Leaving A Light On:Part 1

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Rating: R to NC-17
Warnings: sexual situations
Setting: Written for the PuffySubmariners January 09 Challenge. Disregards H/G relationship during HBP, but carries on with most all of canon afterwords. Although, Fred did survive the carnage; use your imaginations how. This is split into two parts…otherwise LJ would throw a fit and reject the post. Lol Enjoy!

Leaving A Light On

Part 1

Harry let out a deep sigh, allowing a good portion of his weight to rest on his forearms as they sat atop the railing of the balcony to his flat. It was a small space, but one that Harry spent a lot of time in lately.

It just seemed…almost like another room in the flat. A small space where he could just…be.

He'd found an old, battered lounge chair in a second hand shop he'd been walking by earlier this summer and thought it fit right in with what he wanted this space to be, with its faded orange and green striped cushion.

The two housewarming plants that Hermione had given him nearly died the first few weeks in his flat—mostly because Harry kept forgetting to water them. But when he'd banished them to the balcony, somehow they'd been given new life. It helped that Mrs. Perkins from upstairs watered her copious numbers of plants and the remains dripped down directly into Harry's own pots.

Hermione was pleased that he was taking such good care of them and Harry just didn't have the heart to admit that their leafy green appearance had nothing to do with him.

And the best part about this space was that it was quiet and alone.

There were times when Harry loved that his friends came over, loved that they filled his flat with their noise and laughter. But lately there were times, like tonight, when he'd be happy that everyone was around, and then suddenly, he'd realize that he really felt completely alone in the middle of everything.

A moment like that happened just a few hours ago, stealing all the desire out of Harry to celebrate his birthday at all.

The flat had been packed with people; happy smiling people who were laughing and slapping him on the back and wishing him a happy birthday. And then suddenly, it was as if Harry were standing in the middle of a silent room—not really hearing the conversations that were taking place, but *seeing* them all around him. And he'd been the lone single person in the room.

Ron and Hermione had been working their way through a bottle of wine that Harry was pretty sure had been his birthday gift—not that it really mattered. Dean and Luna were on the sofa opposite his best friends, holding hands and chatting about everything under the sun.

Fred and George were off to one side, performing some sort of show for a group of girls they'd brought with them. Fred and George had brought *girls.* Not just one each…but plural. The thought made Harry's mind… yeah.

An already tipsy Seamus had come with his arm wrapped around Demelza, who seemed intent in her job to hold him up while he slurred whatever it was he was saying in his alcohol-thickened brogue over her. But she seemed perfectly content in it, so who was Harry to judge.

Neville brought a rather shy Hannah Abbott with him and Harry had spent a rather enjoyable twenty minutes catching up and wishing Neville a late happy birthday.

The tableau was complete when Ginny walked in, her hand wound through Ritchie Coote's hand.

The moment that Harry realized he was all alone had rather killed the festive atmosphere of the night.

But Harry played a good host, he hoped, and wandered from small group to small group, intent on avoiding anyone who was snogging—which made for some great alone time spent in the kitchen, leaning against the counters while trying to think of anything to keep him occupied so that he didn't create an awkward situation, Harry mused darkly to himself.

When people started to leave, Harry slipped away from the party to his little balcony and leaned onto the railing, watching the few bright stars he could see start to appear in the night sky.

With a glance back over his shoulder through the glass doors, Harry fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a wrinkled pack of cigarettes. It was a filthy, disgusting habit that he'd picked up somewhere. He really needed to get rid of it. But, he had to admit, smoking calmed him. It gave him something to do when he was alone, which was a fair amount of time lately.

So far he'd been able to hide the fact that he did occasionally smoke from Hermione, who would lecture him and probably start leaving magazine articles about cancer and the consequences of tobacco usage tucked into odd places in his flat.

He really didn't want the lecture.

He was pretty sure Ron knew he smoked, and didn't really care. After all, Harry didn't tell Ron how to live his life.

