint. “Things like that just aren’t...fulfilling anymore.”

“Fulfilling?” Ron smirked, raising an eyebrow. “I wasn’t suggesting a *fulfilling* relationship, Harry. Just get a leg over for Merlin’s sake.”

Once again, Ginny’s face popped into Harry’s mind and he shuddered. It wasn’t that he didn’t think of Ginny that way—quite the opposite, actually. He thought about Ginny entirely too much in that regard. But the idea of getting off with someone else, when he knew it would be Ginny in his mind was just...wrong.

It had been wrong when it had happened in the past. He was ashamed to admit that it had even happened a few times when he was with Susan.

“We’ll see,” Harry said noncommittally. Ron knew exactly what that meant and rubbed his face.

“I need to go.”

Harry sat up sharply, selfishly wanting Ron to stay just a while longer. He knew Hermione would need him at home, but Harry didn’t want to be here alone when the others came in. It was childish and pathetic, but he still wanted it all the same.

Just as he was thinking up an excuse for Ron to stay, Neville came in, looking as if he’d run the entire way from Hogwarts.

“lo,” he greeted, his pale cheeks flushing deep red with the heat of the pub.

“Nev!” both men greeted him with a loud cheer. Harry was relieved that someone else had come; Ron would feel compelled to stay just a few minutes longer now.

“Sorry I’m late,” Neville said as he slid into the booth. “Although it looks as if everyone else is too.”

They spent an enjoyable few minutes catching up with Harry mostly listening while Ron explained, in horrific detail, Hermione’s bouts with all-day sickness. Neville went on and on about Teddy, making Harry’s chest swell with pride.

Finally, Neville glared down at his watch. “I expected Hannah before now.”

“Hannah’s coming?” Harry asked, his voice squeaking just a bit. He cleared his throat and tried to ignore Ron’s snigger.

“Yeah,” Neville said. “Seamus sent the invite around to a lot of people. He and Dean have been talking about this for months.”

Harry nodded and sipped at what remained of his pint. If Hannah came, she usually brought Susan with her, which would make for a rather uncomfortable night. And, what if Seamus had thought to invite Ginny? Harry’s heart raced imagining him caught between two ex-girlfriends, one he was pretty sure he had a bit of a crush on again.

It was only a crush, really. It was just...seeing her again after all these years made his old feelings come back again—feelings he hadn’t had to deal with in the past. And his body reacted strangely to her. He’d had crushes before. There was Cho back in school and Ginny herself before he got the nerve to ask her out. Susan

had never really been a crush; more like...friends who shagged occasionally and then all of a sudden it was a relationship. The whole thing puzzled him, actually.

A crush he could deal with. Crushes went away, eventually.

Oh, who was he kidding? What he felt for Ginny was definitely far beyond a crush, and he knew it.

"...Hannah said the pub is doing well, but she'll be glad to get away for the night. We haven't been able to spend much time together."

Harry felt bad for not listening and tried to catch back up on what he'd missed. Ron answered appropriately, but Harry's ability to think—to even breathe—was thrown into question when the door to the pub opened and two women walked in. Hannah removed her hood immediately, dusting the snowflakes from her shoulders. Ginny turned and smiled at them, removing her cloak and shaking it out.

She was wearing...something... Harry wasn't sure what it was, other than it showed an expanse of pale, perfectly toned leg.

"Holy..."

She smiled perfectly at him and Harry was transported back, years in the past, when that smile had been just for him. His hands itched to run up and down those legs, to feel the smooth skin beneath his palms, and to let his hand slide even further, up the skirt and...discover exactly what that tattoo was once and for all.

"Bloody hell, Harry!"

His hand was all wet and Harry blinked down at it, watching as the remains of his pint—only a couple of inches—poured over the expanse of table and into Ron's lap.

All three men jumped up, knocking more things around in their haste to mop up the liquid.

"Sorry," Harry grimaced, staring at the large wet stain that was in Ron's lap. "I didn't mean to..."

"Just...just stay over there," Ron commanded, batting Harry's hands away from him. "And stop looking at my sister like that mate, before I have to thrash you."

Harry's face flared bright red and he sunk down in the seat, praying for a large hole to open in the floor in front of him.

Neville, who found the last comment incredibly funny judging by his choking laughter, stood and welcomed the girls into the booth.

Ron used his wand to dry his robes, but stood finally. "I have to get back," he sighed, looking torn between hauling Harry out back to give him a beating and staying to enjoy the evening.

"Give our love to Hermione," Hannah said. "If you need anything, just let us know."

"I will," Ron sighed, waving as he trudged out of the pub.

Harry refused to look at Ginny, who now sat across from him. He could feel her eyes on him and it unnerved him. He prayed she hadn't seen his uncoordinated, prattish, teenaged behavior and just thought he was having a bad day.

Neville and Hannah saved the day—as usual—by making polite conversation with them both. When Harry finally did look up, Ginny looked away quickly and her cheeks turned pink. He couldn't help but stare at her again—something he really needed to get over doing. She was beautiful. Tonight even more so than usual. He wasn't sure what it was, but her skin was radiant and she...glowed. It sounded insane, but when she smiled, it was like the whole room lit up around her.

'Yeah, a crush, that's all it is,' he berated himself silently. 'Ever hear the word denial, Potter?'

How long he stared, Harry wasn't sure. Thankfully no one saw fit to point out how rude he was being. Even Ginny didn't say anything. From time to time, her eye would catch his and she would smile before looking away. It reminded him, just a little, of when she was young and had a crush on him, although with far less squeaking and giggling.

"Harry, mate, are you going to occupy the rest of the booth all night?"

Harry blinked up and shook his head automatically as Dean and Seamus clambered in next to him, pinning him in the back of the table.

"Order us a round, Seamus, lad," Dean cheered.

Harry forced a smile and allowed himself to be drawn into a conversation with Neville, all the while sneaking looks at Ginny, who was talking animatedly with Dean. He heard the word Quidditch several times and knew she was talking about her work.

Writing to Bernard had been a good thing. It was the right thing to do and seeing Ginny so obviously happy about something made him feel good inside. It made him feel like he might actually be an alright person after all. Despite the whole being a pervert thing.

Seamus brought the rounds, along with a bottle of Firewhiskey that they'd all partaken of. The evening wore on and Harry rested his head happily along the back of the bench, content to watch as Hannah and Ginny took turns dancing with everyone and laughing entirely too much. It was good that they could all relax around each other so easily.

"Come on, Ginny," Neville said, holding his hand out to her, "it's my turn to try and repair the wrongs of my past. Dance with me and I promise not to walk all over your feet this time."

Ginny giggled—a sound that made Harry's skin tingle pleasantly—and enthusiastically joined Neville on the dance floor. Seamus took Hannah out and Dean spun around in his seat, chatting with several women behind them.

"I heard this was where the party was."

Harry laughed as George slid into the booth next to him, stealing the remains of Neville's drink.

"You heard right," Harry drawled. He wasn't drunk, but the buzz from the alcohol meant he was pleasantly relaxed and enjoying the evening. He and Ginny had yet to say two words to each other, but that was alright.

"Ginny seems to be enjoying herself."

Harry thought George put a bit more emphasis on that statement than was necessarily needed, but shrugged it off. It was probably the Firewhiskey talking anyway.

"She's dancing with Neville," Harry informed George, squirming a bit when George laughed at him.

"Feeling good, Harry?"

"Feeling fine," Harry proclaimed with a shrug of his shoulders.

George laughed again and rested his arm along the back of the booth. "She's always been really pretty."

"Yeah, I know," Harry responded before he could call the words back. Ron didn't want Harry thinking about Ginny, George was probably the same. Surely George wouldn't hit him...

Harry's mind raced ahead, trying to find the trap in that statement, but everything was too fuzzy right now.

"You're not the only one that thinks so," George said. "Unless the flowers were from you."

Harry lurched forward in the booth, bumping the table. "Flowers? What flowers? Neville grows flowers."

George gave him a maddening grin. "I'm pretty sure Neville isn't sending my sister two dozen long-stemmed red roses, mate."

Harry blinked at that information and stared as Ginny laughed loudly, ducking under Neville's arm and swinging wide. His eyes traveled down her legs and his groin stirred.

"I didn't send her roses," he denied, shaking his head.

"I gathered that," George nodded. "Wonder who did?"

Harry furrowed his brow and glared into the pub. "The Wanker," he proclaimed vehemently. "It has to be him. What did the card say?"

"I didn't look," George shook his head. "It's not like I went poking around in her flat or anything, Harry. I just saw the owls that brought them, and recognized the box. I go to that florist when I need to get back onto Angelina's good side."

"Shit," Harry groaned. The Wanker was sending her roses. *Red* bloody roses.

George winked at him. "If I were someone that might fancy another someone, I'd make damn sure that someone didn't have another someone standing in the wings, if you know what I mean."

"I don't have the faintest idea what you've just said," Harry admitted.

"It will come to you," George nodded knowingly. He slid out of the booth, effectively squashing Harry's chances of having a happy evening. Now all he could do when he saw Ginny was notice how close Dean—who had taken over for Neville—was holding Ginny, and the way her hand rested on his shoulder. And the other bloke across the pub whose eyes kept darting over to watch her bum—Harry ought to march over there and pummel the berk.

"What does she see in that big, dumb mountain anyway?" he grumbled, grimacing when he remembered seeing Quinlan's grinning face in the papers.

"I didn't think Dean was all that bad," Hannah said, startling him. Harry swung his head around and blinked at her and then stared at Ginny.

"Not him," he growled. "The Wanker."

Hannah's eyebrows rose and she shook her head, sliding further away as Neville rejoined the booth.

Harry continued to scowl into his pint, calling Quinlan all sorts of vile names in his head and even making up a few he'd have to remember to tell Ron next time he saw him.

"You've danced with everyone except Harry, Ginny," Neville said, nudging Harry harder than necessary.

"Er..." Ginny shook her head as Harry stared at her. "I'm fine, really. I was thinking about calling it a—"

"I'll dance with you," Harry blurted out, not sure what was possessing him. All he knew was that he needed answers, and nobody had them besides Ginny. It was a rather ironic position to be in, since she had wanted answers from him not too long ago. "I mean, I don't mind...or anything."

Neville was quick to usher his wife out of the booth and clear the way for Harry to slide out.

Ginny's eyes were wide and she looked like she was trying to find any excuse not to dance with him. But Harry was determined. He held his hand out to her, praying he wouldn't stumble and drag them both down to the floor. That would be awkward.

"We're both adults, Ginny," he smiled, hoping it was one of the ones Hermione called dashing, and not one where he looked as if the floor might just tip him on his arse.

"Okay, Harry," she agreed. She didn't take his hand, like he'd hoped, but maybe that was for the best. Harry needed his wits about him right now. He didn't need this silly little crush to get in the way. This was serious.

Still in denial. What a horrible place to stay for so long.

The room became awkwardly quiet as they began revolving on the dance floor. Harry's hands found their place at her waist, sitting at the beginning of either hip—like they'd been made to fit right there—and Ginny's hands rested on his shoulders. The music didn't matter as he allowed himself to bathe in the flowery scent that was entirely more intoxicating than the Firewhiskey he'd had earlier.

"You look...nice," he started and then winced, calling himself several vile names under his breath. *Nice?*

"You as well," Ginny said. She gave a little shudder underneath his fingers and he peered at her, trying to read her expression.

"Ginny, I..." He stopped and tried to remember what exactly had been so important to talk about. The Wanker. Oh, yeah. "I need to ask you something, but I'm afraid you're going to get mad."

She jumped under his touch and stared at him, her jaw squaring. "Should I get mad?"

"Well, no," he shrugged. "Maybe? I don't know. I just...I need to know."

They were still dancing, moving in a circle. And maybe it was the heat of the room, or the hypnotic melody of the song playing, but it was increasingly hard to breathe, Harry thought.

"Ask your question," she finally said, her breath making the hair on his arms stand up as it ghosted his cheek.

Harry swallowed thickly and tried to think about anything but the way her pulse was racing—he could see it in the spot just below her ear. He'd always loved to press his lips there and feel her heartbeat through her skin, feel the warmth of her seep into him.

"This thing with Quinlan...did it start before we were...done? Or after?"

The question was out, between them before Harry could even think of speaking it and he winced, seeing the tightness on her face.

"If you really knew me," she said, her voice careful, yet quivering, "then you could never ask that."

He'd known that. And yet he felt like he had to ask. He had to hear it from her lips.

"You don't remember," he shook his head. She didn't, did she? Now it seemed as if he was the one who couldn't remember.

"I kept a diary," she shrugged. "I never would have...not while we were together."

Harry pulled back from her then, looking at her eyes. The elation and relief he felt in that moment almost made him lean forward and kiss her. And for the briefest moment, Ginny looked as if she might not hex him to Hades and back for doing it.

"And...what is it now? With Quinlan?"

Ginny pulled back a bit and took a deep breath. "I don't love him," she said, her voice small, yet confident. "I don't remember anything about him."

Inside, Harry was doing a horribly embarrassing dance. Yet, he felt too self-conscious to show anything outward.

And the denial slipped away. This was no crush.

Her eyes were dark and she leaned back in, wrapping him tighter in her embrace. Harry sighed and clung to her, closing his eyes as he imagined letting the years fall away. Right now there was no distance between them. There were no other partners in the past. There weren't years of unspoken hurt and insecurity.

There was only this moment.

Ginny's breathing was harsh against the skin of Harry's neck and she allowed herself this one moment of perfection, praying it would stretch magically into two, and then three.

She wanted to know why Harry had asked about Brogan. Why he had asked her to dance in the first place, and why he was holding her like he loved her. He'd said... No, she wouldn't let those words enter her head anymore.

Taking one last breath, Ginny pulled back from him. He looked just as unbalanced as she felt. Perhaps he was just drunk—alcohol gave people the courage to say things they never would normally.

Ginny opened her mouth to ask Harry what this meant between them, but a rush of chilly air brushed along her legs and she turned her head, watching as Susan Bones entered the pub, unwrapping her scarf. She smiled widely at Hannah and then froze as she noticed Ginny and Harry on the dance floor. Her smile turned into something much more forced and Ginny looked away.

"Can I ask you a question?" Ginny asked. Harry's body went rigid and he faltered in his step before nodding jerkily. There were so many questions she wanted answers to; but only a few answers that she truly *needed* anymore.

"The other women...they weren't before we..."

"No," Harry answered quickly. His eyes darted down to her and she could see the truth in their green depths.

"Okay," she nodded. They made several more turns before she took another breath. "And Susan was...that was serious?"

Harry's Adam's apple bobbed twice and he cleared his throat. "It should have been. But...it just wasn't."

Ginny nodded awkwardly, not fully understanding. She didn't want to torture him, and he seemed incredibly uncomfortable with the topic.

"I was a bastard, Gin," he said harshly. She wasn't sure when he was talking about—maybe he didn't even know. "I...I shouldn't have done half the things I've done."

Ginny could only hold him close and close her eyes as tears stung the back of them.

"The song ended," Harry observed, almost as if he'd just noticed.

Somehow Ginny knew they'd danced more than one song together. But her arms wouldn't move; and Harry's

seemed to have the same affliction.

If they stayed here forever—in their little bubble—eventually they'd say everything that needed to be said and things would be right again.

"The song's over," Harry said again, finally pushing away. His whole body shook and he wouldn't quite look at her. He didn't offer his hand, but gestured for Ginny to go ahead of him, back to their table.

Ginny knew from the way everyone started talking quickly and turned away from them that they'd been talking about her and Harry. She almost wanted to ask what they all thought, just so she could have the opinion of someone who wasn't tipsy, or fettered in all of this...mess.

"Thanks for everything," Harry said from behind her.

Ginny turned in her seat and blinked up at him, just now realizing that he hadn't sat down after their dance, and he was talking to the entire table, rather than just to her.

"I'll see everyone later."

He looked down at her and his hand lifted, almost as if he was going to caress her hair. And for just that moment, Ginny wanted nothing more than to have him touch her. His touch would mean he was finally seeing who she really was, beyond all the rubbish that must have happened in the past.

He would touch her, and then she would take his hand and let him lead her to their flat. And she would follow him home, forgetting to scold the cat off the furniture, and allow Harry to touch her some more. And then she could wake up in his arms, like this had all never happened. Like it was supposed to be.

His hand hesitated and finally dropped as an intense, yet confusing look washed over his face.

"Night, Harry," Neville said, breaking the spell. Ginny had never, in all her years, wanted to hurt Neville Longbottom, but right now she could chop him up into tiny pieces and feed him to his Venomous Tenticulas.

"Night." His hand lifted once more in goodbye to everyone and Ginny turned around, staring at the table. She couldn't watch him walk away right now.

"I'm in very big trouble," Harry told his reflection in the mirror. He wasn't quite sure when the realization had hit. Somewhere between waking after a full night's sleep and realizing the warming charm had worn off the water in the shower while he stared at the pale blue tiles.

But he knew now.

That didn't mean he had any idea what to do about it.

He stared at his reflection, hoping it would have an answer, but the person staring back at him just continued to stare.

“You’re absolutely no help, you know?” he growled, hanging his towel up and walking naked back to his bedroom. He dressed absently, hoping that the things he was pulling from the wardrobe matched, and not really caring if they didn’t.

How was he going to work today? How was he going to pretend he could concentrate on anything besides the tightness in his chest and the way his belly swooped every time he thought about Ginny?

The crush—that silly little, inaccurate name he’d labeled these feelings—was dead. Dead and buried, and a brand new life had taken over Harry’s heart.

He was in love.

He whispered the words out loud to the room and had to sit on the edge of the bed as everything shifted dramatically. This really couldn’t be happening, could it? Could you really fall in love with someone, then fall out, and then back in again? Did the world work that way?

Or had he never been out of love with Ginny?

Perhaps everything just lay dormant in his heart for all this time, making him feel miserable and heartbroken. The thought made sense, but didn’t, at the same time.

What he needed was someone to talk to. Ron was out; he’d made his thoughts on Harry’s Ginny-obsession quite clear. Neville might be an option, but he was all the way up at Hogwarts. George would be no help; Harry still couldn’t quite figure out what he’d been talking about last night. Something about flying, or birds...

All he knew was that last night, when his arms had wrapped fully around Ginny, and she had held him back, a dam inside him burst and Harry was flooded with the overwhelming sensations he’d been searching for the past eight years for; warmth, light, acceptance and love.

But it wasn’t like he could go running off and confess everything to Ginny, no matter how wonderful the idea was. There was still this huge...canyon between them that needed to be crossed—or, that’s what it felt like, anyway. Perhaps there was only a canyon in Harry’s mind.

“Morning, Mr. Potter.”

Harry looked up, not even remembering how he’d gotten dressed today, let alone how he was standing in the middle of his office, blinking stupidly at Martha. Just in case, he glanced down at himself, making sure he *was* fully dressed.

Martha smirked when he wiggled his feet. “I’ve ‘ad those days meself, sir,” she nodded wisely. “I can ‘ave coffee ‘ere in five minutes.”

“Make it three,” Harry sighed absently, feeling as if he was not actually walking to his desk, but floating somewhere above his body, watching as things happened around him.

Martha hurried back in carrying a large cup and a plate full of Danish. “I noticed you didn’t ‘ave no breakfast, sir.”

Harry blinked at her. "You can tell?" he asked, feeling incredibly stupid.

"You're not wearin' none," she smirked.

Harry automatically looked down at himself and swore softly. Not only were his robes clean, but they were inside out as well.

"Thank you, Martha," he dismissed her curtly, ignoring her cackling laughter. Honestly, if she wasn't as efficient as she was, Harry would have fired her years ago, just for her cheek.

Harry forced himself to focus on the files stacked on his desk, signing and stamping them with his seal in the appropriate places (he hoped) while noshing on the food Martha left for him.

By noon his desk was clear and he felt a sense of incredible accomplishment. He'd managed to completely forget about Ginny for ten whole minutes at one point.

But ten minutes was ten more than he thought he could handle again. He wondered if Neville could be reached in an emergency... He moved the last file off his desk and went to slide it into the pile Martha would send to the file room. Inspiration struck as he stared at the framed photograph of Harry, Ron and Hermione taken on the day Ginny left Hogwarts. They were all laughing and smiling. If he remembered right, Ginny had been behind the camera on this one, otherwise she would have been in there with them, nudging their shoulders and squeezing all of them tightly.

Hermione!

"Martha?" Harry called, striding toward the door. He pulled it open just as Martha pushed and they ended up slamming into each other.

"Oof," Harry caught her by the shoulders, keeping them both upright.

"You bellowed, Mr. Potter?" she asked, straightening her graying hair and leaning against the door frame.

"Sorry," he said, feeling incredibly rushed all of a sudden. This whole...love...thing was just pushing too soon, too fast. Maybe if he talked to Hermione, got a second opinion. Maybe it wasn't love. Maybe it was... indigestion. Or...or food poisoning.

"I need to send a memo to Hermione," he blurted out. "It's urgent. Well...not like I'm bleeding to death urgent, but more like...I really, really need to talk to her about something important. And *extremely personal*."

Martha blinked at him and Harry took a moment to review what he'd just said. Great. She probably thought he had some questionable rash or something.

"Mrs. Weasley is on medical leave right now, sir," she informed him, peering closer at him without getting closer.

"Shit," he hissed. "I forgot about that. I'll just have to go to her then." He spun on his heel and stormed back into his office, leaving his receptionist gaping after him. "I, er... You think I'm crazy, don't you?" he asked,

not wanting to turn around to see her answer.

“Certifiable, sir.”

Harry winced and wondered when the binding spell would be shot at his back.

“But we’ve all ‘ad those days. You’re sane enough most of the time; I owe you the benefit of the doubt.”

His shoulders sank and a laugh bubbled up from deep inside him. He *was* insane.

“Merlin,” he sighed, leaning onto his desk. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

“You’ve ‘ad a lot on your shoulders, sir,” Martha dismissed. “I’d be more worried if you didn’ break down now an’ again.”

Harry laughed again and nodded. “I have to talk to Hermione,” he said. “I’ll be back—”

“Sir!” Davis Matthews, Harry’s lead Auror darted into the office, holding his side. “There’s been a break in the case. Simons’ reported back just now. He says the next shipment is due tonight, and he sent coordinates, sir.”

Harry almost shouted for joy, his earlier errand completely forgotten. This was what they needed! With a little bit of luck, they’d be able to shut down the entire potions operation in a few hours.

“I’ll ‘old that memo then, sir,” Martha nodded, giving a knowing smile. “Mrs. Weasley will be there when you get back.”

“Send a general alert,” Harry nodded. “I want everyone there. And get Ron in here—tell him to drop everything and run.”

“Yes, sir,” Martha bustled out with her usual efficiency.

He gave a brief, pained thought that his personal life was going to have to wait until this was over.

Chapter 12: In Repair

Just Say The Word-Chapter 12: In Repair

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Thanks for all the wonderful comments, everyone. I'm glad you're enjoying the story. The chapter title is another one from John Mayer--one that I thought fit perfectly for this chapter.

Chapter 12: In Repair

It was more than forty-eight hours later that Harry was even able to spare more than a passing thought to more than criminals, and paperwork, and...anything dealing with being an Auror.

He'd sent Ron home hours ago, hoping Hermione hadn't locked her husband out for good for abandoning her. It's not like Ron had a choice; Harry was his boss, and he had needed his best mate covering his back on this one.

The raid was successful and they'd been able to capture a man who had assaulted the Aurors months ago as well as capturing a huge shipment of potions, potentially crippling the illegal potions trade in Britain.

It was satisfying and exhausting at the same time.

Harry was torn, however. His brain demanded he go home immediately, feed the damned cat and fall into bed. But his heart wanted an answer to the question that kept popping up during the few quiet moments he'd had. And since talking to Ginny directly wasn't an option—Harry wasn't sure he could handle that just yet—Hermione was the next best thing.

He felt bad for taking Ron away too. He had no doubt Hermione could manage Rose by herself, even feeling sick the way she was. But he also knew the Weasleys would never leave her all alone. Molly had probably bundled them off to the Burrow and fed them until they both burst.

Maybe he could just stop in and check on her before he went home to bed. He was due some time off soon; he'd be sure to spend some of it being Hermione's slave and letting Rose ride him like a hippogriff around the living room.

Thankfully, Apparating to Ron and Hermione's house was second nature and he appeared in the back garden, trudging tiredly through the snow before he knocked softly on the door and stuck his head in.

"Harry!" Hermione greeted from the kitchen table. She was wrapped in a quilt and looked extremely pale. Any guilt Harry felt compounded exponentially and he closed the door quietly. It was starting to get dark and the house was quiet.

"I'm so sorry, Hermione," he sighed, sliding into a chair next to her and tucking the edge of the quilt under her chin tighter. "I shouldn't have asked him to come."

She chuckled and took his hand in hers, rubbing his cold fingers. "It's not your fault, Harry."

"How are you? And don't lie to me, I can always tell."

She laughed again and shook her head at him. "I'm doing better today. Especially now that Ron's home."

"That's good," Harry nodded, feeling a bit better. "I should have had Ron stay here," he repeated.

"Harry," Hermione scowled, rubbing his cold hand and warming it up. "I really am doing better. Besides, Ginny's been here helping with Rose. I'm not sure what I would have done without her, especially since Molly and Arthur went to Romania this week."

Harry sat up straighter at hearing Ginny's name, but he tried to cover it. Any sign of a change and Hermione would be all over him. And even though he wanted to talk to her about what he was feeling, it seemed a daunting task now that he was actually here.

"Ginny was here?"

"Still is, actually," Hermione said, narrowing her eyes slightly.

Harry sighed, knowing it was probably a lost cause trying to hide anything from her; she always read him like one of her books.

"She was giving Rose a bath and getting her down to sleep for me. I just couldn't handle bath time today."

An upsurge of affection for both Hermione and Ginny shot through him and Harry impulsively leaned forward, pressing his lips against Hermione's forehead.

"I have some time off," he offered. "When you need someone, just know I'll be here."

Hermione studied him for a minute before nodding. "The same offer applies to you, you know."

Harry felt his cheeks heat as the exhaustion finally caught up with him. "I know," he mumbled. "I...soon, maybe."

"You can't fight it forever, Harry," she whispered, making him flinch. "Go up and say goodnight to Rose," she urged.

Harry knew what she was trying to do. Damn matchmakers, he cursed. Neville and George...and Hermione. The fact that he felt a magnetic pull up the stairs and into Rose's room didn't matter.

"Maybe," he shrugged, standing anyway. It was too strong to resist right now. He suddenly *needed* to see Ginny.

Hermione, thankfully, didn't say anything to him as he trudged up the stairs, one slow and painful step after another.

He could hear her when he made it to the hallway, despite Ron's deafening snores coming from the master bedroom. Ginny was singing something to Rose, her voice soft and lilting, floating toward him and tugging him along.

The door to Rose's room was partially open, letting the glowing light of the bedside lamp leak out into the dusk-lit hallway. Ginny's hair shone in the soft light, resting along her shoulder as she lay on her side in Rose's bed, singing softly to the little girl who grinned sleepily up at her.

Harry's heart twisted as he watched the tenderness of the scene.

Any misgivings he had about his feelings for Ginny evaporated in that instant. He remembered this feeling. It came crashing back on him, making his knees wobble and forcing him to clutch the door frame to stay upright.

Ginny's voice, soft and gentle, thundered through his head, exciting and calming him at the same time.

How could he have walked away from this? How could he have stood there in front of Ginny and listened as she told him goodbye, and then turned his back and walked away without fighting for them? All that time wasted because he'd been too afraid of being the one to stay. He'd let his pride stand in the way of everything he'd ever wanted. All he'd needed to say was a simple 'I love you' and he didn't.

The thought that Ginny had ever needed to do anything but simply be here was ludicrous and Harry felt his cheeks heat at even thinking it. She hadn't done anything wrong. She'd come back to him—wonderful, warm, caring Ginny was back. And Harry, like an arse, had pushed her away. He'd yelled at her and lied to her.

He was a bastard and he deserved to have nothing more than a slap to the face.

And yet she'd still wanted him. She'd placed her heart on a silver platter, offering it up to him.

And he'd *lied* to her.

The realization that it wasn't *Ginny* that was unworthy of *him*, but the other way around, was humbling. Harry swallowed the emotion of the moment back and watched as Ginny leaned forward pressing a kiss to sleeping Rose's cheek before resting her head on the same pillow.

What would she do if he simply went into the room and climbed onto the bed with her? Would she order him out, or would she simply lay with him, allowing him to hold her like he wanted so badly to do?

If Rose wasn't there... If they weren't in the home of her brother...

If...

Harry shook his head, forcing the missed opportunities away.

Ginny still loved him. Now it was his turn to show he felt the same.

With one last longing look at Ginny, cuddled around the small child in the bed, Harry forced himself away from the door and blindly down the stairs.

“Did you talk to her?” Hermione asked the moment he reappeared at the bottom of the stairs.

Harry shook his head, feeling incredibly dizzy. “Why didn’t you tell me? All those years I was still in love with her...and no one said anything.”

It wasn’t a demand, more of a realization, and Hermione saw it for what it was. She smiled serenely. “Would you have listened?”

“No,” he sighed, ruffling his hair and scratching his whiskery face. “No, I wouldn’t have believed you.”

“What’re you going to do about it?”

The question startled him and Harry blinked at her. Honestly, he had no idea what the next step was. When he said so, Hermione only shook her head.

“Take some time,” she suggested. “Ginny’s not going anywhere.”

Harry nodded. “Thanks...for...everything.”

Hermione stood shakily and wrapped her arms around Harry, going on her tiptoes and hugging him tighter than he expected her to be able to, considering how pale and frail she looked.

“You’re welcome, Harry.”

“He’s beautiful, Ali, he really is.” Ginny brushed the back of her finger down the incredibly soft cheek of the tiny baby in her arms.

“Thanks,” Allison said, laying her head along the back of the sofa and watching as Ginny cuddled the baby. “He was a lot of work to get here, but he’s definitely worth it.”

Coming to visit her friends from her Harpies days was wonderful. In the diary, Ginny mentioned several times where Allison and Marcus had come to visit her, watching her play and spending their holiday with her. Visiting them now was like capturing a small bit of the past that she felt was so recent for her. “How is Marcus taking to being a father?”

Allison giggled, a sound that Ginny remembered well from long talks in the locker rooms and away games with the Harpies.

“You should have seen his face when I took the pregnancy test. I saw the potion turn purple, screamed and

turned to him. I've never seen him so white in my life."

Ginny chuckled and peered at the baby's face. "He looks just like his father, actually."

Allison's hand reached out and enclosed the tiny hand of her son in her own. "Marcus proposed right then and there, kneeling on the floor of the loo."

Ginny smiled. "I wish I'd been here for you, Ali. I..."

"Don't say you're sorry," Allison warned and Ginny sighed, pushing away those thoughts. "You've had enough to be getting on with lately."

The last week had been so trying that Ginny was wearing paper-thin on all fronts. It never failed—whenever something seemed to be going right in her life right now, it inevitably fell apart again.

"Now," Allison said, standing and gathering the baby in her arms, "I'm going to put this little man down, make us some tea and we're going to have another of our marathon talking sessions. Remember those?"

"Vividly," Ginny grinned. "I'll get the tea started."

The small kitchen in the house that Marcus and Allison had bought and worked on fixing up was perfect for intimate dinners and fun family breakfasts. Ginny wasn't sure what appealed to her about houses with crooked cabinets and cupboards in odd places, but it just seemed more...homey that way, rather than having everything pin-straight and perfect. Perhaps it was growing up in the Burrow that made her like that.

While she waited for the self-warming kettle to boil, Ginny watched out the window to the small garden, imagining little Keenan playing out there when he got older while Allison taught him to fly on a training broom. The idea made her smile. If children were going to be in her future, Ginny wanted to do the same thing.

Sighing, she turned and leaned against the counter, her eyes tracing the wonderful oddities of the kitchen. Sitting in the middle of the table was a stack of old *Witch Weekly*'s—quite a large stack, actually. Ginny guessed Allison, who had been on bed-rest for the last six weeks of her pregnancy, did a lot of reading. She just wished Ali hadn't wasted brain power on that rubbish.

The worst offender, in Ginny's opinion, was right on top. A photo of her and Harry dancing at the pub, entwined in each other's embrace and whispering quietly together was plastered on the front cover. The picture didn't show anything incriminating; they didn't kiss, they didn't even argue.

The article when it came out and was delivered to Ginny's flat—she didn't have a subscription, so *someone* sent it to her—made her furious, and then sick. If Harry read it and believed the rubbish that Petronelle's quill was spewing...well, any progress they made toward clearing the air between them would be gone.

"I can't believe you allow this rubbish in your house," Ginny nudged the magazine with the tip of her finger and glared at Allison when she walked into the kitchen.

Allison sighed and shook her head. "I always read the gossip tabloids, Ginny. You know that."

“Still,” Ginny said, crossing her arms in front of her and scowling like a petulant child. “There’s nothing but lies and rubbish in them.”

“True,” Allison said. “But when you’re confined to a bed, you’ll read anything to keep from going ‘round the twist.”

“Do you know how many copies of this got sent to my flat?” Ginny demanded, feeling no anger toward Allison, but furious with stupid people in the world. “George was livid when his Owl Order inbox was full of hate mail for me and his orders couldn’t even fit inside.”

Allison laughed sympathetically and set about making the tea when the kettle yelled that the water was hot enough. “I’m sorry; I know it’s not funny.”

Ginny sank into one of the chairs at the table and rested her forehead on her hands. “Not your fault, unless you’re secretly Floretta Petronelle.”

“Yes, that’s it,” Allison crowed, one eyebrow rising as she peered at Ginny. “I have nothing better to do in my life but gossip about celebrities and flounce their intimate moments all over.”

Ginny wished the joking made her feel better, but it just didn’t. “I’ve stopped opening my mail, you know. George reminded me of when Skeeter wrote about Hermione trying to trap Harry with a love potion and ended up with bubotuber puss all over her hands. I don’t need that right now.”

“I’m sorry, Ginny,” Allison said, setting a cup of tea in front of her. “I honestly only read it for a good laugh. But I agree that it makes it so much different when it’s people you know they’re writing about.”

“Or yourself,” Ginny sighed, stirring her tea.

“Drink up, I’ll read your leaves,” Allison urged.

“Pardon me for not being excited,” Ginny said, trying to smile, “but your Divination skills are spotty at best, Allison. You predicted that Harry and I would be married.”

“No, I didn’t,” Allison corrected. “I predicted he would propose that year. And no Seer can predict everything perfectly, you know. People have a way of inserting their own will into things and mucking it all up.”

The words weren’t meant as a dig, but Ginny couldn’t help but apply them to her. “I did muck it up, didn’t I?”

“Oh, Ginny, I didn’t mean—”

“It’s okay,” she soothed Allison’s worrying. “I did. I can admit it now. I just wish...I wish I had those memories still, you know. Not that I want to deal with the hurt of those years, but...at least then I’d be on an even plain with him. Right now we’re worlds apart. I’m still...stuck at the beginning, while he’s...here.”

“He seems interested,” Allison offered, nodding her head toward the article.

Ginny shook her head. “I don’t know what he is, truthfully.” She pulled the magazine off the stack and stared

at the picture, watching as the couple revolved slowly. “Every time we make some progress toward where I want to be, he pulls away or fights it. I thought we really connected in the pub, you know. We talked without yelling, and he really held me, Ali—with everything he had, like he used to do. And I thought...well, I thought that might be it for us. But...”

“Have you talked to him since?” Allison asked, taking the publication and opening to the page where the article was.

“No,” Ginny sighed, taking a sip of her tea. “He was on a mission for a couple of days.”

“But he’s back now?”

“Yeah,” Ginny shrugged, “I guess so. I haven’t heard anything from him.”

“Hmmm,” Allison murmured, her eyes tracing the words on the page. “Maybe he just needed time to break the Veela love potion you slipped him.”

The way the words slipped out of her mouth—straight and as if she believed it wholly—made Ginny snort. “Yeah, that must be it.”

Allison took Ginny’s hand in hers. “Ginny, no sane person believes you would drug him.”

“Don’t seem to be too many sane people in the world then,” Ginny sighed. “I guess I’m just...tired. Tired of trying so hard for something that may never work out. Tired of fighting with Harry about things I don’t remember. Tired of being called horrific names and flatly told, while I’m in the middle of Diagon Alley, that I should have stayed away. And I’m worried that all of this will reflect on my job—what if people stop buying Quidditch Weekly because they’ve believed this?”

“I know it’s hard to hear, because you’re in the moment right now,” Allison said, measuring her words carefully, “but all of this will be a memory soon. You and Harry will work this out and...and you’ll finally be happy.”

“I wish I could believe that,” Ginny said nudging her empty tea cup toward Allison, who lifted it and stared into it. “Just...even if it’s bad, just lie to me, okay?”

Allison squeezed her hand and set the cup aside without saying anything. “Who believes in soggy old tea leaves anyway, yeah?”

Five days of watching Ginny mope around his house—she wasn’t really *moping*, more just...not being herself—and Ron was ready to pull his hair out.

He *knew* it was a bad idea to get involved in this, but that didn’t stop him from waiting until Harry was alone in his office before ambushing him.

Martha gave him a small show of solidarity, clenching her fist in front of her, before she sealed the door after him—something Ron appreciated. He just hoped Hermione would be able to get blood out of his robes.

Whether it would be his or Harry's remained to be seen.

"Hi," Harry said, looking up from his desk. He continued to work, shuffling papers, scribbling signatures on forms and generally ignoring his best mate. He seemed to be well practiced at the ignoring thing lately.

"Hi," Ron answered back.

"I don't have time for lunch today," Harry said. "Kingsley needs me in twenty minutes. We have to over this next year's budget," Harry grimaced. "Damned Department of Mysteries wants to take my increase so I'll be forced to cut two Aurors. What they don't understand is that their Department doesn't need the money. According to their report last month, they didn't actually *do* anything, yet they still spent more than I do in two months. I hate bureaucracy, mate."

Ron was getting more frustrated by the second, his neck warming up and the heat spreading through his face and toward his ears.

And Harry kept rambling. "And who the hell am I supposed to cut? You know I'd gladly cut Collins. He's still a pain in my arse, even if he did finally shape up to be a decent Auror."

After realizing that Ron hadn't responded to anything, Harry glanced up, his quill freezing mid-signature.

"What's wrong? It's not Hermione is it? Rose?"

"Ginny," Ron grunted.

Harry's jaw dropped and he stood up, his quill trailing ink all over the form he was signing. "What? What happened?"

"You happened," Ron answered coldly.

Harry gaped at him and then looked away, his face flushing. Guilt. Good, Ron could deal with guilt.

"I bloody told you to stay away from her."

"Ron, I..."

"I didn't mean for you to drag her around by her heart and then pretend she doesn't live on the same effing planet as you, Harry."

"That's not—"

"I don't know what happened between the two of you," Ron continued, getting into his stride now. "And I don't want to know, *mate*. But I'm tired of watching my sister walk around like this. She's barely spoken to anyone in days and looks like she hasn't been sleeping at all either."

Harry sank into his chair, tossing the quill in front of him and buried his face in his hands. He wasn't even arguing back and that made Ron even angrier.

“What hell happened?” Ron demanded, forgetting that he’d just asked to be spared the knowledge.

“I fell in love with her,” Harry said dully.

Ron stared at him. “You fell in love with her,” he replied back, trying to understand how that would make Ginny act the way she was.

“I fell in love with her,” Harry said with more conviction this time, his eyes shining brightly behind his glasses. “Or, really...I just realized I’ve been in love with her forever.”

Ron’s jaw clamped shut and his teeth ached from mashing together. “That’s it? You had your little realization and yet...what? Have you told her? Have you said anything to anyone?”

Harry stared at him for a long minute before shaking his head. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Say you’re damned well sorry, Harry!” Ron roared, lurching forward and pounding his fist on the desk. “Say that you’ve decided to stop being an arse and beg for her forgiveness.”

“I...I thought you didn’t want me to be with her.” Harry furrowed his brow and Ron growled in answer.

“I don’t. Or maybe I do. I don’t even know anymore,” Ron threw his hands in the air and flopped into the chair behind him.

“When we were little, Ginny was my best friend, you know,” he said, squinting as he remembered the stubborn little girl with pigtails that could out-climb, out-curse and out-run her older brothers. “She and I used to team up against the twins—we had to for survival.

“And then I left for Hogwarts, and everything changed.” Ron slumped further in the seat, watching Harry’s pained face.

“Then I was your best friend.”

“Yeah,” Ron shrugged. “And I forgot all about Ginny. I was thrilled when the two of you got together, you know.”

“Yeah?” Harry asked, smiling as if this was news to him. For a second, Ron wondered if he’d ever told Harry how happy he’d been for them.

“Yeah. I mean, I thought you two, of all people, would make all your dreams come true. I just knew one day you’d be my real brother and we’d all have kids together. I never even considered that you’d...”

“That I’d walk away,” Harry nodded.

Ron blinked at that and then scowled. “You? I thought it was Ginny.”

Harry winced. “It was...mutual, I guess. She suggested it and I just didn’t fight.” His face drained of color and he stared off at the wall. “It was the biggest mistake of my life Ron. You have no idea how much I’ve tortured myself over this—for the past seven years. I...I’d do anything to go back and *change* it.”

"You think it would make a difference?" Ron peered at him, suddenly thinking that he'd never seen Harry look so tired and drawn.

"I don't know," Harry shrugged. "Maybe not. But...maybe so. All I can do now is look forward. What I wouldn't give to be in the place where Ginny is right now—not remembering the past and only remembering how she feels about me."

Ron nodded, the anger draining and leaving him feeling simply tired. "Why haven't you talked to her?"

"Honestly?" Harry asked, leaning back in his chair. "I really don't know what to say. I was so...angry when she came home. So frustrated and angry at her. I've let myself blame her for all of this for so long, that I forgot I'm just as much at fault for it as she is. We both burned that bridge...it feels like it needs to be repaired."

They lapsed into silence for long minutes. Finally Ron cleared his throat. "What if it doesn't?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" Harry's brow furrowed.

"You said it yourself, Harry, Ginny doesn't remember the past. She's here, now, willing to give you everything. You're the one who has put yourself on the other side of your imaginary bridge."

"So...I just show up, tell Ginny that I've decided we need to be together, and that's everything?" Harry shook his head. "It can't work like that, Ron. I...I need to prove to her that I'm worthy of her. I've put her through hell lately, undeservedly, and she needs to know that if she does love me...I'm not going to walk away. I accused her of not loving me enough to stay. Now I have to prove that I love *her* enough to stay."

"You're not walking away? Not ever?" Ron's eyebrows rose. He knew it was probably bold of him to want to hear Harry say this; really, Ginny should be the first to hear these words out of his mouth.

"Not ever," Harry confirmed. "I'm here, Ron. I want her. Forever."

"Marriage? Kids? The whole thing?"

Harry nodded jerkily. "And Stupid Cat—er...Midnight, there right along with them." He smirked slightly and Ron could see how much this was costing him to admit. Seven years was a long time to deny yourself happiness. Ron knew having a family was always Harry's dream—a lost dream for a long time.