The first pull made his shoulders relax as the nicotine hit his system. Yes, there was nothing like a good fag.

He finished the first smoke and was just about to go back inside and start clearing the piles of dirty glasses and Butterbeer bottles when he noticed that the three couples left in the living room were rather…occupied. Both sofas, and Harry's favorite recliner, were being used as…

"Awww," Harry moaned, cursing softly. "I just cleaned those!"

He shuddered when Seamus struggled to remove Demelza's bra and flung it across the room. It fell over the top of Dean's bare shoulders and he shrugged it off, returning back to kissing Luna and letting his hands wander—

Harry turned away, not willing to see that go on again. And he flatly refused to look at the other sofa where he knew Hermione and Ron were. There were just some things you should never know about your best friends.

Not that he didn't know they had sex. Merlin, he'd walked in on them quite enough times to be sure they were healthy, young adults. And he really couldn't begrudge them the fact that they enjoyed their relationship. He just wished it didn't have to be in his living room, which he had to walk through to get to his own, lonely bedroom.

He'd consider Apparating straight to his room, but the wards he had on the flat made that impossible. Harry glanced over the side of his first floor balcony and wondered if he could conceivably scale down and then find a hotel for the night. He was tired enough that he may even be able to sleep in a strange bed.

At least it's a nice night, Harry told himself as he fished for another fag and resigned himself to staying out here all night, or at least until they were all finished inside and he could walk through without witnessing any of it.

"You put up with entirely too much, Harry."

He nearly choked on the smoke when Ginny's voice sounded from behind him. Harry hadn't even heard the door slide open. Then again, he was really trying to close his ears to anything that may be happening outside of his own head.

"And this," she said, casually reaching up and taking the fag from his lips to toss it over the side of the balcony, "is a disgusting habit."

Harry opened his mouth to protest, but it came out as more of a whine than anything.

"Damn woman," he grumbled. Mostly because she had a point, however.

"And you're quitting now," she continued, giving him a look that made him nod right away, without really thinking much about it. She seemed satisfied with his answer as she leaned her own arms against the railing and sighed.

"I thought you left," Harry said absently, remembering Ginny walking out, dragging Coote along behind her. He'd wanted to say goodbye, but there had just been too many people in between him and the door to maneuver that fast.

"I did," Ginny confirmed, a small smile lighting up her face. "But I came back. I thought you might need help cleaning up a bit."

"Oh." Harry felt a bit stupid and thick, but the fact that she'd thought about him made him feel a bit…funny, too. "Well, er…thanks."

"No problem, Harry." She glanced at him and then stared back out to the city. "You've got a great little flat here, you know."

"I like it," Harry said, clutching any thought that could put coherent words into his head. "The neighborhood is nice. There's a park just down at the end of the street."

"I've seen it," Ginny nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I think this place suits you well." She turned around, her shoulder brushing his, and leaned backward against the railing. "Actually, though, there's only one thing I don't like about your flat, Harry."

This startled him and he turned, looking at where she was staring. He spun again as a pale, bare leg lifted over the back of the sofa where he knew Ron and Hermione were…busy. Everyone else was evidently already gone, or at least moved on to other rooms. He prayed they'd at least have the decency not to have sex on his

bed.

"Er…"

"You want me to go break it up?" Ginny asked matter of factly. "Or do you want to do the honors?"

"Er…"

Ginny chuckled and turned around, nudging his shoulder with her own. "I imagine you've seen enough of that over the years."

"Entirely too much," Harry admitted with a grimace.

"Then stand up for yourself," Ginny nudged him again. "Tell them you think it's disgusting and that your inheritance is running out because you have to keep buying furniture to replace the contaminated stuff."

Harry snorted and chuckled at the thought. "They probably thought I was already in bed," he dismissed. Really, he could go in and say something. It *was* his flat.

Ginny sighed again and then moved toward the door. Harry was half relieved that she was going to deal with this, and yet…

When she returned however, with a mostly full bottle of Firewhiskey in her hands and then charmed the sliding doors to be opaque, Harry's jaw nearly dropped.