"I chose you, you know," Ron admitted. "When she left...I chose you. And maybe part of my hesitating to accept this is that I don't want to make that mistake again. I don't want to ever have to choose between you."

"You won't," Harry denied. "I'm going to do whatever it takes to make this work between the two of us, because I can't do this without her anymore, Ron. I don't want to do it without her."

Ron's heart jumped into his throat at the loneliness that seeped out of Harry's voice and he nodded. "You need a plan," he said.

"How do I make her see that I want her, that I'm serious about this?" Harry asked, looking completely lost. "I...I don't even know where to start."

Ron leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. "I'm not sure what you're going to have to do. Ginny may have been willing to overlook all of this before, but she's been pretty upset the past few days."

"I have been interested," Harry protested. "I just...I just didn't let anyone see it."

Ron's eyebrow rose and Harry huffed, pushing his chair away from his desk and growling as he pulled off his Auror robe and tossed it on the desk. His hands dug deep into his pockets and he sat on the edge of his desk, ignoring the framed photo of Teddy that got nudged out of the way.

"Really?" Ron snorted. "Because I'd say you're pants at that part. We could all see you were miserable, Harry."

"Remember that conference I went to a few years back...the one in Europe? And I was gone for a week?"

"Vaguely," Ron narrowed his eyes, trying to remember.

Harry nodded and then looked away, his face turning red. "I went to one of her games."

"What?" Ron shot upwards, jerking out of the chair. "What do you mean?"

"I went," Harry explained. "Spain was playing in an away series and I...I got tickets to one."

"How did I not know about this?" Ron asked himself more than Harry. Ron knew...everything about Harry, or thought he did, anyway.

Harry shrugged. "She played brilliantly. Just...like flowing water, only in the air. And I...I wanted to talk to her, wanted to ask if...if she felt as horrible as I did."

"This was before Susan?" Ron asked, scratching his head.

"Yeah," Harry jerked his head to the side. "But she was with The...with Quinlan."

"The Wanker," Ron hissed.

Harry flinched and looked down, picking at a piece of skin near his fingernail. "I never even talked to her. I came home instead."

"And you settled for trying to start something with Susan," Ron nodded, feeling enlightened now that he saw more of the picture.

Harry shrugged one shoulder and Ron rubbed his face harshly.

"You need to make sure The Wanker is out of the picture."

"She doesn't love him," Harry added, a hopeful look on his face.

But Ron just scowled. "I thought Vicki wasn't a threat either. Quinlan's an International Quidditch star, Harry."

And, face it; he's better looking than you."

Harry hissed an insult and Ron barked out a laugh. "No, he's not," Harry defended. "His nose is crooked and he's...he's a mammoth. And...and he's stupid. Has to be, he's a Beater, for Merlin's sake."

Ron snorted and shook his head. "Yeah, no brains at all in them." He rolled his eyes and they both chuckled.

"He sent her roses," Harry grimaced. "Red roses."

"Wanker," Ron growled, shaking his head. "We should break into her flat and set them on fire." It occurred to him that somewhere along the line he'd been thoroughly convinced to join Harry's cause here. It annoyed him slightly, but then again, Harry was smiling again. And maybe, just maybe...if Harry could convince Ginny that he was serious...

"Roses aren't her favorites," Harry shook his head. "Lilies are. I used to buy them all the time for her."

Ron furrowed his brow at the look Harry got on his face. It was all...sappy and lovesick. "You *do* have it bad," he shook his head. "Okay, step one, get rid of the Wanker, for good. No more roses from him."

Harry nodded. "Step two..."

"Do something to prove to Ginny that you're worth it."

Harry chewed on his lip and thought about it. "Shouldn't I just tell her how I feel?"

"After you telling her that you didn't love her and couldn't love her?" Ron scowled, slightly pleased when Harry flushed.

"I lied."

"She knows that, but I'm not sure just telling her isn't going to be enough, Harry."

"Maybe," he shrugged, not looking entirely convinced. He moved toward the window and stared out at the country meadow that was covered in a fresh blanket of snow. "I still think I should just tell her."

"You could try," Ron said. "But you'd better do something—anything—because the longer you wait, the more hacked off she's going to be."

Harry nodded but didn't respond.

"You've got time," Ron sighed, "because she's just left for four days straight. She's covering some games."

Harry nodded absently and Ron thought that he probably knew this already. "What do they do if the games go over?"

Ron shrugged. "I have no idea."

"Four days to figure out if I can salvage something I've ruined."

Ron grimaced. "Good luck with that," he shook his head. "All I know is I wouldn't want to be in your shoes, Harry."

Chapter 13: Just Say The Word

Just Say The Word-Chapter 13: Just Say The Word

Title: Just Say The Word

Author:HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: Lucky you, two chapters in one day. ;)

Chapter 13: Just Say The Word

Ginny was sick and tired of waiting. She was tired of waiting for games to start, tired of waiting for Portkeys to arrive; tired of waiting to drift off to sleep at night in a different hotel, tired of waiting for people to stop remembering that bloody article, with all its lies and accusations. But, mostly, she was tired of waiting for Harry bloody Potter.

Eleven days and not a single word from him. Nothing to indicate that he'd felt something change between them at the pub. She kept trying to tell herself that it was only in her head; Harry hadn't really felt anything between them. He was simply humoring her, or he was randier than he imagined and she was someone convenient to hold onto.

That wasn't fair, she knew, but it sure felt correct. For all she knew, he'd wandered away from the pub to find some other woman to be with, to shag his brains out and push the thought of little Ginny Weasley pining over him right out of his head.

It was after midnight when she finally Apparated to the alley behind George's shop and used her wand to open the lock on the back door. She trudged up the steps, thankfully remembering to skip the ones George refused to remove the charms on, muttering about her bed the whole way.

She was so tired she might not even make it to the bed—the sofa would be close enough.

Ginny's eyes went wide as she made it to the top step and saw a large vase, stuffed full of bright white lilies, standing huge in front of her door. They seemed to glow in the dark light of the step and Ginny blinked at them.

"Brogan Quinlan," she growled, stooping to gather the vase into her arms. "...can't take a bloody hint at all... should have sent the roses back..."

Her tiredness increased a hundred-fold thinking that she was going to have to write to Brogan and ask him

not to send expensive gifts like this. Not only would it possibly give off the wrong ideas—no doubt George had already sussed out the flowers' existence—but every gift she accepted from Brogan gave him a small spark of an idea that she may let him be a part of her life.

“What the hell am I going to do with him?” she asked, vanishing the now-dead roses and putting the lilies in their place.

She couldn't help but lean forward and take a deep breath of the sweet fragrance. It was more pungent than the roses, but Ginny liked the contrast from smelling the honey scent of the roses. Lilies had always been her favorite flower, and these huge Casa Blanca white ones were always the most beautiful.

Harry used to...

A flash of hope shot through her and Ginny fumbled to find a card in the mass of flowers and leaves. Tied around the neck of the clear glass vase was a thin white ribbon, and a small rectangle was attached.

Gin,

I hope your trip went well. The articles were brilliant.

Harry

She wasn't quite sure what to make of the flowers. In the past, Harry had only given her flowers when he knew he was in trouble, or knew she wasn't going to be happy about something he'd done.

But...this seemed different. The lilies were incredible and...

She just didn't know.

The message was so...generic. There was no mention of anything remotely regarding feelings or...or anything, really. He'd read her articles. He hoped her trip went well.

Big deal.

Suddenly, the flowers meant very little at all considering Harry hadn't communicated *anything* for eleven—no *twelve* ruddy days!

Twelve days that she'd been going insane trying to figure out why he had held her in the pub like he had. Was he trying to tell her something he just couldn't say with words? Was he just as confused as she was? Or was it simply what she'd feared, and he was looking for anyone to offer companionship.

Some of the beauty of the flowers faded in Ginny's frustration and she stumbled off to bed, thankful she was exhausted enough to sleep, rather than dwell on what it all might mean.

“I think that shot will work really well, Will,” Ginny complimented the photographer after wrapping up her quick interview with Wimbourne's celebrated new Seeker, Dexter Kearney. The man had played an amazing

game and Ginny was excited to see a player with such a spark in his eye. He was young—just a year out of Hogwarts—and Ginny predicted that, barring injuries, he'd be playing for a very long time.

"Thanks, Ginny," Will shrugged, blushing just a bit as he put his camera into his bag. "I'm sure Witch Weekly will want to do a much more salacious interview than you just did."

Ginny rolled her eyes. No doubt. Dexter Kearney was young, athletic, and extremely good looking. His humble, blushing face would be plastered all over teenage witches' bedrooms in no time.

"Stick to the basics," Ginny shook her head. "That's what we're all about."

Will nodded and slung his bag over his shoulder. "Two days off before the big Tornadoes match."

"You've earned them," Ginny cheered softly as she tucked her notes away in her own bag. Ideas for a unique spin on the article were floating through her head and she wondered if Latham would let her make this one just a bit more personal. She'd write it both ways, she decided, and let him choose which side of the player he liked most.

"You should take a few days too, Ginny," Will said with a laugh and a wink. "You've been running at top speed for weeks now."

Ginny smirked and tried to play the suggestion off. But the truth was she *was* very tired. Working and focusing on the games helped to keep her mind from *other* thoughts.

The flowers from Harry were still on her table, just as fresh as ever. But it had been another four days and no sign of Harry. No note. No communication whatsoever.

Doubts that had, at first, sulked around the shadowy edges of her mind, now swarmed in, crowding most everything else out.

"Oh, looks like you have a visitor," Will whispered under his breath as they exited the Wimbourne stadium.

Ginny looked up and blinked at seeing Harry leaning against the side of the stands, looking straight at her.

"I'll, er...I'll see you in a couple of days, Ginny," Will said, backing away slightly. His eyes darted between her and Harry as if there might be a grand fireworks show.

"Thanks, Will," Ginny said, shifting about nervously.

Harry, thankfully, looked almost as nervous as she felt. That helped immensely.

"Hi," he greeted, the corner of his mouth lifting into a half-smile.

"Hi," Ginny said, hoisting her bag higher on her shoulder and clutching her cloak tighter around her.

"I hear I missed a good game," Harry said, nodding toward the stadium.

Ginny took a breath and forced a smile. "Yeah, it was...a great game."

Harry nodded and scratched the back of his neck.

In that instant, Ginny simply wanted to go home. She felt bad because he'd obviously come here to talk to her. He was standing in the snowy cold, waiting for her. But he still hadn't said anything.

"I, er...I wanted to talk to you," he offered.

"Okay," Ginny shrugged. "Talk."

Harry stared at her, his mouth opening and closing several times. "I...did you get my flowers?"

The damned flowers. The flowers that she'd stared at too often, because she had absolutely no idea what they meant. Were they a peace offering between them? Were they just something he sent a friend? Were they some sort of declaration of something he just couldn't bring himself to say aloud?

"I got them," she said carefully.

Harry smiled and seemed to relax. His shoulders dropped a fraction of an inch before hoisting back up. "Did you...lilies are still your favorites, aren't they?"

"The flowers were lovely," Ginny said again, carefully.

"I just thought...maybe we could go somewhere and...talk. Somewhere less...cold."

Ginny's annoyance and frustration crested, making her incredibly drained. "Harry...what mood are you going to use today when we talk?"

Her question perplexed him and he scowled, his eyes glazing. "What do you mean?"

"I just want to know where I stand with you right now, in this moment," Ginny clarified, taking a step forward. "Are you going to be friendly Harry today, smiling and joking? Are you going to pick a fight, yelling and making me feel horrible? Or are you going to find something else to feel, because I have to tell you, I can't quite keep up. Two weeks ago, in that pub, I thought you and I really made some progress toward at least understanding each other—we talked and listened and..." She couldn't bring herself to admit that she'd felt a connection between them. He needed to say it first.

"And then nothing. Nothing for twelve days."

"I sent flowers," Harry said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "I delivered them myself."

Ginny stared at him, speechless.

Dusky night was starting to fall, bringing with it low, grey clouds and the scent of snow. Ginny shivered as she watched him.

"You don't even know what you want," she concluded, feeling even more forlorn now. She had hoped he would at least take some sort of stand about them—either way. It was almost as painful thinking about being

together now as it was apart. And, honestly, Ginny just needed to know.

If Harry wanted her, wanted a relationship with her, then she would give it everything she had. If not...she'd be broken, but she'd limp along until she was strong enough to run again.

"When you figure that out, you know where to find me."

Harry opened his mouth to respond, but Ginny spun on her heel and Apparated into the night.

"Bloody, bloody man," she growled into the darkness of the hallway that led to the stairway.

"Awww, come on, is that any way to greet me?"

The thick Irish brogue could only be one person.

Ginny blinked up and nearly laughed at Brogan Quinlan, grinning down at her from where he was perched on the top step. He waggled his eyebrows wildly, and ruffled his hair in a roguish manner. His bright blue hair.

"What the hell are you doing here, Brogan?" Ginny demanded. She leaned against the railing and looked up at him.

"I come all this way to show you the new hair, and all I get is you cursing at me?"

Ginny shook her head and slowly walked up the stairs. "The stairs are charmed," she informed him, nodding toward his head.

"Gathered that," he nodded, grinning as she got close. He slowly unfolded, towering over her. She'd forgotten in the months since she'd seen him just how big he actually was. Really, it was amazing he managed to keep his bulk up on a broom.

"Invite me in, love, and we'll have us a talk."

The self invitation, and all that it implied, made shake her head. Ginny was too tired to deal with this right now. Why tonight, of all nights, did Quinlan chose to show up, ignoring what she wanted?

"I'm too tired," she tried to beg off, leaning against the door and putting her bag between them. "And I really need to start on my article."

"It can wait," Brogan nodded, leaning over her and lifting his hand, tracing a finger along her cheek.

Ginny shuddered and ducked away from him. She honestly didn't want to hurt him—physically, or his feelings—but she would if she needed to.

"You haven't been sleeping," he chided gently. "Come on, we always have us a chat and you cry on my unusually large shoulder and then..." He trailed off, grinning widely again. Ginny could guess at what he was inferring and it made her skin prickle unpleasantly.

"You came a long way for a shag that isn't going to happen, Quinlan."

"Can't blame me for trying," he shrugged, his smile slipping. "Honestly, Gin, how are you?"

"I'm fine," she tried bravely. He needed to leave. This wasn't the place for him. "Or, I will be when you go."

She winced when he shook his head. Even the direct approach was going to fail tonight, it seemed.

"I'm not leaving until you at least stop lying to me," he pressed. "I know you don't remember us, Ginny, but you do owe me at least the truth."

Ginny's head thumped back against the door and, against her better judgment, she unlocked the door and backed in.

"One cup of tea, and then you're going," she informed him. "And if you don't—"

"I know," he chuckled. "You'll remove my arse forcibly. Not that that's not a fantastic idea, but we'll worry about it when we get to it."

"You're not just leaving my flat, Brogan," Ginny said as she tossed her bag on the floor near the door and moved into the kitchen to make an incredibly fast cup of tea, "but you're leaving England."

Brogan sighed and looked around, his eyes roving over her furniture. He played with a lamp on the table next to the sofa, flicking it on and off again.

"Maybe I've decided to move back here."

The hand holding her wand to fill the tea kettle jerked, sending water all over the counter.

"Er..."

"I'm having you on," Brogan shrugged. "I don't think I'll ever come back here. There's obviously nothing for me here."

Ginny blinked at his tone and then noticed he was staring at the flowers across the room.

"Did he..."

"Yeah," Ginny admitted. "He did."

Brogan's face twisted as he shoved his hands in his pockets. "Good."

"We're still...working on things," Ginny admitted, tapping the hob with her wand to light the water under the kettle. "It's...complicated."

"All good things are, yeah?" Brogan said, sinking down onto the sofa. His head rested against the back and Ginny studied him closely.

He was an incredibly attractive man. Big and broad shouldered, Ginny could see how the girls always seemed

to swoon around him. His face was well proportioned and his light, honey-brown hair was stylishly cut to look messy. But...there was nothing there for her; Ginny felt nothing but a rising sense of panic when she looked at him. He had been a perfect gentleman, mostly, during the two times she'd spoken with him.

She knew he was in love with her—or the Ginny he believed she was. She could honestly understand the attraction that someone like herself, all alone in the world, may have felt for him. But she wasn't that person. And, despite all his flaws, she was still in love with Harry.

"What are you doing here, Brogan?" she asked again, moving into the living room.

He blinked up at her. "I just...I just needed to see you again."

"You need to stop," Ginny said, shaking her head. "No more flowers, no more notes. And you can't just... show up here like this. You and I...whatever we may have had is in the past. I don't even remember it."

"That's not as easy as it sounds," he grimaced.

"I'm sure it's not."

"I just...I need to know that you're alright," he finally said, standing and coming to stand in front of her. He reached down and took her hands in his, squeezing them gently. "I need to know that you're happy and that...that things are working out for you."

"It's a process," Ginny admitted. She wasn't going to lie to him—she just couldn't. "But I could never be fully happy if I didn't try and do what my heart wants."

He opened his mouth to say something, and then closed it, nodding. "I always thought I could give you what you wanted."

"I'm sorry," Ginny said, looking up at him. "You'll find the right woman out there, but...it's not me."

"I'd give you anything you want, Gin. A house here in England, a big family—a million babies if you want," he offered, bending his knees just a bit so he could look into her eyes.

Ginny chuckled, pulling away from him. "Do I look like the type to want a houseful of children?"

"Anything you want, I'd give it," Brogan promised. "You know that." He sighed. "But you want babies with black hair and green eyes, not huge, strapping Irish ones like mine would be."

Ginny stared at the flowers, ignoring his comment about what type of children had been in her fantasies, and the way it made her heart thump loudly.

Brogan sighed and stood next to her, looking at the table as well. "If I could give you everything, I would."

"I appreciate that."

The kettle squealed loudly, but they both ignored it.

"If what you want is him..."

"I do," Ginny admitted. It was going to be a struggle, especially because Harry still didn't know what he wanted, but she was going to see this to the end.

She was actually rather disappointed that Harry hadn't come after her. She'd directly challenged him and he'd backed down. It was frustrating seeing him fall back into what he'd apparently been doing for years.

"Shall I go gather him up, drag him over here by his testicles?" He chuckled and Ginny smirked. She didn't protest when his arms came around her shoulders. His hug was tight, but it didn't last long. He stayed close when they released, however, and lifted her chin with his finger.

"You're an amazing woman, Ginny Weasley, and he's a fool if—

A loud crack rent the stillness and both Ginny and Brogan jumped, pointing their wands at the intruder.

Harry Potter stood, his hair ruffled horribly, his eyes wide behind his glasses, and his chest heaving.

"I *know* what I want!"

Harry watched as Ginny Apparated away from him, leaving him in the cold air of Wimbourne, the frosty air closing in around him.

You don't even know what you want.

Ginny's words echoed around him and Harry panted out a breath, forcing away the frustration. He *knew* what he wanted. He wanted her.

Ron had said it wasn't going to be easy, but this... She hadn't even listened to him. She'd stood there feet away from him and not even heard as he asked her to go someplace they could talk.

He blinked in confusion several times before shaking his head. Had he misread the situation? Did Ginny now want nothing to do with him?

The urge to Apparate to Ron and Hermione's to talk to Hermione was great, but it was late, and Harry knew Ron would only smile in that annoying, knowing way he had and proclaim that it was lucky Harry had come out of the first encounter with no bats flying out any orifices.

No. That wasn't going to help at all right now.

Harry Apparated home; to his silent flat and the cat that hated him. He stood in the entryway, back pressed to the door, for a long time, staring at nothing.

He remembered, vividly, the day he and Ginny had walked through the door to this place, seen the dusty, rather cramped interior, and loved it. He could still see Ginny holding her arms wide and spinning in the middle of the living room, laughing.

"You'll do well here, Harry," she'd told him. Harry had clamped down his jaw, holding back the invitation for her to move in with him. She was only barely seventeen, after all, and going back to Hogwarts in a few short weeks. There would be time for that.

"I haven't," Harry whispered to the stillness, "I haven't done well at all."

These walls had seen a lot over the years—entirely too much, and yet, not nearly enough. The first years here were amazing, wonderfully wild years that made Harry smile. He and Ginny had been so passionate about life, about each other. And then she was gone, and yet...it still felt like she lived here for quite some time. It wasn't until he'd come back from seeing her play for Spain, his heart enclosed in a tiny box inside him, that he'd even considered the fact that this wasn't her home anymore.

And it hadn't really been his from that point on, either. Yes, he lived here, but it wasn't home. It was a place to lay his head at night—when he could sleep—and a place to keep some of his things. But he also had a sofa in his office where he slept often. And some of his things were kept at the Burrow, up in the attic with the ghoul. Bits and pieces of him were scattered all over England.

But his heart had finally come back to England and was now, probably in London, furious with him.

"I know what I want," Harry said, quietly. Stupid Cat lifted his head and blinked at him before settling back down.

"I *know* what I want," Harry said, more forcefully, startling the cat. He repeated it again, even louder and Stupid Cat jumped off the sofa and sauntered into the kitchen, glaring at Harry over his shoulder.

When you figure that out, you know where to find me.

Harry's fist banged on the door behind him and he pushed away from it, running his hands through his hair. Why was she being so...so difficult?! Harry had finally figured out what he was going to say to her; after days and days of struggling, of trying to find just the right words to tell her that he wanted to see her again, that he wanted them to be together again.

And now those words were gone. He couldn't even remember what he'd planned to say, because she'd stolen the minute, taken it with her wherever she went.

"Damnit," Harry hissed, pacing behind the sofa. "Why is she being so stubborn?! I sent the damned flowers, I wrote the damned card, I read her damned articles." Okay, so the last one he would have done anyway—he'd always read every issue of Quidditch Weekly, but...still.