"I can't watch that, or even think about it, sober," she said, taking a long drink straight from the bottle while she sat heavily on the lounge chair. Watching the liquid drain out of the bottle, and the small dribble that escaped and ran down the column of Ginny's throat made Harry swallow thickly. His groin stirred and he glanced away quickly, scolding himself for being a pervert and for being lonely in the first place.

"You going to drink that whole thing by yourself?" he asked as he sat down beside her.

"Maybe," Ginny said, holding up the bottle and closing one eye to stare through the amber light that shown through it.

"Give over," Harry demanded, holding his hand out for the bottle as he watched her. Suddenly, the idea of getting plastered sounded like just what he wanted to do. It was *his* birthday after all.

Ginny didn't say anything, but her smile stretched her face pleasantly and Harry found he almost couldn't tear his eyes away. He took a long swallow and winced as it burned his throat.

They continued to drink, taking turns with the bottle, in silence for a few minutes before Ginny spoke.

"I was surprised you didn't have a date tonight, Harry," she said, sliding until her back rested against the brick of the flat and her legs stuck straight out across the lounge.

"Date?" Harry snorted. "I don't have time for dating. Besides, there really isn't anyone out there I'm interested in."

"There has to be someone," Ginny mused as she used the back of her hand to wipe a dribble of liquid from her chin and passed the bottle back over to him.

Harry set it in his lap without taking a drink and stared at it. His head was feeling pleasantly light and

wobbly. The urge to laugh uncontrollably bubbled up in him, but he turned it around on Ginny, who had her eyes closed.

"What about you?" he asked. "You and Coote are a new thing."

Ginny smiled slowly and looked over at him, her head tipping to the side just a bit, as if she were too tired to hold it up. "Ritchie and I are just friends, Harry."

Harry narrowed his eyes, remembering—although fuzzily—the way she'd held onto his hand all night. "Didn't look like that to me," he grumbled, not sure why the thought bothered him. Ginny was a big girl. She could take care of herself.

Ginny laughed, a sound that sent chills all through his body. And then she leaned over onto him, draping an arm around his back as her head found his shoulder.

"It's true. Besides…he has this thing for Demelza." She scowled toward the opaque window. The charm must be wearing off a bit as Harry could make out shadows now. "And Demelza obviously has a thing for Seamus."

"Oh," Harry said, feeling a bit stupid that he hadn't noticed. Then again, why should he have?

"It's this really sick, love triangle kind of thing that makes me tired just thinking about it," Ginny admitted.

Harry nodded again, not fully understanding, and not really wanting to. He took another drink from the bottle and then offered it to Ginny, who grimaced and turned a bit green.

"No thanks," she muttered, rubbing her face harshly.

"So you're not dating anyone?" Harry ventured again, trying to remember where the conversation had left off.

"Don't really have time," Ginny said as she stretched, arching her back like a cat and reaching her arms high above her head.

Harry licked his lips as a flash of pale skin showed around her middle. He quickly finished off the last of the bottle and set it on the floor, prying his eyes away from her.

"You should make time," he said, surprising even himself. "You're…really great, Ginny. You deserve to be happy."

He turned around to find her staring at him in a strange way; a way that he really didn't know how to interpret.

"You as well, Harry," she said, leaning back onto him again. This time, however, Harry put his own arm around her back. He was feeling very tired all of a sudden. Tired and…content.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, listening to the cars go by and the other sounds of a city settling down for night.

"I'm not sure," Harry said, trying very hard to focus on the dark night outside the little comfortable spot he and Ginny had made here, "what I want is out there. I'm not even sure what I want."

Ginny was quiet for a minute and he thought she might have fallen asleep before she shifted.

"I know the feeling," she said quietly with a bit of a sigh in her voice.

They both flinched when the opaque charm wore completely off the door and the edge of the sofa could now be seen from where they were sitting. It rocked back and forth, sliding a fraction of an inch across the floorboards and back again.