"I asked her to talk with me, what more does she want?"

Stupid Cat peered out from the kitchen, longingly staring at his spot on the sofa.

"Oh, go find somewhere else, you damned animal, it's *my* house, not yours!"

It wasn't the first time that Harry had yelled at the cat, but it was the first time the cat seemed to listen to him.

"Damn cat," Harry hissed, watching as the black tail disappeared around the hallway. "Damn witch," Harry

hissed as his thoughts turned back to Ginny. Really, Ginny and the cat were entirely too much alike; opinionated and stubborn to a fault. He could never get the cat to listen, and Ginny had walked away tonight without even hearing him out.

When you figure that out, you know where to find me.

Oh, he knew where to find her alright! He should just...

Almost like a light going off in his brain, Harry's whole body stilled. "When you figure that out, you know where to find me," he repeated. That was almost an...an invitation.

Was this some sort of test Ginny had handed him? And what, exactly was it? Did he go after her and win? Or was he supposed to take more time to figure it out and then come to her?

"Why does this have to be so hard?" Harry begged the silence. "I...I know what I want," he heaved, rubbing his eyes under his glasses. "I want her." Saying the words aloud made his chest feel tight, and warm, and wonderful, so he said them again. Over and over until he was completely out of breath.

...you know where to find me...

Yes. He did.

Harry closed his eyes and Apparated, hoping that all of him would make it when he finally arrived. The crack booming in his ears was almost deafening, but Harry knew it was sometimes like that when you used a lot of emotion to power your Apparition.

Ginny's tiny flat materialized around him and he opened his mouth, blurting why he had come, only to find two wands trained on him.

Ginny.

And...The Wanker.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

Both Harry and Ginny said the same thing at the same time, although it was directed at different people.

Harry lowered the wand that had come up automatically, but he didn't put it away. Instead, he stared at Brogan Quinlan who looked incredibly smug, standing there next to Ginny.

"Harry!"

He blinked when Ginny yelled his name and forced his eyes away from the huge Beater.

"I want you," he said, his voice cracking in the middle. Quinlan snorted, but Harry ignored him, taking a step toward Ginny. "I want...you."

Ginny stared at him, disbelief, and frustration, and...relief, all warring for positions on her face.

"What?"

"You told me I don't know what I want," Harry said, forcing himself to take another step closer. He didn't want to do this in front of Quinlan—wanted more than anything for the man to show a little decency and Apparate out, leaving them alone—but he'd tell her no matter what. Harry wasn't going to let her get away again without chasing. "But I do," he shook his head. "I want you, Ginny."

This was her test, he knew it. And he had almost failed by not following immediately. But he was here now.

Her jaw locked and Harry prepared himself to be hexed with something painful. "It's taken you fourteen days to figure that out?"

"No," Harry shook his head. "I've known since...since the pub."

Quinlan made a noise, but Harry forced himself not to look at the man. If he did, Harry knew he wouldn't be able to hold himself back from hitting The Wanker. It would probably break his hand, but it would be worth it just to get one good shot in.

"You..." Ginny's eyes widened and she took a step closer, suddenly seeming much more imposing than she should, considering how small she was. "And you let me..."

"I didn't know how to tell you."

"You open your damned mouth, Potter, and tell her," Quinlan interjected.

Harry spun on the defensive, his wand pointed directly at the man's heart, and his knees flexed, waiting for an attack.

"Bugger off!" Harry warned. "No one wants you here. She doesn't want to be with you."

Quinlan's face darkened and Harry was pleased that he'd hit a nerve.

"Seems to me she's not jumping for the chance to be back in your bed either, Potter."

Harry took a step forward, a spell tickling the tip of his tongue. "You bastard!"

"Stop it!" Ginny yelled moving between them, her back toward Harry. "Stop it, both of you!"

Harry tried to nudge her out of the way—if Quinlan wanted to start something he'd definitely get more than he bargained for—but Ginny wouldn't be moved.

"You're not welcome here," Harry continued, knowing this was headed downhill quickly. But he just couldn't seem to stop. Ron's words about Quinlan kept echoing in his mind. This was something that he should have done years ago—first when Ginny broke things off with him, and then when Harry had gone to one of Ginny's games and seen them together. Harry *should* have broken his nose then. Ginny was *his* and she always

would be. "Just go home."

"Harry, you're not helping things," Ginny said as she spun and wrapped her arms around his chest. "You're making things so much worse." He blinked down at her, feeling his face heat at having her so close. The urge to lean down and kiss her was great, but he knew it was simply out of spite for the other man—staking his claim on what the other man wanted, but would never get to have again.

Ginny must have felt the electricity between them because her cheeks went red. "Please don't do this," she begged. "Brogan was just leaving. He and I...we were just talking and...he was going."

Harry stared deep into her eyes and then glowered up at Quinlan who looked quickly away. Coward.

"I'm leaving," Quinlan confirmed taking a step towards the door. "I still think you're making a mistake, Ginny —"

"By not being with you?" Harry demanded, taking a step toward the man and dragging Ginny with him. "How could that ever be a mistake? You're an arse, Quinlan. A lying, cheating arse." Quinlan laughed loudly and Ginny let her arms slip away, swearing as Harry lunged forward. "You were never good enough for her."

"And you think you are?" Quinlan challenged back, moving until he stood directly in front of Harry, looking down on him.

"No, I'm not," Harry yelled right back. "But I'll work every damned day I can to prove that—"

"Stop it!" Ginny yelled, jerking both men from their argument. She was screaming, her fists clenched at her sides. "You stupid, egotistical...men! You're both such bastards! Right now I don't want either of you!" Her wand flashed into sight and Harry's eyes went wide.

"Shit!" he yelled, trying to duck behind Brogan, but it was too late, both of them got hit with a sickly green light and the crack of Ginny's Apparition shattered the night.

Harry flew backwards, holding his nose as something—Harry knew they were bats—clawed at his face.

"Damn," Quinlan groaned, lying next to Harry. "I hate it when she does that."

Harry, despite the need to be sick at what was happening to his face, felt a stab of pride that Ginny had apparently used that spell on Quinlan before. He'd never experienced it before now, thank Merlin.

"I have to find her," Harry mumbled, scrambling to find his wand and clean himself up. "Can't let her get away again."

Quinlan groaned and used his sleeve along his face, trying to clean the mess up. "Potter...don't muck this up. She's in love with you."

Harry wanted to quip something incredibly nasty back, but he just nodded. The driving need to find Ginny and straighten things out between them was too great.

"Get the hell out, Quinlan," Harry warned, wiping at his face again, "and don't come back."

“I won’t, unless she asks me to.”

Harry shook his head and glared down at the man. “She won’t ever have a reason to do that.”

Quinlan opened his mouth to respond, but Harry didn’t stay to see what he’d say. He had to find Ginny.

Chapter 14: You're A Part Of Everything

Just Say The Word-Chapter 14: You're A Part Of Everything

Title: Just Say The Word

Author:HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R (hard R on this chapter)

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Chapter 14: You're A Part Of Everything

Ginny hadn't chosen anywhere specific to Apparate to—in fact, she hadn't meant to Apparate completely, but more to simply escape the situation. It shouldn't have surprised her that the Burrow, with lights blazing and a thick trail of smoke coming out of the chimney, appeared before her.

She stared at it, shivering in the cold, snowy night, and wrapping her arms around her body. In her haste to escape the whole mess at her flat, Ginny hadn't bothered to grab her cloak. She'd simply wanted to get away from those two arrogant men, who were probably killing each other right now, on her living room rug. If they got blood on it...

There was no way she could face that right now—she wasn't going back tonight. She could stay here at the Burrow—there was always room for her here. She'd need to explain why she'd left her own home and that Harry was probably going to end up in prison for killing Brogan, but they'd always take her in.

As she began to walk through the snow, swearing when it fell into her shoes and got her feet wet, Ginny realized that today was Bill's birthday. She'd sent a card on ahead to him and told them she'd be here if the game didn't go long. And then, with Harry showing up outside the stadium, and then Brogan at the flat, she'd completely forgotten about it.

That realization made her progress falter. Everyone was bound to be here. And everyone would see her red face and puffy eyes and...they'd know something had happened. She couldn't even pass it off as her coming in late. They always knew too much.

But the only other option was going back to her flat, facing Harry, and possibly Brogan, again. It's what she *should* do, but the warmth and light of the Burrow drew her in. It was too much to resist. She'd be welcomed, and loved, and not judged here.

And, if they were having a party, maybe she could be distracted enough not to think of what had gone on today. It was all so confusing. Things with Harry were like that...confusing.

What had Harry said?

The words rang in her head and Ginny staggered toward the back porch. Maybe her mother would have a potion to make this whole night—the whole last fortnight—go away. Maybe she could go to sleep tonight and wake up in the morning with no memory of any of this—and just have Harry’s love.

He hadn’t said the words; hadn’t said that he loved her. Ginny knew that wanting her and loving her were two different things. But...at least he was feeling something.

She was angry that the chance to speak to each other tonight—to really get everything out between them—was gone. It had been ruined by two men who refused to listen to each other, let alone her.

The back door to the kitchen squeaked, as it always did. Ginny found that comforting, even if it had always announced that someone was trying to sneak in. She suspected one of her parents charmed the damned thing to publicize a quiet entrance, but she’d never caught them doing it.

Ginny hoped her red cheeks from the cold would help hide the fact that she was flushed and breathing hard and her eyes were red. No doubt her mother would be on her in a second, feeling her forehead and trying to pour Pepper-up potion down her throat. That would be fine, as long as she didn’t have to explain, in detail, why she’d shown up in the middle of everything.

“Hi, everyone.” She tried for a cheerful entry into the living room, and it seemed to be working for the most part. Ron peered at her a bit too closely and Ginny forced herself to move in the opposite direction as he did. If she could just take a minute to get her bearings, she could stop herself from blurting out the truth. “Sorry I’m late; the game went longer than expected.”

“Ginny!” Her mother bustled over, wrapping her in a hug, tutting when she felt how cold Ginny was. “Didn’t you bring a cloak? Goodness, Ginny, you’re going to catch your death out there in this weather.” Her hands ran up and down Ginny’s arms, creating warmth with the friction.

“I must have forgotten it,” Ginny excused, “I was in a hurry to get here.”

Her mother’s fussing was cut short, however, when a large group of small arms wrapped around Ginny, bringing with them high voices and giggles and squeals of excitement.

Ginny could always count on the kids to save her.

“Oi, look at all the short people!” she proclaimed, grinning down at them. “Uncle George must have been at it with his shrinking potion again.”

“Aunt Ginny!” Victoire giggled. “Uncle George hasn’t given us anything.”

Ginny stooped and lifted Rose into her arms. “No?” she asked, dropping her jaw in a theatrical way. “George, you’re slipping! There are prime candidates for product testing right here and you’ve not given them anything?!”

All the kids giggled and pushed harder at her knees, threatening to topple her over.

“Let Aunt Ginny breathe, you little heathens,” Bill said, snatching Christophe under one arm, and Apolline

under the other, grinning when his children squealed with delight.

“Happy Birthday, Bill,” Ginny cheered. “I didn’t get you anything—figured my presence here was enough.” The truth was, Bill’s gift was back at her flat, on her table. But Ginny wasn’t about to admit that she’d left it there.

“I don’t need anything,” Bill assured her, leaning in to give her a kiss. “Are you...your eyes are red.”

“Just the cold outside,” Ginny excused, poking Rose’s belly so that the little girl would erupt in giggles.

Bill didn’t look convinced, but he moved further away, taking two of his children with him.

“Aunt Ginny,” Victoire said, pulling back and grinning with a glowing face. “Teddy wrote me the most wonderful letter. He told me all about Hogwarts and all the exciting things that are happening there. And he says that he’ll be sad next year if I’m not in Hufflepuff, but that we’ll still see each other anyway. And that his favorite class is Transfiguration, even though Potions is fun, and Neville makes Herbology so interesting. Teddy almost got eaten by a giant Chinese Chomping Cabbage! I can’t wait to go next year!”

Everything spilled out of the young girl with an exuberance that made Ginny simply happy. She remembered being ten—although at ten she’d already been gushing about Harry Potter.

“I’m excited for you, Vic,” Ginny said, running her hand over her niece’s long, golden-red hair. “Hogwarts is a wonderful place. And, just think, you’ll have a friend already there.”

“A friend who has ruined the whole thing,” George grumbled, lifting Gideon to his back and trying to pry Fabian’s arms from around Ginny’s leg. “He told her that she didn’t have to wrestle a troll to be sorted.” George looked thoroughly put out and Ginny laughed.

“Maybe they change the sorting requirements, depending on who it is,” she offered. Victoire giggled, holding her hand over her mouth and George beamed at Ginny.

“Hear that, Fabian, you’ll be troll wrestling in no time!”

“Yay!” Little Fabian cheered, finally loosening his grip.

“Good to see you, Ginny,” George said, nudging her. “You’ve been busy lately, haven’t been around the shop.”

Ginny shrugged. “Lots of games to get to.” It was true, even though she had been avoiding everyone a bit lately. Things had just been weighing on her mind so much, and everyone in her family had a way of watching her...it was disconcerting. The image of Brogan, sitting at the top of her stairs, popped into her mind and Ginny winced. “Remind me later,” she said quietly to George, “you and I need to have a talk about how you secure your shop.”

George raised an eyebrow but she waived him away. “Not now, just...later.”

“Okay,” he shrugged.

Perhaps she shouldn't have said anything, because now George would probably go straight to Diagon Alley to figure out what she was talking about. At least he could clean up the bodies.

"Come on, Rosie-girl," Ron said as he lifted his daughter out of Ginny's arms. "Mummy's tired, we better take her home."

"Home!" Rose cheered, clapping her pudgy little hands together gleefully. Ginny smiled and straightened the little girl's jumper. How wonderful to be so young and innocent.

Ginny sighed and rubbed her face harshly, wishing she could just go back home. But she didn't know if they were still there, and she wasn't about to face that again. She couldn't handle it right now.

I want you.

It couldn't be real, could it? After all this time, months of her waiting and praying that Harry would feel something other than hatred and loathing for her, had it really, finally, happened?

It was all too much to deal with right now, and the extreme highs and lows of the day weren't helping her cope at all.

"You look knackered, Ginny," Ron said with a chuckle. "Everything alright?"

The urge to confess everything to those crystal blue eyes looking down at her was great, but Ginny knew what would happen.

"Fine," she said. "Just been busy lately."

Ron peered at her and Ginny squirmed. "Seen Harry lately?"

She should have expected directness from Ron, but it shocked her all the same.

"Er...yeah, tonight, actually."

A slow smile spread over his face, and then slipped off. "Did he...did he tell you?"

"Ron..." Ginny rubbed her forehead and glanced around, hoping not everyone was staring at her. Her face felt red and she was sure she was flashing like some beacon, drawing everyone's attention. "Harry and I...we didn't get much of a chance to talk. He... I had to come here."

"Sod the party," Ron hissed, lowering his voice until it was just between the two of them. "You should have stayed and listened to him."

"Ron," Ginny warned, "just...just don't."

"He mucked it up," Ron sighed, throwing his arm in the air. People were starting to notice their whispered conversation now and Ginny felt her face heat. This wasn't what she wanted right now, to have to explain that Harry may finally be feeling something for her, yet she'd run out.

Sometime over the past two weeks, Ginny had convinced herself that Harry would never fancy her again, let alone love her. She didn't like the idea at all, but she'd come to accept that it was bound to happen. Fourteen days left to drift and be battered by the storm of her own doubts, fears, and emotions was too much.

So when Harry had burst into her flat and declared that he knew what he wanted...Ginny's mind had begun to shut down. There was an overwhelming sense of joy, but over it all the shadow of the idea that it wasn't real, that it would be stolen from her by the same force that had taken so much from her already.

Surely something she'd done in a past life—or maybe even in this life—had sentenced her to all of this angst and drama over her simply being happy. It, apparently, wasn't allowed.

And Harry...well, that was a whole different story.

Even his pronouncement today, that he wanted to be with her, was shaky, in her mind. If it had come earlier, at the Quidditch pitch, or anywhere but blurted in front of a man who Harry admitted he hated, it would have been so much more meaningful.

She didn't doubt his words, really. Maybe she doubted the strength behind them, and the real feeling. She knew he felt *something* because she'd felt it between them at the pub, and then again tonight when she'd held him back from Brogan. But she knew he was fighting feeling anything for her with all that he had. And that made her sadder than almost anything.

"It was so simple," Ron sighed, "and he went and mucked it up. Only Harry could do it, you know." Ron looked extremely irritated, like he might just march over and throttle Harry, forgetting that he was shaking and crushing little Rose in his grip. When the girl squirmed, Ron let her slide down him and she toddled off to her mother, who was watching the situation between Ron and Ginny intently from her seat on the sofa.

"It was me," Ginny admitted, shaking her head. "I just...just needed some space."

Ron stared at her for a minute. "He's sincere, you know."

But Ginny couldn't hear this right now, and she certainly couldn't hear it from Ron's lips. "I need him to tell me, Ron. I appreciate it, but..."

"You're right," he nodded, not looking convinced, but more...resigned. "It needs to be him."

"Thank you," Ginny said softly, fidgeting in place. Suddenly, the Burrow was too crowded. There were too many eyes watching her and Ginny felt the weight of all the stares.

She closed her eyes against the tears that burned in the back of her eyes, hating that she seemed to cry so easily these days. All it took was a simple thought of what she'd lost—through no fault of her own (or maybe it was her fault, but she didn't remember)—to make her act just like Cho Bloody Chang, with her nose always running and her cheeks always wet.

Maybe Harry was right to be wary of something between them; if Ginny was going to be a human hose-pipe, she didn't blame him, really.

"Just...just hear him out when he finally gets it together, yeah?" Ron asked, peering at her again.

"I'll do my best," was all that Ginny could promise. "I just..." But the words died in her throat, because Harry was here now, standing in the doorway, his chest heaving much like it had been earlier tonight when he'd Apparated into her flat.

Cheers and chaos erupted around her, kids cheering Harry's name and rushing toward him. But Harry didn't seem to notice any of it, his eyes were locked on Ginny and everything seemed to be in slow motion.

They stared at each other long enough for the room to take on a horribly uncomfortable feeling.

"Can I speak with you alone, Ginny?" Harry asked, his voice tight.

Ginny winced, not sure what emotion was driving Harry right now. His shoulders were tense and he looked very...powerful.

While her brain was screaming at her to stop and think about the situation, her heart won and she nodded.

Bill's solid hands closed gently on her shoulders and he cleared his throat. "Anything you need to say, Harry, you can say right here. We're all family."

Ginny looked up over her shoulder, stunned at the coldness in Bill's tone. His scared face was rigid and he stared at Harry, perhaps feeling the intensity surrounding the man.

"It's okay—" Ginny started, but Ron cut her off.

"I think it's best if they have a bit of privacy."

"Ron," Bill scolded, "Harry looks on the verge of ripping someone's head off, I'd prefer if it wasn't—"

"I won't hurt her."

"He won't hurt me."

Harry and Ginny spoke at the same time and Ginny patted Bill's hand, taking a step forward. The restraining hold fell away and Ginny swallowed thickly, staring at Harry.

His green eyes were blazing and he looked incredibly attractive. Her face flushed and Ginny looked away, trying to give a reassuring smile at her family as she walked through the door Harry held open for her.

The Burrow should have been his first stop. Really, it was logical that Ginny would go there, and not anywhere else.

But Harry hadn't been thinking logically when he left her flat. He'd been itching to go back in and pound Quinlan's face, just for good measure. He'd never felt like this before—although it was more because Harry hadn't ever let himself dwell on the idea of someone else with Ginny, even though he knew Quinlan had always been there.

That whole concept was more painful than Harry wanted to admit. Ginny's relationship with Quinlan—whatever it had been—had lasted longer than his romantic relationship with Ginny. He couldn't even think of that without making himself a little sick.

Then again, it was Quinlan who Ginny had ordered out of her flat. She hadn't been about to toss Harry—maybe she'd only meant to hit Quinlan with that stupid hex, and Harry had simply been a casualty. That thought survived one more step closer to the Burrow before it evaporated. Ginny had meant it. He'd seen that blazing, fiery look in her eyes when the light flashed and knew he was in trouble.

He couldn't help but be aroused by the entire situation, even though it was incredibly inappropriate. Ginny had wrapped her arms around *him* in front of another man, and had pleaded with him to stop. She had stood in front of *him* and not the other man. Silly as it was, she had protected him. That, more than anything, gave Harry the drive to keep walking.

It gave him the courage to Apparate to Ron and Hermione's dark house, to search up and down Diagon Alley, and to tear through the Leaky Cauldron like a madman, asking Hannah if she'd seen Ginny.

Susan had been there, sitting on a stool at the bar, and Harry actually, for the very first time, hadn't cared that he looked slightly insane running into her. He'd been so focused on finding Ginny that no one else mattered right then.

"I need to tell her," Harry nodded, reaching for the back door of the Burrow. He just hoped she was now calm enough not to hex him again before he even got the words out of his mouth. He really would prefer it if she would come somewhere private with him, as well. But if it needed to be done in front of everyone...

The door squeaked loudly, but Harry barely heard it. He was too determined right now to do anything but search for Ginny. When his eyes finally found her, standing next to Ron and looking incredibly lost, Harry's chest tightened.

I'm in love with her.

He remembered this feeling—this all-consuming, can't-think-of-anything-but-her, need-to-hold-her feeling. It tore at his heart and he felt like the stupidest man on earth for ever turning his back on her and what they'd had together.

Their eyes met and the room swirled around them.

Somewhere Molly was welcoming Harry in. Somewhere a hoard of the shortest Weasleys were charging toward him. Somewhere people were beginning to whisper about the intensity of the stare.

But none of that mattered right now.

"Can I speak with you alone, Ginny?" The words echoed in his ears and Harry watched as Ginny tightened. Her cheeks flushed and her breathing sped up, making her chest lift and fall. Harry pulled his eyes away from her breasts and forced himself to watch the way her face showed every emotion she was feeling.

Bill's attempt at forcing them to speak in front of everyone didn't deter Harry. He'd confess every single thing he was thinking right now if only Ginny would listen. He was sure everyone wouldn't approve of how he'd

tell her that he wanted to be inside her right now as she looked at him with that passionate look—but they'd get over it.

He wasn't going to hurt Ginny; the fact that she knew that—still trusted him that much—injected courage right into Harry's soul.

She passed him and Harry had to clamp down on the urge to reach for her hand. His fingers itched to touch her skin, to feel it come alive again underneath him. And not just sexually—although he certainly wouldn't object to that. Ginny's skin had always held a warmth about it, something that set Harry on fire whenever he brushed his fingers along it. He needed that now; craved it like being addicted to a potion.

"You found me."

Her words were, at once, tired and hopeful.

"I looked all over," Harry admitted once the door closed behind them. There would be a dozen ears pressed to it in a second, but that didn't matter. "I should have known..."

"I..." Ginny trailed off, finally looking at him. The blazing look was gone now, replaced with uncertainty and doubt. "You didn't kill Brogan, did you?"

He laughed, surprising both of them. "No. Wanted to. Didn't."

"Good," Ginny nodded, taking half a step closer to him. Her hand lifted and she looked like she wanted to touch him, but then she forced it down.

Harry moved closer. "I came tonight to tell you something."

Ginny nodded and stared just below his eyes.

"I'm in love with you."

The words rolled off his tongue like they always should have. Like they'd never left it.

But Ginny shook her head. "You hate me."

"No," he denied, shaking his head. He lost the war with his will when his fingers brushed the soft skin of her wrist. "I...maybe I did, a little. I hated your choices—hated my own choices. But I love you more."

"Oh."

Her eyelashes fluttered and she finally looked into his eyes. Harry took a breath.

"I love you," he said it again. "And I've been an arse."

Ginny's chest rose and fell and she looked down at where his fingers were now gently tracing her own.

"An unforgivable arse."

“Prove it,” she challenged. The phrase trickled out and shocked them both.

“Wha—? Prove that I’ve been an arse? I thought that I’d done plenty of that.”

She must have decided it was a good idea because she haltingly pulled her hand from his and crossed her arms. “Prove that you...that you...”

“That I love you,” he inserted, because it seemed like she couldn’t say the words.

“You disappeared for two weeks, Harry. *Two weeks* I was left to worry that I’d done something horribly wrong, or that I’d mucked everything up. Or that you’d actually read that rubbish in the press and believed that I’d deceived you, or drugged you with some sort of Veela potion.”

Harry winced as her voice rose. It was what he feared would happen and he needed some way to cut her off, to make her listen again.

“I was trying to get it all straight in my head,” he tried, knowing she wouldn’t hear him. She was into her stride now, pacing back and forth, her arms swinging wide with each gesture she made.

“You have no idea what that does to a person, Harry. How many nights I lay there, trying to decide if I’d imagined the way you held me in that pub, the way your eyes...looked right through me—”

“You didn’t imagine it,” Harry shook his head. “I’ve been in love with you since I was sixteen, Ginny.”

“And then...nothing,” Ginny continued over the top of him.

Damn, she was far too attractive when she was worked up. Harry was getting thoroughly distracted watching the way the flush of her cheeks traveled down her neck and onto the small bit of her chest he could see. The blazing look was back and Harry had to swallow to keep control.

“You want proof?” he finally demanded, stepping forward and wrapping his hands around her shoulders.

Ginny blinked at him, stunned that he had interrupted her.

“You want proof,” he repeated, turning it from a question into a statement. If that’s what she wanted...what could he do? “I can prove I’m sincere,” he whispered, sliding his hands down to capture hers, “that I mean what I say.”

Ginny nodded, looking so young and vulnerable that it stole Harry’s breath away. He almost kissed her then, but, instead, tugged her toward the door that separated the kitchen and living room. She didn’t resist, but her eyes darted around as he pulled her into the room.

Any conversation that had existed—and Harry was fairly sure there hadn’t been much—died as Harry led Ginny straight into the middle of the room.

“Harry, I...” Ginny tried to pull her hands away from him, but he held tighter.

“You wanted proof,” he shrugged an apology for doing this in front of everyone. “I’m in love with you, Ginny Weasley,” he said, his voice quivering, but growing stronger when he ignored the family around them, pretended that half the crowd wasn’t cheering and the other half gasping their astonishment.

“I’ve been a complete arse,” he continued. “I was an arse all those years ago when I let you leave. And then again when I walked away from you. And for so many years. But I’m tired of being like that.”

Ginny’s eyes widened as he leaned in. Harry licked his lips once before pressing them against hers. She seemed shocked that he’d actually kissed her, and Harry persisted, brushing his tongue across the seam in her lips, thrilled when she opened up to him.

“I love you so much,” he whispered against her as they kissed. Ginny didn’t pull away and slowly her arms raised, wrapping around his neck and opening herself up fully in his embrace.

Ginny’s tongue tentatively reached into his mouth and traced along his top teeth—something she’d done years ago—and it made Harry shudder with desire. That small thing was enough to convince him that she accepted what he said—it didn’t mean everything between them was perfect, just that she wasn’t rejecting him.

Harry moaned and lifted her to him further, pouring as much emotion into the kiss as he could. She wanted proof. He only hoped this was good enough, because it was all he had.

“I never stopped loving you,” he said when they finally broke apart for air. “And I never will. I’m never going to walk away again, Ginny. Never.”

Ginny felt like she was drowning. Drowning in emotion. Drowning in Harry.

Drowning in love.

Her heart almost burst when Harry’s lips pressed to hers at first. It was overwhelming, and real, and alive all at the same time.

All of the sensations were overwhelming and Ginny’s brain shut down trying to process them when Harry’s tongue touched hers. She simply allowed herself to drown, knowing he was finally there to catch her.

“I never stopped loving you. And I never will. I’m never going to walk away again, Ginny. Never.”

The words brought tears to her eyes and she growled as she buried her face in Harry’s neck, burrowing in as far as she possibly could. Her fists held his shirt tightly, but Harry seemed to feel the same need, because he clung to her as well.

Slowly, the world came back into focus. Harry’s hand was stroking her hair and they rocked side to side.

Somebody let off a loud bang with their wand and Ginny jumped, realizing that all the children had crowded around them, dancing some primal, primitive dance with her and Harry the fire in the center. They whooped and cheered like native wild people.

Harry chuckled and his face heated as he looked around. Ginny chanced a glance and saw that her mother was crying in her father's arms. Bill looked torn between scolding them for snogging in front of his children, and laughing at the entire absurdness of the situation.

Ron and Hermione were the only ones who looked genuinely as if they'd been waiting forever for this moment to happen. And maybe they had.

"Enough already," George shouted, diving in to scatter the children away.

"I think," Harry said, trailing off as he looked down at her, "I think..."

"Take me home," Ginny whispered, squeezing him tightly. Ginny's knees wobbled and Harry held her up. She knew she couldn't stand right now, let alone Apparate. Her head was all over the place as Harry's proclamation rang in her head.

"Okay," he finally said. She heard him tell Ron something, but didn't even try to listen. She only heard the low rumble of Harry's voice under her ear.

This had to be true. Harry had kissed her in the same way he always had—possessive, and wonderful, and freeing. It was everything she'd missed all these months she'd been without it—or years. Everyone else believed it had been years...it must have been, even if Ginny felt it was only weeks...hours...minutes.

Her whole body tensed when Harry dual-Apparated them right out of the Burrow. But it wasn't to her flat that he took her.

"Oh," she said, lifting her head and looking around the dark living room of Harry's flat.

"If this isn't..."

"Just...just wasn't expecting," she shook her head. Ginny tilted her head back and really looked up at him, admiring the man he had become. He was still handsome as ever, but the years (there was the evidence again) had been very kind, making him even more attractive.

"Hi," he smiled, his fingers tracing her cheek. "You, er...you believe me?"

"I love you," she answered back, because it was the only thing she could say, and it was the only answer.

Harry grinned and kissed her again, taking his time this time, his tongue exploring while his hands pulled her hips to him. It was too close, and not close enough, at the same time.

Ginny shuddered, feeling the way his body moved against hers. This was so familiar.

"We should talk," Harry mumbled, his lips mapping her neck and jaw line and his hands sliding under her shirt to brush along her skin.

"Yeah," Ginny agreed, but she kept moving them closer and closer, step by step, to the sofa. Midnight scrambled off with an outraged squawk. But she didn't stop Harry's hands from moving to her front, from brushing her stomach, like he used to do. And she didn't stop him from lifting her shirt over her head. Talking

was going to wait, because she needed him. She needed to feel him touch her again and prove that he loved her—not just with words and actions, but with real, feeling caresses. In this, she could tell all the way. She could prove to her whole self that nothing was different, and that everything was real.

And then they were on the sofa, Harry pressed between her thighs, his shirt tossed somewhere and kissing her urgently.

“Missed you,” he said, rocking his hips into her, the friction of his jeans on hers maddening. “Missed you so much.”

“I’m here,” she protested, feeling like she might burst if she couldn’t feel all of him. . They both still had their trousers on, but Harry’s face was intense as he found a rhythm. His hand quickly released her bra and his lips found her nipple, gently tasting and laving it with his tongue.

He was beautiful, with his smudged glasses and the way his hair flopped into his face. The soft grunting that accompanied each rock into her drove Ginny closer and closer to the edge.

She wanted him inside her, but it seemed too much to ask right now. They really did need to talk and to clear this all up. But...at the same time, she *needed* this physical affirmation of Harry’s love.

“Love you,” she said as she wrapped her legs around him, rocking just right to achieve the perfect friction at the perfect place.

Harry kissed her again and his motion sped up, his whole body shuddering above her.

“Need...” The word implied all that lay between them and Ginny nodded, biting her bottom lip as she soared over the edge of release. She arched into him, panting his name. Harry swore softly and braced his feet on the arm of the sofa, making it shudder along the floorboards in protest. He roared a primal sound as he released, braced above her.

When they both stopped moving, Ginny felt her face heat at the thought of what they’d just done.

Harry must have felt the same incredulity as he chuckled and wiped his face with his arm before lowering himself slowly onto her.

“I remember the first time we did that,” he said, full of awe.

Ginny reached up and ran her hand down his face, scratching the whiskery growth there. “Your eighteenth birthday,” she whispered.

Harry leaned down and kissed her, this time lazily swirling his tongue in her mouth and shifting his hips. She knew he was probably growing uncomfortable, but the movement shot little jets of pleasure through her.

He pulled her to him and rolled them. “We really need to...”

“Yeah,” she said. “Maybe...maybe we should take a minute and...clean up.”

Harry’s face split into a boyish, sheepish grin and he nodded. “You go ahead. I haven’t moved the loo.”

Ginny shook her head at his joke and forced herself to stand, holding onto the sofa and feeling her face heat as she realized she was tangled up in her bra. She forced herself forward, however, rather than looking back.

Chapter 15: Only You

Just Say The Word-Chapter 15: Only You

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: This one has not had the outtake removed from the main text. I just don't have the time right now, truthfully. So...enjoy.

Chapter 15: Only You

Once the door to the loo closed, Harry let himself collapse on the sofa, blinking up at the ceiling.

His brain hadn't quite caught up with the fact that Ginny and he were...well, whatever they were, they were *it* again. Years melted away at the touch of her hand and Harry felt eighteen again.

He stayed like that for several minutes until Ginny's shirt, summoned from the other room, zoomed past him. He sighed and scrambled for his wand, cleaning himself up and pulling his shirt back on.

Everything was fuzzy—and not just because his glasses were smudged. Everything felt wonderful, and hazy—as if the only thing that brought clarity was Ginny and what he felt for her.

When she finally came out, Harry had two Butterbeers on the table near the sofa, and his bare feet were propped on it.

"I...I thought you might be thirsty," he shrugged, loving that she blushed again, but came right onto the sofa, curling next to him, tucking her feet under her and laying her head on his shoulder.

"Thanks," she whispered.

Harry lifted his arm over her shoulder and tugged until she was as close as she could get without being in his lap fully.

"So..."

"So..." he answered back, feeling incredibly foolish.

"When did you figure it out?" she asked.

Harry sighed and rubbed his forehead. "I never *really* got over you, Gin. I just...I pushed any feelings for you aside because I couldn't handle the fact that you'd gone."

She nodded and was quiet for a minute. "I'm glad I can't remember, but...I wish I could." He nodded, understanding perfectly. "All I have are words in an old book, impressions that I can't ever know the context of because...I just can't."

"I imagine that's hard."

"And I can't even begin to explain to you what it feels like, other than this huge...void...in my life. I went to bed one night, still trying to decide what I was going to do, and woke up with the decision already made. Eight years of my life, gone—stolen, or taken, or whatever—and nothing was right. I was in a place I would never choose to be in, with a person I wouldn't choose for myself. And the one person..." Her voice broke and Harry leaned down, pressing his lips to her head. "The one person I knew I loved more than anything couldn't be around me."

"I'm so sorry," Harry said, feeling his eyes burn. He couldn't do anything but stare at Ginny. He'd done so much over the past months to deliberately hurt her, to make them both miserable. And he regretted every harsh word that came out of his mouth, every thought he had about how much *she* had hurt him. None of that should have mattered. He'd let himself become the worst sort of person, over something that Ginny had no control over. "I wish..."

"Wishing won't make it go away," Ginny said, wiping at her teary eyes and stuffy nose. "We're both here now, in the same place, I think."

Harry nodded. "We are."

"Then let's work through this so we can go forward, instead of worrying about what happened in the past."

"I...I'm not sure where to start," he admitted. "It's not that I don't want to, just..."

"I know," she assured him. "Just...tell me about when I left." Her voice was low and Harry pulled her to him.

"We thought we'd be okay," he admitted softly. "We'd been apart before, and it was only supposed to be a year."

"One year," Ginny nodded, bringing her legs up under her entirely.

"I never even thought that we wouldn't make it," he shook his head. The memories were thick and cloying, making his chest feel tight and his stomach rumble uncomfortably. "I never thought...we were always the ones who could make it."

"Our first mistake," Ginny shook her head and tucked her hair behind her ear.

Harry stared at her for a minute, feeling incredibly affectionate toward her. "And it was fun, at first, Portkeying back and forth, meeting for long weekends or just a few short hours."

"I can see how it would be sexy," Ginny shook her head, "like being horribly naughty and not getting caught."

Harry snorted. "It was," he agreed. "It was an adventure. But then...the weekends became shorter and harder to schedule. And Portkeys got easier and easier to miss."

"We took it, and each other, for granted," Ginny said softly. She reached for his hand and traced the lines on his palm, making them itch wonderfully. "How could we have let that stand in our way?"

"I don't know," Harry admitted. And now, looking back on it, it seemed particularly stupid that they'd missed so much life, mucked it up with other people and other things that should never have been there in the first place. But, at the time...

"It's easier to see now that we've gone through it," he sighed. "Or...I have."

Ginny grimaced and he kissed her head. "We both knew what it was coming to," he shook his head. "We held off for as long as we could."

"When I read those parts in the diary..." Ginny trailed off and shook her head. "I was so angry. How could I have been so selfish, so...so completely insane? I wrote in there that being in love, if it was the right person, should never be as hard as it was between us."

Harry grimaced, remembering her saying that exact thing when they'd broken up.

"But that's...its completely mental," Ginny said, pulling away a little as she got passionate about it. "If it's right, doesn't that mean it may be even more work?"

Harry shrugged, but Ginny wasn't really looking for an answer now. He loved it when she was like this, all worked up over something she believed in. Her face flushed and his heart pounded, remembering how she looked just the same when they were intimate.

"I don't honestly believe in all that shit I poured into that diary, Harry. Anything worth having is worth fighting for."

"I agree," he said.

"We can't ever let ourselves become complacent just because it's easier, or too hard to work through."

"I agree," he repeated. He couldn't stop himself from kissing her then, and Ginny's hands wound into his hair as she climbed into his lap, kissing him back just as passionately as he was kissing her.

"I won't ever give up again," he promised, feeling like she needed to hear it.

"I'm sorry for what I did to you, Harry," Ginny said. "Even if I don't remember it, I had no right to treat you the way I did. I...I don't blame you for walking away."

His hands wrapped tightly around her arms and his eyes got teary again. "We were both wrong," he said. "If only there was a time-turner that could work that far back, I'd go back right now and not let you leave. I'd... I'd..."

"I know," she whispered, cuddling in to him further. "I would too."

"I don't like the person I became without you, Ginny," Harry said, rubbing his hands up and down her back. "I'm a very selfish person and I...I rarely think of others."

"That's not true," Ginny said. "By all accounts, it was me who was selfish. I walked around in my designer clothes and brought...brought *Brogan* here." She shook her head and rubbed at her temples. "Honestly, what was I thinking?"

"You weren't selfish," Harry denied, feeling his throat tighten considerably. Ron's idea that Ginny had stayed away, purposely to allow Harry to have some semblance of family made him almost sick to think about. "You're anything but selfish." Even if it wasn't true, it *could* be, and that was enough for Harry.

"I...I was the selfish one," Harry said, choking back his tears, "I did things to hurt you. I...I made sure I was in the papers, I... After I read about you and Quinlan...I was so angry."

"I'm sorry," Ginny shook her head. "The press...they blew everything out of proportion. I wasn't *with* Brogan, not in that way anyway, until much later."

"I should have known that," Harry said, feeling like he was going to be sick. He laid his head on the back of the sofa and blinked blurry eyes. "I...there were a lot of girls, Ginny, but I...I didn't sleep with all of them."

Ginny swallowed and pulled away slightly.

"How many?" The whisper was torn from her throat and Harry shook his head.

"Three," he admitted, swallowing back bile. "I...when I realized that I was only doing it to hurt you, to get you out of my head...I couldn't do it anymore. It's not a good thing when you're with someone and...and all you can think about is someone else."

Ginny was openly crying now and Harry wrapped his arms around her, finally allowing his tears to fall. Now that he'd started, Harry felt the need to confess everything to her. He needed her to know everything so that he would never have to look at her and wonder if she'd been allowed to choose him fully.

"I came to one of your games," he said, whispering as he rocked her side to side. "And I saw you there with... with him. I knew you had finally moved on, and I felt horrible that I still thought about you, still dreamt of you. I came home and tried to make it work with Susan. I tried, but...it was never enough."

"You loved her?"

Ginny's eyes were red and puffy, and her nose was running and swollen. She'd always said she didn't cry pretty, and he knew that, but right now he couldn't help but have his breath stolen.

"No," he said. "I loved the idea of having someone there...of having a family. I was panicked because I was getting older and...Ron and Hermione were expecting Rose. It was hard, watching everyone around me getting what I wanted most."

"I'm so sorry," Ginny said again, conjuring tissues and wiping at her own face, and then his. "That's always what I wanted to give you; your own family."

Harry's heart burst and he pulled her to him, slowly allowing himself to accept that possibility that dream was in his future again. He wanted so much to ask, but it still seemed so early. 'It's too soon,' he convinced himself finally, recalling the words that sat at the tip of his tongue.

"In the end, what I felt for her wasn't enough," Harry shrugged. "Seeing you at Christmas...it made me really stop and take a look at who I had become. And I didn't like it."

"I was determined to become a better person," Harry sighed. "And that lasted up until about an hour after Ron told me you were coming home. And all that anger, all that frustration just...burst out of me. Seeing you again...I just couldn't hold it back."

Ginny snorted out a laugh and rubbed her face harshly. "I remember."

"I didn't want to feel anything for you again," he admitted harshly, "because if I did, then the realization that I'd never stopped loving you was going to come. And I just couldn't face that. The anger was easier."

"I was angry too," Ginny admitted. "Angry that all of this was stolen from me, and I still don't know how it happened. I...I want that back. I want to wake up one morning and roll over and have everything be like it was supposed to be. But I know it doesn't happen that way."

"It won't ever be the same," Harry admitted. "But that doesn't mean we can't have anything."

"No," she said, moving her face within inches of his, "it doesn't."

"What do you want, Gin?" he asked boldly. "What...what do you want me to do?"

She was quiet for a long time and their breath mingled, noses touching and foreheads resting together.

"I want you," she admitted. "For...for as long as I possibly can have you. If that means a lifetime, or one more minute...I can't waste any of it. I...I want a family. I know it's soon—probably too soon, but..." Harry could hear the vulnerability in her voice and leaned forward, kissing her.

"I want it all too," he burst out. "Everything that you'll allow me."

"Everything," Ginny repeated, pressing kisses to his face; his eyes, his nose, his cheeks, and, finally, his lips once more. "Everything is yours, Harry."

"Make love with me?" he asked, feeling like an eighteen year old again, asking as he scuffed his feet along the floorboards in her room at the Burrow, praying she wouldn't hex him for begging.

Ginny giggled this time. "That's yours too," she agreed, wrapping tighter around him as he struggled to lift them both off the sofa. "Although since we kicked the cat off the sofa, he may have taken over the bed."

Harry growled and nipped lightly at her neck as he shuffled along, down the hallway to the room that had, really, always been theirs.

“Stupid Cat.”

Ginny laughed and ran her fingers through his hair. “I can’t believe you call Midnight that.”

“It’s the only thing he would answer to after...after you left. I couldn’t bring myself to keep calling him Midnight.”