"Sweet Merlin," Harry moaned, pressing his eyes closed as he fumbled with his wand, trying to recast the charm. "I'm going to die a virgin," he said despairingly.

The glass on the door cracked under the force of his out of control spell, but it held, and went completely dark, thankfully.

He shuddered at the thought and pressed his thumb and forefinger under his glasses and into his eyes, hoping that the bright lights flashing behind the eyelids would blot out what he was imagining.

"Are you…did you just…" Ginny stared at him and pulled away.

Harry took a moment to blink away the darkness in his eyes and stared back at her. "I said that out loud, didn't I?" he said, an awed tone to his voice.

"You haven't…" Ginny's jaw dropped a bit and Harry became irritated.

"Go ahead and make fun of me," he bit out, scooting away from her further.

"I'm not—"

"Why is it so funny that I've not met the right person yet?" he asked, mostly speaking to himself, but a little bit to her. Ron certainly ribbed him enough about his personal life.

"It's not," Ginny said. It was then that he realized that she hadn't actually been laughing. Her expression was more one of shock and…something else his pounding head couldn't quite grasp right now. "It's…sweet."

"Shit," Harry mumbled, rolling his eyes and tipping over so that he was lying on the lounge. He removed his glasses and pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes. "It's damned pathetic, if you ask me."

"It's not," Ginny protested. He could hear the roll of her eyes in her tone. She wrapped her hand around his arm and tried to tug it away from his face, but Harry wouldn't let her. "It's…sweet."

"Sweet?" Harry grimaced, glaring up at her. "It's *not* sweet, it's…pitiful."

"Harry, stop being so melodramatic," Ginny said. The lounge shifted and Harry could tell she was lying next to him now, probably facing him and glaring at his dramatics.

"I'm a twenty-two year old virgin," Harry announced to the world. Suddenly, it wasn't so much pathetic as it was funny. Hilariously funny, actually.

They both laughed until Harry's sides ached and he felt as if he might possibly throw up. But it was cleansing all the same, to be laughing with a friend over something he had little control over in his life.

"Well," Ginny said when they both calmed down enough to breathe. "Then I'm just as pathetic as you," she said, rolling onto her back so that she was staring up at the ceiling of the balcony above them. "Because I'm one too."

Harry took a moment to process that statement. "You're a twenty-two year old virgin too?" he asked, raising

his head.

Ginny rolled her eyes and turned her head to look at him. “You got the last part right.”

Harry sank back down and mirrored Ginny’s position. Their shoulders rubbed and his hand fumbled for hers. “I don’t think you’re pathetic, Ginny. You’re nothing but…wonderful and beautiful and…and…wonderful.”

“And you’re drunk, Mr. Potter,” Ginny said, even as she smiled.

“Not so much,” Harry protested, realizing he might actually be right, because his head was feeling fairly clear right now.

“Enough,” Ginny said, a smirk on her face.

And then they were serious for a minute. Harry wasn’t sure what should be said, just that *something* should be said.

“Do you…” Ginny started and then trailed off, her hand squeezing his until it made his fingers tingle.

The idea that her words pushed into his head ought to have worried him. Because this was Ginny. This was his friend. His best mate’s little sister. This was…Ginny.

But the fact that she was a very attractive woman, and the way that her tongue darted out and moistened her lips and the way he could feel the goosebumps break out all along her arm, and actually see her nipples harden underneath the t-shirt she was wearing…all of that combined to convince Harry that it was actually perfectly natural to be aroused by her. To be thinking about her in *that* way.

“I don’t really want to be a virgin,” he admitted, his cheeks heating when the words breached his own ears. Maybe he *was* drunk after all.”

“How about we make a deal then?” Ginny said. Her lips looked dry and Harry couldn’t stop looking at them as she spoke. “In…six months, if neither of us have…if we still haven’t had sex…then we do it—“

“Together,” he finished, the idea making his head feel both light and full at the same time.