“Why didn’t you leave him at the Burrow? Or ship him to me?” Ginny asked when Harry set her down in the bedroom. The bed was, thankfully, animal free.

“I tried to leave him,” Harry shrugged, leaning down to kiss her. “But I just couldn’t get rid of him. It was like...saying a real goodbye, and I just couldn’t do it.”

“You never have to say it again,” Ginny promised, wrapping her arms around him and pulling him toward the bed.

Ginny’s whole body shook as she knelt on the bed. Her hands trembled when she pulled her shirt off over her head and then reached behind her to remove her bra. Harry stood at the side of the bed, his hand absently stroking the front of his jeans as he watched. She could tell he was just as nervous as she was, because the pulse point in his throat thundered away, matching hers.

She bit her bottom lip as her fingers fumbled with the clasp of her trousers, undoing it slowly and lowering the zip. Harry’s eyes grew wide and his own hand undid the button on his jeans before his shirt was over his head as well.

“Gin,” he breathed, moving forward, his hand hovering near the skin of her belly. “You’re just the most... amazing thing...”

Her face heated and she swallowed, taking a deep breath before she pushed her trousers down her legs, leaving her only in knickers.

“Where the hell did you get this?” Harry asked, bending to press his lips to the dark tattoo on her hip. He licked the small Quaffle picture on her skin and then nuzzled his face against it. “I saw this that day at George’s shop, when you were stretching,” he explained.

Ginny looked down and brushed her fingers over the picture. “Don’t remember,” she shrugged. “But the diary said I got it when I made the team in Spain. My own little symbol of independence.”

“You don’t know how much this little thing has figured into my fantasies, Gin,” Harry groaned. He kissed it again, spending far too much attention on it when there were other, just as sexy, parts of her to rediscover.

“Your turn,” she prodded him softly, staring at the dark purple head of his penis as it peeked out of the slit in his boxers. Harry smirked and wiggled his hips, letting his jeans fall down lower and lower.

Ginny sucked in a breath when he sent his boxers down after them, exposing his fit and amazing body.

“You’ve er...been working out,” she observed, feeling her face heat as she explored his body with her eyes.

Harry chuckled and tossed his clothing aside, climbing onto the bed and wrapping his arms around her. His penis poked into her belly and Ginny couldn’t help but rock against him. “Nothing better to do,” he admitted, kissing her face lightly. “You have an amazing body, Gin. You always have. I always felt like such a skinny blighter next to you.”

Ginny laughed and dug her fingers into his sides a bit, pleased that he still squirmed. She kissed him and her fingers traced his hipbones guiding down to his groin. When she finally held him in her hands, they both trembled.

“Feels so amazing,” Harry hissed, rocking into her hands.

Ginny grinned and lowered herself down, placing kisses along his chest, and belly, and finally taking him in her mouth, sucking lightly as her hands caressed him. Harry’s hands found her hair, gently massaging her scalp and the muscles at her neck as she kissed and licked him.

“Oh, Gin,” he moaned. He thrust up gently when she put the tip of her tongue into the slit, gathering the moisture there.

She’d missed this. Loving Harry was loving him completely, without reservation and without secrets between them. And now, it finally felt as if they were on even ground again.

Harry’s breath, harshly pushed out his nose as Ginny continued to suck, and lick, and taste, finally seemed enough and she pulled back, kissing his belly once more.

Harry lifted her gently and kissed her before guiding her back toward the pillows. They lay together, Harry’s fingers trying to memorize every bit of her as she did the same to him.

He still chuckled when she palmed the cheeks of his bum. He still shivered when she ran her finger down his perineum. And he still moaned when she took his hand and slid it inside her knickers.

And he knew her just the same. She still whimpered when he sucked on her nipples. She still rocked against him when he used the palm of his hand against her clitoris. She still shuddered all over when his fingers dipped inside her, spreading her juices around her folds in preparation for him.

“Missed you,” he breathed into the skin on her neck. She echoed the sentiment and allowed her hips to follow his hand as it pulled out of her underwear.

“Love you,” he said, looking deep into her eyes as he moved down, taking her knickers with him, and pressed his lips to every inch of her body, spending more time at her tattoo, kissing and licking all along the heated skin.

Ginny sighed in satisfaction when he finally closed his lips around her clitoris, enclosing her in the warmth of his mouth. His fingers found their place again, pushing in and out of her in a gentle rhythm, turning lightly when they came out and brushing the sensitive skin near her opening.

“Harry,” she moaned, arching up into him. It only took a few minutes for her to come completely undone,

climaxing in a spectacular orgasm that made her head spin.

Harry was at her entrance in the next breath, rubbing his penis all around, sliding inside just a fraction of an inch before pulling back out, and teasing her tremendously.

Ginny hissed as he circled her clit, and lifted her knees, opening herself up to accept him fully.

The feeling of his body entering hers was like soaring in the skies, and coming back home again, all at the same time. They were made to fit together so perfectly, and times like this just illustrated the fact.

Harry thrust shallow a few times, rolling his hips, before pushing all the way in. He held himself there a minute, leaning down to kiss her before he started moving. Ginny held onto the back of her knees, watching him as Harry watched their coupling.

His hands were everywhere, on her hips, on her breasts and belly, rubbing her clit and then pressing on her anus, sending little shudders all through her body.

His speed increased, but for Ginny it wasn't enough. She wanted to feel all of him surrounding her, feel his heart beat against her body and feel, deeply, each of his thrusts.

"Need more," she begged, lowering her knees and pressing up when he rocked into her.

Harry nodded, leaning down to kiss her as they shuddered all movement to a stop. They kissed for a long minute, caressing and touching everywhere. Ginny finally pulled away and turned, presenting her backside to Harry, who kissed all along her spine and rubbed himself in her folds again. His fingers slid inside, making a slick, squelching sound before he finally entered her again.

This had always been Ginny's favorite position for sex with Harry. The simple, primal need of it all was overwhelming and she loved being this close and feeling every pulse of his body as he climaxed.

Harry kissed her and caressed her thighs and bum one more time before moving his body over hers, resting his hands on the bed next to hers and whispering how much he loved her, right in her ear.

Ginny's eyes rolled back at the feeling of him there, enclosing her in his embrace. When he rocked forward, she thrust back meeting his every move and driving them both closer to the edge of release.

The bed beneath them groaned and squeaked, protesting the movement, but their harsh breathing matched every sound.

"Can't...almost," Harry groaned. She could feel his groin tightening on her bum and bent her elbows to allow him even deeper penetration. Harry pressed tightly along her back, their sweat sticking them together. His penis pumped in and out of her at a frantic rate and she could tell he was holding on with every last bit he had.

"Fuck, Gin," he hissed, the words sending her over the edge. Her body pulsed along him, squeezing and releasing as his heart thundered on her back.

"Go, Harry," she commanded, feeling him give a little hop as he propped himself up and increased his tempo.

It only took a few thrusts and he gave a mighty bellow, releasing deep inside her, even as his hands found her breast and delved down to where they were connected, massaging as he rocked them together.

Ginny came again, this time a lazy, distracted climax as her arms shook, holding both of their weight up.

“Never letting you go,” Harry said, his voice slurred because his face was pressed to her back.

Ginny laughed, a hoarse sound that barely escaped out of her mouth as she lowered them down, keeping them connected as Harry’s penis twitched inside her, leaking the last of his release. Ginny’s vaginal walls continued to milk him and she finally felt him pull away before Harry turned her in his embrace, wrapping completely around her. They were sweaty and covered in fluids, but it was more than Ginny had allowed herself to hope for over the past months.

“Never letting you go,” she echoed back, clinging to him.

Ginny’s eyes fluttered open in the soft grey light of morning and she blinked at the room that was both unfamiliar, and wonderfully entrenched in her memories.

‘If this is a dream, or I roll over and it’s not Harry whose arm is around me or some other shit like that...I’m going to get violent.’

But the hand that rested on her belly spread out reflexively and the arm draped over her hip slid a fraction of an inch and a soft murmur and kiss was placed against her shoulder.

Ginny relaxed into Harry’s embrace, sure that it *was* Harry now. His familiarities were etched into her mind deeply—she’d obsessed over missing the silly little things like the way he held her when they slept together, the way he talked in his sleep (even though he denied it) and the way he had to always put his right sock on first. None of them meant a whole lot scattered through a day, but when you missed having them there, they meant everything.

She allowed herself one long minute to simply...be. Harry kissed her shoulder once more and wrapped tighter around her, pulling his legs up under hers. Ginny slid her hand down his arm and wound their fingers together.

“Don’t want to get up,” Harry murmured.

Ginny’s face split in a grin so wide that she felt her face might crack. “Then don’t,” she whispered back. “Being the Department Head should have a few benefits.”

Harry snorted. “Like staying home to shag my girlfriend?”

Hearing him call her his girlfriend again made Ginny’s heart soar. “Exactly.”

“And what about your articles,” he questioned, nudging her so that they could cuddle face to face, “what are you going to tell Bernard?”

Ginny chuckled and then kissed him, letting her lips barely touch his before pulling playfully back.

“Whatever comes to mind,” she shrugged before moving even closer, straddling Harry’s waist and nudging him to roll over. “I’m sure I can think of something.”

Harry was quiet for a minute, responding to her touches and kisses, but not pushing it further like she’d hoped.

“What’s wrong?” she finally asked, laying on him fully, their chins almost touching.

“Nothing,” he shook his head, “I’m just...taking it all in. I...it all still feels a bit unbelievable.”

“I think it’s supposed to feel that way,” Ginny said, reaching up and playing with a piece of hair that was lying on his forehead. “You remember the first time?” she asked, feeling her face heat at the wonderful memory.

“I do,” he said, a slow smile stretching his face heat. “You know...I rarely allowed myself to think of that, but now...”

“It’s a good memory again,” she agreed, guessing at what he was thinking.

“It can be again, yeah,” he agreed. His fingers played with the edges of her hair and trailed down her back, raising goosebumps that made her shudder both with chills and emotion.

“Remember how...amazed we felt afterwards?”

“Besides thinking your family was going to come bursting through the door and chop my bits off,” Harry snorted, “yeah, I do. I felt...like I’d discovered magic and flying and...and *something* all over again.”

“Last night felt like that for me, Harry,” Ginny admitted. “Nothing else mattered but you and I and what happened right here.”

Harry smiled and nodded, his finger tracing the lines on her face. “I’m glad that we could share it,” he agreed.

“And...I want to do it again,” Ginny said, giggling. “Over, and over, and over.”

Harry slumped against the mattress, pretending to be exhausted, but Ginny’s fingers against his side roused him and soon they were wrestling and laughing.

The moment turned serious again when Harry pinned her down, her arms above her head and sitting on her hips.

“I love you, Harry,” she whispered, reveling in the heat that flared between them. And Harry kissed her, his playful touch gone now as he translated the passion and emotion he felt into his kisses and touches.

People rarely accused Ron of being the smartest wizard around—in fact, that had never happened—but he

was intelligent enough to stay as far from Harry's flat as he could all day. Despite his happiness that Ginny and Harry seemed to be working things out, there was no force on earth that could make him step foot into that flat.

If they weren't fighting, they'd probably be...

Yeah. He wasn't going there.

He tried not to pay attention when Harry's office door remained closed for hours after he should have been in. He ignored the questions posed by the other Aurors about where Harry might be. He even pretended to be involved in reports when Seamus and Dean visited, simply to ask who had hacked Harry off enough to deserve the face that graced the front pages of the Daily Prophet.

Ron grabbed the paper from Dean's hand, wincing at the intense, ferocious look that Harry wore as he charged down Diagon Alley, his Auror robes billowing out behind him.

"Looks like he's been taking Snape lessons," Seamus pointed out, right before Ron smacked him with the paper.

"It was Ginny," Ron shrugged. "Those two..."

"Still haven't shagged yet?" Seamus asked, shaking his head in sadness. He and Dean shared a knowing look.

Ron gagged, knowing that the situation was probably rectified now, but unwilling to admit it.

"Everyone knows it's a matter of time," Dean sighed.

"I don't think you have to worry about it," Ron finally sighed, wishing he could really bury himself in the paperwork rather than just pretend to.

"Yeah?" Seamus asked, laughing loudly and waggling his eyebrows.

"Out," Ron commanded, pointing them out of his office. "You'll know all the gory details when the paper knows, I'm sure."

"Oh, come on, Ron," Dean whined. "He's our mate too."

"Then ask him," Ron shrugged, feeling incredibly irritable. It wasn't that he wasn't happy for his best mate and sister, but actually *knowing* the details he was entirely too privy to... He shuddered again.

Before when they'd dated, he could pretend that Harry and Ginny were completely celibate. The one time he'd walked in on them on the sofa at Harry's flat, he'd begged Hermione to memory charm away the worst of it. At least, he hoped that was the only time. Perhaps she'd taken pity on him and simply done it in his sleep, vanishing memories no older brother should ever have.

When Harry showed up well after lunch, smiling and greeting everyone, whistling (whistling!) Ron closed his door and tried to gather the nerve to go and confront Harry.

He knew it was being incredibly childish, since he was grown enough to know what adults could get up to in their private lives, but... This was Harry. And he and Harry usually joked about women—at least on Harry's end—and now...now they couldn't even talk about it, because Harry was banging Ginny.

The whole thing seemed incredibly...unfair and wrong.

Then again, Harry had put up with a lot from Ron over the years. Maybe...maybe this was payback for forcing Harry to go with him to the chemist to retrieve those...*things* that Hermione had needed. Or for dropping everything he was doing and coming over when Hermione was taking the pregnancy test with Rose. Harry himself had held Hermione's hair back countless times when she'd been sick. He'd even taken Hermione to St. Mungos when she went into labor with Rose, and sent his Patronus to Ron, who was on a mission.

If Hermione had allowed it, Harry probably would have been in the delivery room when Rose was born. Thank heavens he was spared that, while Ron still had nightmares of his daughter coming out all covered in... yuck.

When he looked at it that way, Ron probably owed Harry a lot more than he would ever be able to repay. He'd have to just ignore the fact that it was Ginny who put that I've-just-had-the-best-sex-of-my-life smile on Harry's face, and act like a man.

Harry was *still* whistling when Ron knocked on the open door.

"Come in," Harry cheered, making Ron's eyes widen. He looked...like a new man, actually. There were still grey circles under his eyes, but...he was smiling. Ron hadn't seen Harry smile like *this* in...a very, very long time.

Any discomfort over having Ginny be the one to put it there faded into the background.

"Alright?" he asked, peering at Harry.

"Never better," Harry smiled, gesturing to the seat Ron always took and using his wand to close the door behind him. "Sorry that we, er...left last night."

"I don't want details," Ron grimaced, holding up his hand. "I just...I just want to know that you're both alright."

Harry smiled and nodded. He took a minute to answer, but when he did, Ron was stunned at the transformation of his best mate. "It's not perfect," Harry admitted.

"But?"

"But...we're trying again. We're talking, and...and actually listening to each other. I...I really missed her, Ron."

"I know," Ron said, feeling his throat tighten. "I...I know."

"No one has ever been able to make me feel like she does," Harry admitted. "Even when I hated her...I still felt something for her, and it wasn't like anything I'd ever felt before."

"It was almost like I was still mourning the death of what we had together. And I had to accept it fully before I could really see the part in it I played."

"And Ginny?" Ron asked looking down at his fingers. "How is she doing?"

Harry sighed and Ron shook his head at the return of lovestruck, sappy Harry. It had been a very long time indeed—since sixth year, and then the summer after the Final Battle since he'd seen this look on Harry's face. It was good to see again, even if too much of it would make you sick.

"I think...I think she's good," Harry shrugged. "She seems really happy."

"That's good," Ron nodded jerkily. "I just...I don't want to know details, you know...but I feel like I need to, as a brother, make sure things aren't just...physical."

Harry nodded, his face going red. "As her brother?"

"And yours," Ron shrugged. "You and I have been through a lot of shit together, Harry, you know I want what's best for the both of you."

"The only promise I can make, Ron, is that we're both giving this everything we've got. It's not just about the sex, which is spectacular by the way—"

"Oi, Harry!" Ron groaned and plastered his hands over his ears, ignoring the way Harry nearly tipped off his chair laughing. "I said no details."

"Your sister is extremely talented, mate," Harry wagged his eyebrows, digging even deeper. "And flexible."

Ron stood and stormed out of the office, grumbling the whole way.

"You deserved that," Harry called out as he leaned against the door to the office. "Remember that hotel in South America, when they only had one room?"

Ron's step faltered and he spun. "You...you were...?" Harry grinned knowingly and chuckled. "You *swore* you were asleep!"

"Like I'm going to tell you with Hermione standing right next to you."

"Urgh, Harry," Ron groaned, slamming his office door and laying his head on his desk.

After banishing the images that Harry the Wanker had purposely put in his head, Ron couldn't help but smile and laugh.

Harry and Ginny. Together again.

She was twenty-nine years old; giggling like a little girl should definitely be in the past. And blushing horribly

over a man and what they'd done in bed, and in the shower...and on the sofa, was for randy teenagers.

Then why did it feel as if Ginny was seventeen again, and discovering Harry's body and their sexuality was this new, amazing and exciting thing between them?

Because it did.

It was that simple.

How she'd managed to piece together her articles and turn them into Latham was a minor miracle. She only prayed she didn't compare anything to Harry's eyes, or the way her heart beat, or something else equally horrifying.

But Latham hadn't called her back, and it had been several hours, so she guessed everything was fine.

The urge to run back to Harry's flat and climb into the bed, swimming in the scent of them together, was great but Ginny managed to hold back. It was silly, but she couldn't help but think that being there without him would be too lonely.

Her own flat seemed to be in order—no blood on the rug, and everything locked up like it should be. She watered Harry's lilies, allowing herself to fully enjoy them for the gesture they had been. Poor Harry, flabbergasted with what to say, had simply written...well, not much at all.

It was easy to forgive now, on this side of yesterday. Harry's whole demeanor over the past few months took on a whole different meaning when Ginny knew he'd been struggling with admitting he still loved her, rather than loathed everything about her. Looking back, she could understand how he had confused the two feelings—both were such intense emotions and held so closely inside that at times it was hard to draw the line between them.

And, knowing how her life while she lived abroad had impacted others, Ginny didn't blame him that the hate was real. She certainly wouldn't have loved herself, living the way she must have.

But, she also saw it for what it was, which was a shell to protect herself. Ginny had been the one to make the decision to end the relationship, she would have stuck with it unless faced with the fact that without each other she and Harry were colossal failures at life.

Ginny could easily see herself immersing in friends and the team and whatever else she could find to cover the hurt of leaving Harry behind.

She had no confirmation of these facts, only words in a diary, but it seemed to Ginny as if she had simply given up. The whole idea was so foreign as to be completely unrecognizable to everything Ginny knew, or thought she knew, about herself. Then again, she had no experience to build on in that regard.

"You're going to drive yourself 'round the twist with this, girl," Ginny scolded herself when she realized she'd been staring at Harry's flowers for nearly thirty minutes.

Ginny Apparated to Ron and Hermione's house, knowing that Hermione would be home. If she wasn't up to talking, at least Ginny could play with Rose to take her mind off Harry until it was time for him to come

home.

“Gee!” Rose cheered from her perch on a stool next to the kitchen counter when Ginny walked in the back door.

Ginny couldn’t help but laugh at the little girl covered in smears of white flour and biscuit dough. Hermione looked better, but even she had a fine sheen of powdery dust over her.

“Hi,” she greeted. “We’re making biscuits.”

“Bithcits!” Rose cheered, throwing flour into the air. Hermione sighed.

“You’re welcome to join us, if you don’t mind getting a bit dirty.”

“I don’t mind at all,” Ginny said, rolling up her sleeves. “In fact, this is just what I need right now.”

They worked in silence for a few minutes, rolling out dough and cutting it into fun shapes. Ginny let her mind wander, wondering if maybe this Christmas she and Harry should try and make biscuits with Teddy. Harry would look cute with flour fingerprints on his cheeks. They couldn’t get too carried away if Teddy were with them. Maybe they should have a trial run before Teddy came home from Hogwarts.

“So…”

Ginny’s face heated when Hermione’s drawn out word implied a thousand questions that were burning in her eyes.

“So,” she answered back, unable to keep the smile off her face.

“Uh huh,” Hermione laughed.

“Hermione, just come right out and say it,” Ginny sighed, tossing a small pinch of flour at her friend.

“Not until little ears are safely tucked away for naps,” Hermione answered, nodding to Rose, who was pushing her hand onto a round ball of dough over and over again, forming it into a sloppy circle.

Ginny rolled her eyes, and tucked her lips in, trying hard not to laugh.

“Did you, er…inspect the flat?” Hermione asked.

Ginny lost her battle in holding back the laughter and snorted. “Oh, er…yeah. Yeah, I inspected quite a few places.”

Hermione laughed loudly, startling Rose who spilled sprinkles all over her raw biscuit dough. She seemed pleased to see the mess and patted the bright bits of color into it.

“Mummy, wook!”

“Beautiful, darling,” Hermione complimented. “Daddy will like that one especially.”

“Hawwy!” Rose cheered, pointing toward the misshapen dough.

“I don’t know,” Hermione said, laughing, “we should ask Ginny, she’s the expert on Harry these days.”

Rose grinned up at her aunt, extremely pleased that she’d created something so wonderful.

“I think,” Ginny said, pressing a kiss to Rose’s forehead, “that Uncle Harry would love a biscuit made just for him. And if I tell him it was made by you, Rosie-girl, he’ll love it even more.”

“Hawwy!” Rose cheered, grinning and clapping her hands.

“She loves her Uncle Harry,” Hermione said, fondly shaking her head.

“She’s not the only one,” Ginny said, winking as she hugged Rose and helped her put her biscuit on the pan to bake.

“Are you...everything’s good?”

“Not perfect,” Ginny admitted. “But really, really good.”

Hermione sighed and scratched her belly beneath her apron. “You don’t know how good it is to hear that, Ginny.”

Ginny smiled and shrugged a shoulder. “Probably about as good as it is to say it.”

Hermione nodded and used her wand to transfer the rest of the biscuits and float the pan into the waiting oven.

“But we’re taking it slow,” Ginny said, conjuring a flannel to wash Rose’s scrunched nose. “Well, as slow as we can, anyway.”

Hermione shook her head. “I hope you’re at least using protection. The two of you need time to get all of this straight before taking on the burden of children—”

Her words faded from Ginny’s mind as her heart rate sped up and her eyes went out of focus. How could they have forgotten? Neither she nor Harry had used any sort of protection last night, or again this morning.

Shit.

Ginny could tell that her mouth was gaping open, but she couldn’t do anything about it.

“Ginny?” She blinked at Hermione, who was clutching her arm now. “Are you—”

“I’m twenty-nine,” Ginny choked out. “Not seventeen. How could I have forgotten?”

“Oh,” Hermione wailed, covering her mouth with her hand. “Oh, Ginny...”

Ginny groped for a chair behind her and sank slowly into it, watching as Hermione fretted, finished cleaning Rose up and gave her a quick snack at the table.

"I'm sure it'll be fine," Hermione said, rubbing her forehead. "I mean, it was only—"

"Four times," Ginny admitted, feeling her cheeks heat.

Hermione sighed. "Nothing?"

"We were distracted," Ginny shrugged, feeling every bit a young, teenage girl right now. Hell, even at seventeen she'd remembered to cast a contraceptive charm. "How soon can I tell?"

Hermione shrugged. "It's different for everyone, but I'd say you have a few days, or weeks, at most."

Ginny suddenly felt incredibly queasy and light headed. "I'm completely insane," she hissed, resting her head on the cool wood of the table. "I can't be a mother. Insane people are not allowed to have children, are they?"

Hermione laughed. "You'll be fine, Ginny. You and Harry both—even if something does come of it. You're both older now..."

"We just got back together. And the press will have a field day over it if I am," Ginny rocked her head back and forth.

"But Harry will be okay with it," Hermione said, rubbing Ginny's back. "Maybe not the timing, exactly, but the whole family aspect of it."

Ginny shrugged, the whole concept not seeping in at all. Admitting that she was twenty-nine, and not twenty-one, as she remembered herself to be, was enough of a jump. But now, adding the possibility of a child into the mix...

"I need to go," she mumbled, standing and jerking the table slightly. "I need to..." But she actually had no idea what she needed to do. Something involving crying, and panicking, and telling Harry, but not necessarily in that order.

"You might not be," Hermione tried to soothe her. "Go home and sit down, take a few deep breaths and do the calculations, Ginny. You might not be."

Ginny's hand absently went to her belly and she remembered Harry's hand splayed there this morning. Could it have been cradling the very beginnings of their child?

It was all too much and Ginny nodded jerkily.

"I don't think you should Apparate," Hermione determined, leading Ginny to the fireplace. "If I was allowed to take you, I would. But I can't Apparate either."

"You...you think I am?" Ginny asked, holding her belly and blinking at Hermione.

"I meant you shouldn't Apparate simply because you're not sufficiently focused, not because you might be

expecting.”

Ginny nodded again, feeling as if her head might just pop off and roll away.

Hermione threw the floo powder in the grate and Ginny called out Harry’s flat before Hermione could say anything. Being there at Harry’s seemed like the proper place to be.

Chapter 16: Home To Me

Just Say The Word-Chapter 16: Home To Me

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: This song happens to be the best Josh Kelley has ever done, IMO. I could listen to this one all day long, every day.

Chapter 16: Home To Me

Harry's good mood lasted the whole day, although he was quite preoccupied most of the time, drifting off and smiling in a soppy manner that probably made him look like a huge prat. Thankfully, Martha didn't say much about it.

He had just signed his name to a final bit of parchment when there was a small knock at the open door.

"Come i—"

He looked up and was surprised to see Susan standing there, looking completely out of place, even though she'd been to his office many times.

"Hi," she shrugged, glancing around. "You haven't changed much in here."

Harry chuckled awkwardly and shuffled the papers on his desk into a pile. He hated paperwork, but the rest of the week should be easier, considering he was going to be in the field.

"Haven't really had time to change much," he agreed. His office was comfortable, but he supposed he could use a few updated photographs and such.

"I hear you've been...particularly busy," Susan nodded. She was studying him now and Harry sighed.

"Is there something that you needed, or..."

"Just...just wondering how you were doing." She shrugged again and the differences between her and Ginny were highlighted dramatically. But perhaps that was the point—they were two very different people. And when Harry was looking for an escape from his feelings about Ginny, Susan had seemed a logical choice. He could easily see how he had never been happy in the relationship—not fully, anyway.

"I'm very well," he said, smiling. He certainly didn't want to rub his relationship with Ginny into Susan's face, the guilt over how he'd treated her was still there prominently.

She nodded and closed the door behind her, startling Harry. It seemed she definitely had something she wanted to say, something she wanted to keep private. "I know you've been having a rough time of it lately, with Ginny being back."

Harry sighed and rubbed his face. "Ginny and I are back together, Susan. It's...it's a recent thing, but...I'm sure the press will know about it soon enough."

"Oh," she seemed surprised, but then again, not, at his words. "If you're happy—"

"We are," he smiled tightly.

"Then I'm happy for both of you. I...I never hated her, you know."

Harry sighed and pushed his chair back from the desk a little. "I was horrible to you, Susan, and I'm sorry."

"It's in the past," she tried to waive it off, but he could tell she still thought about it.

"It may be, but you needed to hear that from me. If I'd just been man enough to deal with what I felt for Ginny, I never would have involved you."

She nodded jerkily. "We had some good times, though."

Harry smiled, strange that he could look back on that relationship fondly, unlike he'd never been able to do with Ginny. "We did."

"And if Ginny's what makes you happy—"

"We make each other happy," he smiled. He was happier today than he'd been in a very long time. "It's been a long road, but..."

"You two were made for each other," Susan shook her head. She looked sad, yet resigned.

"You...are you alright, Susan?" Harry asked.

"Fine," she nodded, her smile tight. "I just...I'm over it, really I am. But seeing how amazing she looks, the way you look at her...I'm not above admitting that it hurts."

Harry winced. "I'm sorry."

"You don't need to be," Susan protested, "that's the silly thing. You were always hers, and I knew that. I knew that from the moment we first started seeing each other, but I thought...maybe I could change that."

"No one can," he shook his head, feeling suddenly horrible for wasting so much time—years too long.

"I'm seeing someone," she burst out, fidgeting in place, "not sure where it's going yet, but..."

"Good for you," Harry nodded. He couldn't think of anything else to say, other than to tell her how much he wanted to be home with Ginny, but it seemed cruel to say something like that. "I hope...I hope you find what you want, Susan."

"You and Ginny...make it work this time, Harry."

He smiled and laughed lightly, forcing the sound out of himself. "I will."

She stared at him a moment longer before turning and leaving through the door.

Harry sighed into his chair, slumping back into it. That was...strange, and awkward, but he felt a little better that it was over now. Really, they'd been avoiding each other for too long.

The need to see Ginny again, to take her in his arms, was growing and Harry pushed away from the desk, gathered his cloak and marched to his door.

"Shall I be expectin' any more ex-girlfriends, sir?"

"Merlin, I hope not," Harry chuckled at Martha's quip. She looked at him from her desk, her glasses slipping down her nose so that she was looking over them. "Just...keep an eye out for the current girlfriend, yeah?"

Martha laughed and nodded. "I look forward to seein' Ms. Weasley again, sir. 'ave a good night."

"I will, Martha. You as well."

His flat was growing dark when Harry Apparated in. He planned on changing out of his clothes before going in search of Ginny. They hadn't made any real plans for tonight, but he hoped she'd stay again...and then again. In fact, the idea of her simply moving back in here worked fine for him. This had been her home as well. It simply made sense.

Ginny's cloak was on the back of the sofa and he smiled. Apparently he wouldn't have to search far for her.

She was curled up under the covers in the bedroom and Harry stared at her, excitement and contentment swirling through him. His robes were draped onto the chair near the door, his shoes left there as well, and Harry climbed into the bed, gathering Ginny's sleep-warm body to him.

Her eyes fluttered open and she smiled lazily before blinking and turning her head away.

"What's wrong?" he asked, shocked by the change in her. Someone must have said something. Merlin, he should have called into work today and spent the whole day with her. Surely she wasn't still having doubts.

But Ginny clung to him, shaking in his arms.

"We...last night, and then this morning...Harry we didn't use the charms."

The sentence made no sense to him and Harry blinked at her, trying to remember wha—

Oh, shit.

“Er...I don’t think we did.”

Suddenly, her glassy eyes and scared face made complete sense. “Er...are you? Could you be?”

She sighed and rubbed at her face. “It’s possible. I’ve done the maths three times, but we won’t know for a week or so, maybe two.”

Shit.

Harry swallowed thickly, not sure what to say. A child, especially one the first day they got back together, certainly wasn’t in the plans.

“I’m sorry,” he said, kissing her forehead. “I didn’t even think.”

“It’s my fault,” Ginny protested. “That was always my job...before.”

“It takes two, Gin,” he scolded softly. “I could have easily done it, but...I just wanted to be with you.”

She blinked up at him, the tears receding from her eyes. “I’ve been lying here for hours trying to decide how to tell you, and how to...how to deal with this.”

Harry nodded before a tiny kernel of happiness burst inside him. The feeling grew and grew until Harry couldn’t stop himself from smiling. Maybe dreams came true after all.

“I...I want the baby, Ginny,” he admitted softly. “I want a baby with you.”

She stared at him, first as if he was a complete nutter, and then slowly she nodded, understanding spreading. “I want it too,” she admitted. Their hands met on her flat stomach and a thrill coursed through Harry. He was...it was possible he was a father.

He’d always dreamed of this day—this precise moment—not really sure how he would feel. He knew he’d be happy, but the choking panic that rose with it surprised him.

“I just didn’t want you to think that I did this on purpose,” Ginny said, her voice small as she let him hold her, “that I would get pregnant, just to trap you.”

The idea shocked him and he shook his head, denying it immediately. “I would never think that. This baby, if there is one, is a part of you and me, Gin. It’s something we made together because we love each other. Gin, I’m so far gone over you, it wouldn’t matter anyway.”

His words made her laugh and she wiped at the few tears that had escaped, running down the side of her face.

“The idea of you carrying our child...it’s the most amazing, the most wonderfully...the sexiest thing you could

have told me," Harry admitted, leaning down to kiss her.

"We're going to have a baby," Harry sighed, erupting in happiness.

"Maybe," she agreed. She did look happy, just...shocked. "We don't know yet."

He nodded, trying to restrain his happiness from leaking out his ears. "If not...can we..." It felt silly to ask her to start a family with him when they'd only been together less than one full day.

"We'll talk about it," she nodded, kissing him back.

Harry relaxed into her, his hand finding the skin on her side and sliding under her shirt. "You've made me so happy, Gin. I can't even find words."

"We talk too much anyway," she laughed, her warm hands finding his cooler skin, making him shiver with anticipation.

"We do," he agreed.

The giddiness of the relationship faded, although the original affection and emotion of being with Ginny was still there. And Harry was grateful. He still had to work to remember to share little things together—being alone for alone for a long time made him hold a lot of things inside, but Ginny was good at reminding him that they needed to talk.

Although the not talking was brilliant too.

After the initial pregnancy scare, it turned out that Ginny wasn't, in fact, expecting. Harry admitted that he was disappointed, but Ginny assured him that she was ready to start trying very soon. She wanted a family as much as he did.

They spent most of their free time at home, at Ron and Hermione's, or at the Burrow, trying to keep their relationship private. It wasn't that they didn't want everyone to know—quite the opposite, actually—but more that they didn't want Teddy to find out they were together again by some salacious picture in a tabloid. They wanted to tell him themselves.

Ginny wanted to write him a letter, but since it was so close to the Christmas holiday, Harry suggested they pick him up at King's Cross and tell him personally.

"He's going to know right away, Harry," Ginny laughed as they were walking, hand in hand, toward the barrier that separated the platforms.

"No doubt," he said, gesturing to their linked hands. His finger found the engagement ring she wore also, giving it a little tap. "So will everyone else in about thirty seconds."

He stopped just before the barrier and pulled Ginny to him, kissing her softly. "I don't want to hide something that makes me this happy, Gin."

“Neither do I,” she agreed. “Besides, if I see one more story linking me to Ludo Bagman, or Viktor Krum...”

Harry chuckled. Now that he and Ginny were together and he could see the horrid stories for what they were—simple headlines meant to sell papers—they were actually quite funny. “You’d think they could put you with someone good looking for a change,” he laughed.

“Someone with black, messy hair and green eyes, perhaps?” Ginny asked, rocking them back and forth as they stood just outside the platform. They were definitely drawing stares from both Muggle and the passing Witch and Wizard, but neither of them cared any longer. Teddy would know in a matter of minutes, everyone else they loved knew already.

“If you’re lucky,” Harry quipped back, tugging her toward the barrier. “Come on, he’ll be here soon.”

Harry’s enthusiasm to see his godson must have been catching, or Ginny really missed the boy as well, because she pulled him through, holding up her hand to block the light from the cameras that started to flash.

Harry’s hands found her shoulders and he smiled grimly for the press.

“Mr. Potter—”

“Miss Weasley—”

“Are the two of you...”

“We’re together,” Harry answered all of the questions at once. He slid his hands down her arms and linked their fingers, holding the left hand up to show off the ring.

“When’s the date?”

“Aren’t you both seeing other people?”

“Krum will be crushed!”

“I’m sure he’ll live,” Harry shook his head, growing incredibly annoyed with the vultures pressing around them. The train was already here and students were pouring off. His eyes searched for the noticeable bright blue hair as Ginny fielded a few questions. Seeing a thatch of the right color, Harry tugged Ginny forward, unable to control his excitement. It had been far too long since he’d seen Teddy.

When Teddy finally noticed them coming toward him, Ginny gave Harry a little nudge and he surged forward, letting go of her hand in favor of lifting Teddy off the ground in a huge hug.

“I missed you, cub!”

“Harry!” Teddy protested, although he grinned, his hair flashing brightly in his excitement.

“You’ve grown,” Harry scowled when he finally set Teddy back down. Indeed, Teddy looked so little like the clumsy, awkward eleven year-old boy who he’d put on the train just months ago, and so much like Remus

that it made Harry's heart pound. "I thought I told you to stop doing that!"

"Oh, leave off," Ginny scolded, nudging Harry aside so that she could hug Teddy as well. "Don't listen to him, Ted, you grow all you want."

"Thanks, Ginny," Teddy grinned. A longer piece of his hair fell into his eyes and Harry had the urge to brush it away, but he held back, fumbling for Ginny's hand instead. The press was still around, but thankfully were a respectable distance away, flashes still popping.

"What's going on?" Teddy said, scowling at the intruders. "You do something heroic again?"

Harry snorted. "Hardly. We er...Ginny and I have something to tell you." His hand felt sweaty in Ginny's but she held tighter. It shouldn't be hard to tell Teddy about them, but somehow it was.

"Wait," Teddy said, his face lighting up as he stared at their clasped hands. "You're...you're together, aren't you?"

Harry sighed in relief and a smile split his face. "We are."

"I knew it," Teddy crowed, hopping a bit. "I just knew it."

Harry couldn't help but laugh as he ruffled Teddy's hair. "How did you know?"

"I just did," Teddy shrugged. "You fought it too much, and...and I knew Ginny'd win in the end."

Ginny crowed with laughter and nudged Harry, who had to agree; he had protested too much, and Ginny did win, even though it felt like it was Harry who was holding the prize.

His eyes met Ginny's over the top of Teddy's head—just barely, the boy was getting entirely too tall—and a look passed between them.

"So does this mean you two are..." Teddy trailed off, raising his eyebrows pointedly while staring at the engagement ring.

"Got any plans for New Years?" Harry asked, leaning in so that not everyone on the platform would hear.

Teddy's grin grew wider. "I do now."

"Perfect," Harry said, wrapping his arm around Teddy's shoulder and moving them all forward. "Your Gran can't wait to get her hooks into you. She's been fretting about robe choice for weeks now."

Teddy groaned and rolled his eyes. "Harry, just don't make me wear pink."

All three of them laughed as they walked back toward the barrier, ignoring the pictures that were taken of them. It really didn't matter anymore. Harry had his family.

Ginny cuddled back into Harry's arms, letting herself finally relax after a very full day. Tomorrow she had a Quidditch game to cover and Harry and Teddy would be there with her, but today had been all about Teddy.

"He took the news well," Harry mused, pressing his lips to her shoulder and squeezing her lightly.

"He loves you, Harry," Ginny said sleepily. "He wants to see you happy."

"He loves you as well," Harry added, and then chuckled. "Did I ever tell you how jealous I was of you when you got back? You're all Teddy talked about. You're all *anyone* talked about. Even Neville!"

Ginny laughed and rolled in his embrace, smoothing his hair back away from his forehead, brushing her fingers over his faded scar. "I didn't know that." She felt bad that Harry had been faced with so many people shoving her in his face. It seemed so long ago—as if years had passed, rather than weeks.

"I think Neville was trying to play matchmaker," Harry chuckled.

"Everyone was, in my opinion. Maybe not Ron," Ginny shrugged.

"Ron didn't want us together again, at first, anyway," Harry admitted. "He didn't want to have to choose between us again if something went wrong."

"It's a shame no one told us we were perfect for each other," Ginny sighed, her eyes tracing his features. She never tired of doing this, of re-memorizing everything about him, in case it was gone again in the morning. She still had no idea why she couldn't remember the past years, but it almost didn't matter anymore. Everything she needed was right here with her now.

"Neither of us was listening particularly well," Harry laughed.

"No, I don't suppose we were."

"We don't have to worry about that anymore," Ginny sighed, laying her head on his chest. "I'm never leaving."

"And I'm never walking away again."

The words were spoken often between them. One day, perhaps, they wouldn't need to reaffirm them so often—they would simply *know*. But for now, it was a promise between them.

Ginny closed her eyes, sighing in contentment as she relaxed fully into Harry's embrace. Everything she needed was right here.

The warmth of the bed was comfortable and Ginny snuggled back into Harry's embrace, willing the rest of the world to go away. She knew she had a game to cover today, and it would be exciting to see Harry and Teddy whooping with glee as the Harpies decimated the Tornados. Really, Ginny wasn't supposed to be biased, but the Harpies were set to win the League Cup this season, and it wasn't even nearly over. Their record was phenomenal.

Harry murmured in his sleep and Ginny smiled lazily, hoping he was having good dreams. She really should get up. Her mother was running around like a crazy woman, planning a wedding in less than ten days—a fact which Molly grumbled over, but wouldn't trade for anything—and Ginny had really not offered much in the way of input.

"Something that marries us," Ginny had said.

"Something small and intimate," Harry put it.

Her mother had blinked at both of them for a long minute before springing into action. It was rather like watching a whirling dervish—humorous up to the point it sucked you in, draping you in lace and silk, and asking you a thousand questions on your opinion of chocolate versus white cake.

Ginny yawned widely and wiggled against Harry. His hand gripped her hip and held her perfectly to him.

"Keep that up and I'll be late," his sleepy voice sounded in her ear. But his actions betrayed his words as he kissed along her shoulder and onto her neck. "I've been thinking about that job offer."

Ginny murmured her appreciation of his kisses, rocking into him further before his words caught up with her. "Wha..?"

"And...if it's what you really want, Gin...we'll make it work. We've done the whole year apart thing and, while it doesn't make me thrilled, I—"

"Wait!" Ginny squeaked, rolling out of his arms and sitting up, staring around the room. She clutched the ivory sheets to her chest, staring at the framed photographs on the wall—the ones that hadn't been there since she left—and her professional broom propped in the corner, along with her Harpies training kit still sitting on the chair near the door. *That* certainly didn't belong in this room.

"Bloody hell," she said, grabbing her head. She felt lightheaded as her mind tried to process what was going on.

"Ginny, love, what's going on?" Harry's hand on her arm startled her and she nearly screamed when she looked at his face. This wasn't the man she'd gone to sleep next to last night. This was...this was...

"Ginny," Harry cautioned, reaching for her as she backed across the bed and tumbled over the edge, dragging the sheet with her. "You're scaring me. What the hell is going on?"

His face peeked over the edge of the bed and Ginny stared at him. Her eyes traced his face, the scar that was slightly pink, the hair that was longer and flopped into his eyes, the perfect, tight skin of a twenty-two year-old, rather than the aged face she'd expected.

Slowly, Ginny lifted the sheet away from her body and stared down at herself, noting the changes in her own body: breasts—perfectly firm and taut, hips—narrow, stomach—showing a hint of toned muscles. No tattoo on her hip. Her hands were next and Ginny gasped at her naked ring finger.

"Gin?"

"Sorry," she gasped out, laying her head down onto the floor and trying to remember what happened. "Er... what's the date?"

"Gin?"

"The date," she snapped, feeling bad when Harry blinked and screwed up his face. "I'm sorry, I..."

"The fifteenth," he said, sliding further to the edge of the bed and holding his hand out for her to take. "Gin, you—"

"I haven't left yet," Ginny said in amazement. Her hand folded into his as her head spun and her pulse raced. "I haven't...the offer from France, I haven't accepted it yet?"

Harry shook his head and helped her stand, before leading her to lie down.