“Yeah,” Ginny said, giving his hand a squeeze. “I mean, we both understand each other. And I find you…very attractive.”

“You’re beautiful,” Harry blurted out. He mentally began to chastise himself, but when she smiled, the words died in his brain.

“What do you think?”

“Six months,” Harry repeated, trying to calculate when that would be.

“Let’s make it…New Years Eve. Instead,” Ginny said.

The idea, Harry had to admit, was more than exciting. “Yeah,” he said, agreeing without much thought. “Yeah, let’s do it.”

Ginny nodded, a mischievous smile spreading across her face. “You have to let me know if you change your mind, or if…if it’s not necessary anymore.”

“Same for you,” Harry said, although the thought of Ginny finding someone else made him squirm a bit.

“It’s a deal then,” Ginny said firmly, giving his hand a squeeze before leaning forward and pressing a kiss to his cheek. She nuzzled her face into his shoulder and Harry shifted them so that he could put an arm around her back.

Harry closed his eyes, not able to help the smile that he wore. His birthday, despite the rocky start, might just have turned out alright anyway.

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Ginny’s pounding head woke her. That and the uncomfortable brace that she didn’t remember being in her bed…

Wait a second.

Her eyes fluttered open and she blinked up at Harry’s face, calm and so young looking in sleep. Now she remembered where she was. At Harry’s flat, on his balcony. They must have fallen asleep late last night…after drinking almost an entire bottle of firewhiskey.

Although now that she thought of it…she’d been much more hung over after drinking less before. Ginny stared up at the ceiling above them as she let her fingers play along the hairs on Harry’s arm. It would be just like Fred and George to water down the bottles they brought. Damn brothers, anyway.

Harry shifted next to her, his face pressing more into her shoulder and the arm wrapped around her waist moving a bit. Ginny took a deep breath and thought back to their conversation last night.

To say that she was shocked that Harry hadn’t had sex was an understatement. Not that she expected him to be the type that jumped in bed with any available woman; that wasn’t his style at all. But there had been girls, hadn’t there? The tabloids and newspaper surely made enough headlines about Harry’s relationships. Ginny knew that most of that was rubbish. But over the past few years, surely they had gotten at least something right.

It wasn’t exactly like Ginny went about asking Ron, or even Hermione, about Harry’s personal life. She wasn’t in love with him anymore. But in that same breath, Ginny freely admitted to herself that she still carried around a bit of a crush on him. And probably always would.

The bright light of morning made their agreement the night before much clearer than it had been in the hazy, alcohol-induced, happy place of the night.

They’d agreed to have sex.

Wow.

Strangely, the thought didn’t frighten Ginny the way that it probably should have. Sex with Harry would be, most likely, very much like their friendship; casual and comfortable, while possessing an intensity that Ginny knew wouldn’t, and maybe even *couldn’t* come with anyone else.

The idea was just as thrilling as it was terrifying, but for entirely different reasons.

“Think they’ve cleaned themselves up enough that I don’t have to memory charm both of us?”

Harry’s soft words startled Ginny and she blinked up at him. His lazy smile dazzled her just a bit and she felt

her cheeks flame.

Down girl.

"I certainly hope so," Ginny said. The contentment that she felt lying here next to Harry was a bit frightening if she allowed herself to think about it. So she pushed it away. There would be time to examine it later. "Because I have training later this afternoon."

"Night training?" Harry said, picking up his head and searching for his glasses. His eyes were red rimmed and bloodshot, making Ginny smirk.

"Sometimes," she agreed. Reluctantly, she began to get up, swinging her legs over the side of the lounge and stretching. "Gwenog wants us to be able to fly in all kinds of conditions."

Harry stayed where he was as Ginny stood, looking up at her, glassy eyed. His expression was one that she really couldn't place, but she wondered if he was reviewing the memory of their agreement last night, possibly even regretting the alcohol that led to the strange things being said between friends.

But then he smiled and Ginny pushed the nervous feelings away, extending her hand to help him up.

"You have to work today?"