"Did you hit your head?" he asked, peering closely at her and squinting into her eyes.

"I don't know," she admitted. Her head throbbed, but she wasn't sure if it was from falling, or from the thought that it was all changed; everything she thought she knew was gone. She could remember the other memories—the acute pain that came from hearing Harry tell her he didn't love her, the shock of how differently her life had been than what she expected. All those memories were there, and yet...when she thought about them, they were beginning to fade, almost like a dream when you woke up...

"...that's what we were talking about," Harry sighed, sinking down next to her and winding their hands together. "If you really want to go to France..." His words died out and he shrugged.

Almost like a dream...

"I'm not going to France," Ginny proclaimed, startling both of them. "I'm not going." She threw her arms around him and held him tightly, tears coming to her eyes as she realized. The whole thing—waking up eight years after making the decision to go to France, the break up, the strife of getting back together—all of it had been a dream. More like a nightmare, really; but her brain had imagined the whole thing.

Harry returned her hug, chuckling. "Gin, if you want to go, we can make it work."

"No," Ginny said. "I'm not leaving. I'm not going to take us for granted Harry. There's no guarantee that you and I would stay together if we lived apart. It's not worth the risk."

Harry stroked her long hair and seemed like he wanted to say something—to protest or argue or...something—but he didn't. Instead, he held her tighter.

"What about Quidditch? You're a great player, Gin, and I don't want you to give that up simply because you're nervous—"

"I'm not," Ginny said, finally pulling away. "I had this dream, Harry. And...it really made me think about how much I've taken you and me for granted. I was actually considering taking the position on the team...but not now."

"A dream?" Harry asked, guiding her down until they were cuddling on the pillows, nesting in the blankets.

"A dream," Ginny nodded, "and I woke up eight years from now, and I had already moved to France. But things weren't good. You and I weren't together, Harry. We had broken up and—"

"That wouldn't happen," Harry interrupted.

"Are you going to let me tell you?" Ginny smirked.

"Sorry," Harry shrugged contritely.

"And we hadn't really talked in seven years." Harry grunted and she knew he wanted to protest again, so Ginny laid her hand on his arm. "I didn't remember any of those eight years passing, Harry. As far as I knew, I went to bed one night with you, still not having made a decision about France, and woke up with the decision already made and paying the consequences. I was so...confused and...just crushed, because seeing you again was wonderful, and horrible at the same time. You...you hated me."

"I wouldn't."

"And I don't blame you," Ginny overrode him. "But, in the end, you and I worked out our differences and were together. We were even getting married."

"Sounds like the dream ended well."

Ginny looked up at him and couldn't stop her fingers from tracing the lines of his face. "I guess so, but...it was painful, for both of us. I think...I think it was like my mind coming up with the worst possible scenario it could if I made the decision to leave. I lost you, I lost my family, and, ultimately, I lost Quidditch too."

"But, Gin, it was just a dream."

"I think I had it for a reason, Harry," she protested. "I think...I've always had faith in you and me. I've always thought that we could make it through anything, but I've let myself take you for granted, thinking you'll always be here for me. I can't do that anymore, Harry. I need to treasure each minute and not set us aside for a chance at momentary happiness."

"I may be able to still go to France and play. We may be able to make things work between us and be wonderfully happy, but why take the risk when what I really want is right here?"

"Well...when you put it that way," Harry sighed. "Maybe we've both been taking things for granted. It's time I made some changes as well. I can work fewer hours and we can...maybe I can take some time away. I don't have to say yes to everyone," he smirked and then sobered. "I just don't want you to regret not playing ten years down the road, Ginny."

"I would only regret a decision if it caused me to lose something that I loved more. I love you, Harry. I don't want to waste any more time worrying about a career in Quidditch. If it happens, it happens. Or I can try to be a trainer, or...maybe even write about Quidditch."

Harry's face lit up at those suggestions and he nodded, as if it hadn't ever occurred to him. And she didn't blame him, because it hadn't occurred to her before the dream either. Before, her life had been so determined; she was going to play Quidditch, she was, eventually, going to marry Harry and they'd have a family.

But life didn't always work out like you planned. Sometimes you had to cling to what you wanted, while life took you in a different direction.

"Marry me?" she asked breathlessly, surging up to kiss him.

Harry returned her kiss amid laughing. "What?" he asked, grinning at her incredulously. "Did you just..."

"You heard me," Ginny poked his side and kissed him again. "Marry me."

Harry looked stunned and spluttered, making Ginny laugh.

"Aren't I supposed to be the one to—"

"Get on with it then," Ginny urged, pulling him so that he was lying on top of her. "I'm waiting for my answer."

"Yes," he said, almost instantly. He looked surprised by the answer himself until a huge smile broke out on his face. "Ron's going to take the mickey for years when he finds out *you* proposed to me."

Ginny laughed and kissed him again.

"We're getting married," she said, full of awe when they broke apart.

"I would have asked, you know," Harry smiled. "Soon. I have a ring and everything."

Ginny laughed again. "I know. I just...I don't want to wait anymore."

"Neither do I," Harry agreed, resting his forehead on hers.

Author's Note: So, some of you guessed correctly what was going on, right at the beginning. Did you really think I would write such cliched, out-of-character versions of Harry and Ginny and be completely serious about it?? And before you start railing on it...think about it. There were clues all through those first two chapters, but you've all become so accustomed to chasing the bigger clues that some of you were off on wild chases, suspecting Neville of tampering with Ginny's memory, or an illegal potion mess, or that even the Weasley's themselves were responsible for the "memory loss". I hope everyone enjoyed the story, at least a little.

It's by no means anywhere near my favorite, nor did it take much thought to write. Three weeks in comparison to my other stories is fairly insignificant, really. Perhaps I enjoyed it more because I knew the twists that were coming and I also knew I'd hear you all railing on about unfairness and stupidity of characters. ;)

The original idea Alex proposed was similar to the movie The Family Man, where a man makes certain decisions about his career that end up ending a relationship. He dreams one night that he made different choices and had a very different life. I just reversed the process, really. Instead of having the idealistic life in the dream, Ginny had it in real life and was shown what might happen.

Chapter 17: Green Eyes

Just Say The Word-Chapter 17: Green Eyes

Title: Just Say The Word

Author: HGFan1111

Genre: Drama, Angst, Romance

Warnings: mild language, sexual suggestions

Rating: R

Setting: Alternate Universe, Post-DH

Summary: Three years following the Final Battle finds Harry and Ginny living their dreams as an Auror working his way up the ranks, and a star Chaser for the Harpies. But when a career changing decision is handed to Ginny, will she be able to follow her heart, or will she even realize where her heart is? Post-DH, AU.

Author's Note: The chapter title is one of my favorite songs (as if I don't have thousands of them.) It's by Coldplay.

Chapter 17: Green Eyes

"You're sure you don't mind me doing this?" Ginny asked again, peering at Harry over his bite of eggs that were hovering near his mouth, dripping yellow yolk down to his plate again.

"Not at all," he denied before taking his bite. "I have enough faith in you to tell anyone to bugger off if they bother you."

She couldn't help but smile at his innocent tone. "I honestly don't know why they want to speak with me anyway, I mean, it's not like I played very long at all, really." She looked down at her own half-eaten breakfast and nudged the plate away from herself. Despite the fact that she'd been thrilled to have the invitation, Ginny was nervous. She wasn't sure what to expect today and that made anything possible. Was the interviewer only after an expose of the life of Harry Potter's wife? Would there be scandalous questions that she'd have to refuse to answer and embarrass everyone?

"Ginny," Harry sighed, shaking his head and smiling at her. "The program is People Who Have Changed the Face of Quidditch; you certainly qualify. You may not have played for the Harpies for long, but you've certainly had an impact on the whole field by writing what you do."

She grimaced, still not completely convinced, even though they'd had this same conversation several times since the invitation had come.

"And don't forget," Harry said as he slid out of his chair and came over to hers, tugging her out of it and into an embrace, "you're also the mother of England's Most Eligible Bachelor and Chaser Extraordinaire of the Kenmare Kestrels."

Ginny laughed and wrapped her arms around her husband. "I'm so proud of him," Ginny sighed, laying her head on Harry's shoulder, "not necessarily the eligible bachelor part, since James tends to play that up more than he really should."

Harry snorted and rocked her a bit. "He's definitely like his namesake in the attitude department, isn't he?"

"Sirius? Or your father?" Ginny asked, laughing.

"Both," Harry shrugged.

"We really cursed him, didn't we?"

"No more than the other two," Harry chuckled.

Ginny laughed along with him. "I don't think any child likes everything about their name, I certainly don't care for Ginevra."

"I always liked my name," Harry mused. "Well...except for...never mind. I liked it well enough when I was younger."

Ginny tightened her arms around him, giving a squeeze. She knew what he was talking about. It wasn't the name that had ever bothered him, but the fame and stigma attached to the name that was hard to live with.

"Come on, you're going to be late if you don't get moving soon," Harry urged, taking a step back toward the stairs that led to the bedrooms in the house. She nuzzled his rumpled pyjama shirt and breathed in the warmth that was between them. "And you need a shower."

Ginny snorted. "You offering to join me?"

Harry faltered in his step, his eyes swinging to the clock in the room. "We have enough time."

The urge to laugh was great and Ginny didn't hold back. Of *course* there was time for that. Even at forty-seven, Harry was still as randy as he had been in his twenties, not that Ginny blamed him; just looking at his still-fit body after all these years made her insides quiver.

"If we hurry," Harry put in as they walked up the stairs, hands intertwined.

"This is Leighton Phillips and we're continuing our 'People Who Have Changed the Face of Quidditch' series here on *Quidditch on the Wire*. We're here today with Ginny Potter, most well known for her precise and insightful reviews of Quidditch matches here in Britain, although she does happen to be related to a few people with rather famous names as well."

Ginny fought the urge to roll her eyes, even though the smirking smile on the interviewer's face betrayed the sensationalism of the comment.

"Our listeners today are in for a real treat as Mrs. Potter is as witty as she is beautiful—although, I guess you'll just have to take my word for that as this is wireless."

The few people in the studio chuckled and Ginny looked through the glass window to see Harry watching and listening. He gave her a quick wink that shouldn't have been able to give her courage in such a small

gesture, even though it always did.

“Some of you may or may not know that Mrs. Potter—”

“Ginny, please,” she insisted, speaking her first words on air. “Really, only my children’s teachers call me Mrs. Potter, and that usually means one of them has been up to no good.”

Phillips, whose large voice was no match at all for his small stature and rather thin face, laughed. “Okay, Ginny it is then. Ginny played two years of professional Quidditch herself, as a Chaser for the Holyhead Harpies. Narrowly missed for a spot on the National Team, Ginny went on to become a trainer for the Harpies—a position that lasted for two years before she retired.

“What was it like watching the game instead of playing?” he asked.

Ginny took a deep breath and leaned into the microphone as she’d been instructed. “It was hard, at first. The start of every game I would have to root myself to the bench in order to keep from jumping off when the team was called forward.” Ginny smiled at the memories. “But, I got used to being in the background, rather than being part of the show.”

“There were rumors that you had received several offers to play on International teams just after leaving the Harpies, are they true?”

Ginny glanced at Harry who smiled softly and sat back in his chair. The dream she’d had all those years ago was now tempered and faded by time, but parts of it came to her with frightening clarity at times when she least expected it.

“There were,” she agreed. “The most interesting offers came from Italy and France. And I did consider taking the French one for a time—a very short time.”

“What changed your mind?” Phillips asked. His genuine curiosity, and the fact that he had handed her a script of questions he was interested in asking her before the interview even started, helped her to relax.

“It was a personal decision, actually,” Ginny explained. “After discussing it with my fiancé, at the time, we decided it was best for our future that I stay here in England.”

“You don’t think you might have had a marvelous end to your career across the Channel?”

“No one can accurately predict the future,” Ginny shook her head. “Maybe it would have worked, and maybe it would have ended in disaster for me. In the end, when I really looked at both choices, I found that playing Quidditch gave me instant gratification, but that wasn’t enough. That kind of happiness lasts for months—or, if you’re lucky, a year or two—but it can’t be the answer for everyone. For me, it was staying here with my family and with the man I loved.”

“Are you proud of the profound change you’ve had on the entire Quidditch community, Ginny?” Phillips asked. “You’ve been an advocate for fair play laws as well as testifying before the Wizengamot about the scandal of equal rights for witches in sports.”

“I am proud of that,” Ginny said. “It wasn’t an easy thing to stand up for at the time, but the sport has made

great strides for equality in recent years—something that can only benefit all of us.”

“Do you feel you were naïve when you first started playing professionally?” Phillips asked, leaning forward onto the table that separated them.

Ginny considered the question for a moment before answering. Now that the questions were flowing, it felt more like talking with an interested, although educated, person about a sport that Ginny adored, rather than a real, live interview.

“Definitely,” she finally settled on. “You come in so excited, so full of emotion over playing a game that you love. But, at times, the harsh realities that this is a real sport—a business, even—wash over you. I was definitely blind to those things when I first started playing.”

“For those of you not familiar with the scandal,” Phillips said, fairly growling into the microphone, “the issue of corruption in the National team as well as favoritism of male players is thoroughly laid out in a book entitled *Who Gave Them Control: A Look Into the Dastardly Side of Quidditch*, which marked the brief glimpse of Kennilworthy Whisp coming out of retirement. You had a chance to speak with Mr. Whisp in the course of his writing, did you not?”

“I did,” Ginny grinned. “The man is a veritable treasure trove of Quidditch information. Mr. Whisp was a very gracious interviewer and did a wonderful job of helping us to right a wrong that had been going on for too long. Witches simply didn’t talk about how they were discriminated against in the sport; it was a taboo subject.”

“The book is excellent reading,” Phillips nodded, “and I highly recommend it to anyone interested. Did your son read the book before he signed with Kenmare?”

Ginny chuckled. James had scoffed when she first suggested it, but had, eventually, read the book. “He did. Harry and I have tried to keep our children as informed about the world around them as we can. The children are not perfect by any means, but they’re good kids.”

“James Potter is definitely aiming at breaking some records this year,” Phillips complimented. “He’s a wonderful player.”

“Don’t go on,” Ginny cautioned with a chuckle, “We’ve also tried to keep their heads from getting too big.”

Phillips laughed and nodded. “I apologize for any inflating I may have done. I imagine you’re quite proud of your children.”

“Immensely,” Ginny nodded. “James is a wonderful son, as is Albus. And then there’s our Lily.”

“A fine Seeker on her Gryffindor team, I’m told,” Phillips complimented. “My son Albert plays Keeper and has commented often on what a fine Seeker she is.”

A light clicked in Ginny’s brain and she glanced over to see Harry scowl. Albert Phillips had long been a thorn in young Lily’s side. He was several years older than Lily, and commented quite frequently on her developing womanly...assets. Harry had offered, more than once, to set the boy straight. Ginny had no idea that Leighton Phillips was Albert’s father.

“Lily is a brilliant Seeker,” Ginny agreed. “She takes after her father in that regard, but also in temperament. She’s dead set on being an Auror, just like her Daddy.”

Phillips paled slightly and Ginny fought the urge to smirk. That ought to slow the comments from his son soon enough. The subtle reminder of just who his son was ogling was obviously needed.

“Are you disappointed that your son Albus hasn’t followed in the family tradition of playing Quidditch?”

“Not at all,” Ginny denied with a shake of her head. “Al has always gone his own way in life—something that Harry and I have encouraged with all our hearts. He’s brilliant at potions—like his paternal grandmother, Lily—and is planning on being a Healer, provided he achieves all his N.E.W.T.’s.”

“Having a Healer in the family would be wonderful,” Phillips agreed. He cleared his throat, glancing at the clock that hung on the wall. “We only have time for a few more questions before our program for today is over.”

Even though the interview had not been an ordeal at all, Ginny was glad it was coming to a close. Things like this always disrupted life, even when they tried hard not to let them.

“What prompted your return to the Quidditch world after so many years’ absence, Ginny? And why writing? Why not training, or coaching?”

Ginny laughed. “I didn’t realize all the questions were going to come at once.”

Phillips chuckled. “Sorry about that,” he apologized.

“In my last year as a trainer for the Harpies, I discovered I was expecting James. I continued to work for several months and then left to raise my children—a decision that I’ve never regretted. Seeing them take their first steps, say their first words—that’s not something I’ll ever want to trade, not for a hundred more years in Quidditch.

“After they were grown and settled in school, Harry and I talked about it and decided that it might be time for me to try my hand at something new.”

Phillips chuckled. “Bernard Latham tells an interesting story of his first interview with you, you know?”

“Really?” Ginny smirked. Harry chuckled behind her; even through the glass she could hear his laugh. “I’m sure it’s far more colorful than the truth.”

“His story is that you spent two weeks following his reporter, Shaw Jackson, around to all of the games he covered, writing up your own reports. You marched into Latham’s office and set your own stories on his desk and proceeded to explain how having you on staff would be an asset to his publication and how Jackson was too old to see the Quaffle anymore anyway.”

Ginny’s cheeks heated. Perhaps Latham hadn’t embellished as much as she expected him to.

“Well...I don’t remember saying quite that about Mr. Jackson, but...”

“Tenacious was the word Latham used,” Phillips chuckled.

The word made Ginny rather proud. “I’ve never been a timid person, Mr. Phillips. When there’s something I want, I go after it.” Her eyes naturally gravitated toward Harry on the other side of the window.

Just as in her dream years ago, Harry had aged wonderfully. He wasn’t nearly as fit as he had been in that vision—but he also hadn’t been obsessed with finding something to occupy his time.

His hair was now sprinkled with salt and pepper at the temples, but still as unruly as ever. His glasses were a little thicker and the lines around his face a little more defined. But he was brilliant.

“I’ve heard that of you, Mrs. Potter,” Phillips complimented. “I’ve enjoyed every single report of yours that I’ve read. You have a way of injecting humor and lightheartedness into every situation that makes what otherwise might be a tedious recitation of the facts an enjoyable few minutes read.”

“Thank you,” Ginny said, her cheeks heating. “I try.”

“You succeed,” Phillips corrected. “Is there any advice you would give someone just starting into the professional Quidditch field, or perhaps someone who is interested in playing professionally?”

“It’s the same advice I would give anyone about their future,” Ginny shook her head. “The same advice Harry and I have given our three children, as well as Harry’s godson, Ted Lupin—be yourself. In everything you do, be true to who you are. Find something that you love to do, but don’t let it control who you are inside. You are the one who ultimately has to live with you.

“Don’t take others for granted,” Ginny said as she found Harry’s smiling face through the glass. “If you love someone, don’t forget to tell them that, and to show it every single day.”

“All wonderful advice,” Phillips nodded. “Thank you for taking time today to speak with us.”

“It was my pleasure,” Ginny said, actually meaning it.

“You can read Ginny’s weekly reports on all the Quidditch matches you may have missed in Quidditch Weekly. Join us next week when our special guest will be Brogan Quinlan, famed International Quidditch star who has taken up coaching the Irish National Team.”

Ginny felt her face heat and had to laugh silently as Harry’s eyebrows waggled. She’d eventually confessed all of her dream to Harry, prompting him to take the mickey every time Quinlan’s name was mentioned in the press. He’d even once bought her a pin-up poster of the man as a joke. In turn, Ginny knew the perfect time to mention Harry’s attachment to Susan Bones in her dream to make him splutter and stammer. Being secure in their feelings for each other allowed them to have fun with something that otherwise might have been a painful thought.

“That wasn’t so bad, now was it?” Phillips asked and Ginny startled, realizing that they were no longer broadcasting.

“Not at all,” she agreed. “Not that I plan on doing it regularly.”

"You probably could, you know," Phillips said thoughtfully. "I'm sure people would love to hear you give your reports over the wireless as well as writing them."

"I think I'll stick to what I'm comfortable with," Ginny shook her head, smiling. "But I appreciate the vote of confidence."

"Ah well, there's always Witch Weekly's show two doors down, in case you want all your dirty laundry aired," Phillips laughed.

Ginny snorted and stood, moving out into the waiting room and winding her hand with Harry's.

"I think we'll pass on that, as well."

"It was a pleasure to meet you both. Albert has said wonderful things about your children up at Hogwarts." He seemed to fidget a bit more than he should and Harry's smile turned rather predatory.

"We've heard about your son as well," he said, wrapping his arm around Ginny's shoulders. "My Lily is quite open in what she shares about her schooling. For instance, I remember her saying that Albert wasn't taking his N.E.W.T. in Defense?"

"Er..."

"James received an Outstanding in his Defense N.E.W.T, and Al is poised to get his as well. Lily herself received an Outstanding on her Defense O.W.L."

Ginny fought the desire to stop Harry from gloating a bit over their children's prowess in Defense Against the Dark Arts. The words were having the desired effect of warning Leighton Phillips to remind his son to keep his mouth in check.

"Yes, well... It was a pleasure meeting you," Phillips stammered once more before turning and quickly striding out of the room.

"There'll be an owl on its way to Hogwarts within the hour," Harry predicted.

"Be nice," Ginny warned half-heartedly. Lily could definitely take care of herself, and Al was not above defending his sister if the case arose. Lily would be just fine.

"Take me home, Harry," Ginny commanded, throwing her arms around her husband's neck so that he could dual-Apparate them.

"My pleasure," he said, nuzzling her nose with the tip of his own before turning them both on the spot and disappearing.

Closing Note: Thanks for reading, everyone. I hope you got a little enjoyment out of it, even if it wasn't everyone's cup of tea.

This story was written specifically for my LJ friends, and I don't plan on releasing it out to the general public.

Thanks to Ella, Mel, Daron & Deb for all their hard work.

To everyone who won contests, I'll do my best to start to work on those stories soon. Right now the original stuff is rather consuming.

Andi