"No, thank goodness," Harry said, holding his head as he sat on the edge of the lounge. "I'm not sure I could manage sitting in an office today."

"You should go for a fly," Ginny suggested. "One of the best ways to get over a hangover."

Harry chuckled softly. "I'm assuming you know this from experience."

Ginny shook her head wryly. "A Harpy has a reputation to protect, you know. Gwenog indulges us on our off time, as long as we are fully up and running at practices and at game time."

Harry shrugged. "I've broken up a few of those parties, I think."

"I remember," Ginny nodded. "Thank Merlin you didn't bring Ron with you that night." The memory of herself dancing on a table—fully clothed, thank you very much—flashed and Ginny laughed at herself. Harry had been amused when he helped her down and pressed a flask of hangover potion into her hand before making sure she'd gotten home safe.

"At least there was no table dancing last night," Harry said, finally standing and tossing a friendly arm over her shoulder.

Ginny wasn't sure if it was to help himself steady the floor beneath him, or to make sure she was steady. At any rate, it felt nice to be close to him again.

"Did *I* do that?" Harry asked as he stared at the cracked glass.

Ginny laughed and nodded. "Yes, sir, you did."

"Wow," Harry peered at the glass and then waved it off. "I'll fix it later." His arm slid from her shoulder and he gave her a small nudge in the back toward the door. "You go in first, scream if they're still in there, yeah?"

"That will go over well," Ginny said dryly as she stuck her head in. Ron's large foot dangled over the side of

the sofa, which looked to have moved several inches from where it should be. And Hermione's bra hung over the back cushion. Ginny glanced over to see that at least they were both covered up before she walked back to the door Harry had probably completely ruined last night.

"Everyone's gone," she said cheerfully. Harry grinned and pretended to wipe his brow before entering.

"Do you have time for breakfast before you leave?" he asked, shifting in place before his face split in a huge smile. "It's the least I can do for you…I mean, after we slept together and all."

Ginny snorted out a laugh but was interrupted from answering by Ron's spluttering.

"What the hell?!"

They both spun and Ginny took a step closer to Harry, smirking at her brother. Ron was clutching the thin blanket he and Hermione had been sharing around his waist, and had his wand trained on Harry, who had his hands up in surrender.

"Ronald!" Hermione hissed. Ginny could see her hand reaching over the side of the sofa, searching for clothing as she tried to stay hidden.

"*What* did you just say?"

"Er…" Harry floundered for a second, possibly retracing what he'd actually said and how it could have brought on this response.

"You," he pointed at Harry, and then turned his wand on Ginny. "And *you*…"

"Oh, get over yourself, Ron," Ginny scolded, moving forward to hand Hermione's shirt back over the sofa to her. "Harry and I fell asleep on the lounge on the balcony after talking. He certainly wasn't going to walk through this room to get up to his bedroom with you two going at it on *his* sofa."

Ron's bloodshot eyes moved back and forth between her and Harry as the gears in his mind tried to make sense of what she'd said. The blanket slipped a bit and Ginny huffed, summoning all the remaining clothing and banishing it toward the sofa.

"You owe me a new sofa," Harry said as he finally lowered his hands and shook his head, moving off toward the kitchen.

Ginny laughed and followed him. "Thanks for the offer," she said as she ducked her head into the small kitchen. Harry was rummaging in the fridge, pulling out enough food to feed all four of them. "But I think I need to pass."

"Next time, maybe," he said. The look he was wearing earlier, just after he'd first woken up—the one that Ginny couldn't quite identify—was back. But this time, Ginny thought just maybe she knew what it meant now.

She hurried into the room, snatching an apple off of the counter and pressing her lips to his stubbly cheek. "Next time we sleep together, Potter, I'll expect a three course meal."

Harry laughed and Ginny ducked out of the room, her cheeks burning.

Before she made it out of the door, however, Ron caught her. He blocked the front door with his tall frame and his eyes darted over her head to the kitchen. Harry was banging pots and pans around noisily.

“Did you and Harry…”

“Relax, Ron,” Ginny said, rolling her eyes at his over-protectiveness. “I don’t ask about your love life, do I? Not that I have to after last night’s show, although.”

“We thought Harry had already gone to bed,” Ron said in a low voice full of guilt. “If I’d known he was out on the porch…”

“That makes it alright to have sex on his sofa?” Ginny asked incredulously.

“No,” Ron said, fidgeting. “All you really did was sleep?”

Ginny huffed, annoyed that Ron was being such a hypocrite. Really, it would serve him right if she and Harry had gone at it like rabbits and she could make his eyes bulge with the details.

An idea surfaced and, although it wasn’t very fair toward Harry, it was funny.

“Ron,” she said, leaning forward and resting her hand on his chest. “Harry and I actually spent all night talking. He really needed someone he could talk to, you know. Sometimes he can’t always tell you everything that’s bothering him.”

“What couldn’t he tell me?” Ron mused, his eyes darting back toward the kitchen where Harry was whistling while making breakfast.

“You’ll have to ask him the details,” Ginny said, shaking her head sadly. “But…Harry confessed last night that he is gay.”

Ron’s jaw dropped and he stared at her and then at the kitchen.

Ginny laughed mightily and used the opportunity to duck out of the door. “Good luck, Harry,” she muttered as she trotted off down the stairs. No doubt he’d make her pay for that. But that was part of the fun of their friendship.

She’d send him a peace offering of a hangover potion soon and that would smooth over the rough edges.

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Harry’s throat was hoarse half-way through the game, but he wouldn’t have missed it for the world. Ginny was starting as Chaser today after working hard for so long on the reserve team.

And she looked brilliant out there today, swooping and swerving with the Quaffle tucked under her arm and that beautiful, fierce look on her face, her green robes flapping behind her in the wind.

When her owl had come just this week, a frantically scribbled message that Harry had nearly had to decode, telling him that she was starting, on her birthday no less, and really wanted him to be there, Harry had traded two shifts just to be able to come. Thankfully Williams had been willing to be talked into the trade. But it also meant that he would miss her birthday dinner tonight at the Burrow…and any celebration if they won.

“You still going to kill my sister after her joke?” Ron asked, clapping Harry on the back and then cheering as Ginny scuffled with one of the much larger Appleby Chasers.

Harry grinned at the memory. It hadn’t been funny at the time to walk out of the kitchen and have both Ron and Hermione clasp him in tight hugs, ignoring the plates of breakfast he was trying to avoid spilling, and tell

him that they supported his choice of an alternative lifestyle.

It was quite a feat to convince them that it had been all Ginny's idea of a joke, and that he *very much* preferred witches over wizards.

"No, but I owe her one," Harry said, finishing off what remained in his Butterbeer. The vial of hangover potion she sent later that morning, with a sweet little note attached to it helped to soften any irritation he felt toward her.

That and the fact that she'd signed the note 'love, Ginny'. He'd spent entirely too much time reading things into it that were probably never intended in that sentiment. All the same, it was a good memory and Harry had tucked the card away in his old Hogwarts trunk, right next to a handmade card that still screeched mildly when he opened it, and a wrinkled, rumpled piece of parchment with a horrid little poem on it.

And today he had a card for her, tucked deep inside the interior pocket of his robes. He'd spent hours thinking of the right way to say what he wanted to say, without coming off too…emotional or putting too much behind his words.

But he still wanted to tell her how much her friendship meant to him. The past two weeks since his birthday he'd been thinking a lot about Ginny and what she meant to him. She almost always seemed to be there, mostly in the background, but she popped up from time to time when he really needed someone. Harry wasn't sure how she knew just when to show up; she just…did.

The day after his birthday, once he'd finally convinced Ron and Hermione that he really wasn't gay and shooed them out the door, and scourgified the sofa several times, he'd roamed around the house trying to clean. But mostly he'd been thinking about Ginny and the agreement they'd made.

Sex. They were going to have sex.

In light of that thought, six months seemed both entirely too far away, and loomingly close. What if she changed her mind? Would it really matter if she did, if she found someone else, besides just a friend, that she wanted to share that with?

Harry didn't like that thought and tucked it away to deal with another time. If Ginny found someone else, then he wouldn't have lost anything, really, he'd be back to where he was before last night. The thought made him a bit sad, but, again, he pushed it away.

The Harpies won the game by a spectacular two hundred and ten points, mostly due to Ginny's hard charging lead right at the beginning of the game. As the fans poured down onto the field to congratulate the team, Harry and the rest of the Weasleys held back, reminiscing the highlights of the game while chatting about things.

Harry glanced at his watch and swore silently. He really wouldn't get to celebrate at all with Ginny. He was due at work in fifteen minutes.

Ginny was like a whirlwind when she finally entered the box. Her face was alight with excitement from the win and happiness at seeing all of her family. Harry hung back in the shadows while they all greeted her with hugs and congratulations. Fred and George tossed confetti all over her that made her hair and shoulders sparkle like fairy lights. Ron and Bill lifted her on their shoulders and paraded her around the box for a minute before she finally demanded, through laughter, to be let down.

Finally, she caught Harry's eye and smiled widely. "I wasn't sure if you'd make it," she said when they were face to face.

"I wasn't sure either," Harry admitted. He shifted in his spot and fumbled for the card in his pocket. "I have something for you for, er…for your birthday."

"It can wait until later," Ginny said softly. She glanced around and people shifted. Harry wasn't sure if they were trying to listen in, or trying *not* to.

His cheeks burned just a bit as he handed the card over anyway. "Actually, I won't be there later. I have to work now."

"Oh." Disappointment flooded her face and Harry bit his lip. There was no way he could miss work now; not after working so hard to try and trade his shift so that he could be here for the game.

"I'm sorry."

"It's fine," Ginny waved it off. "What time do you get off? Maybe you can come by then."

Harry grimaced. "Not until two."

Ginny took the card from his hand and leaned forward, pressing a kiss to his cheek. "Come by the flat, I'll… I'll leave a light on," she whispered into his ear as they embraced quickly.

Nervousness flooded through him as Ginny pulled away and moved on to hug her parents. But underneath it all was an overwhelming…excitement about being able to sit on the sofa with Ginny and just…talk.

Maybe *this* is what he'd been missing for so long. Just a friend who really wanted him around. Someone who wanted him to show up at two o'clock in the morning, and would even be waiting for him.

Ron and Hermione were great, but they didn't really understand him the way that Ginny did.

Working the overnight shift didn't seem like such an undesirable thing anymore.

***

Ginny hurried through her shower, careful not to slip on the wet tiles as she moved back through the locker room and to her locker.

"Oooo, Weasley must have a hot date tonight!" Kinson, the small and spunky Seeker for the Harpies teased, making Ginny smile.

"Actually," she answered, pulling on her knickers and a worn pair of jeans that were her favorite precisely because they had holes in both knees. Her mother detested the trousers and often commented on them when Ginny would wear them to the Burrow. "I'm just meeting a friend."

She hoped Harry's invitation to drop by after their run of traveling games was still open. Either way, she planned to go anyway and just hope that he was sitting at home, alone, on a Friday night.

A small niggling fear that he may have a date, and that she may be interrupting something if she showed up, settled in her head. Ginny shrugged it off, however. It wasn't really something she could dwell on. If he did have company, or wasn't home, Ginny would just go home and crawl into bed. Nothing lost there.

The night four weeks ago when Harry's tentative knock had woken her from her cat nap on the sofa flashed through her mind and she couldn't help but smile.

“I always smile like that when I’m meeting friends,” Kinson teased again, bringing a round of laughter from Ginny’s teammates.

Ginny rolled her eyes and ignored the teasing. After growing up with six brothers, she was well practiced at it.

They’d stayed up all night talking about everything and nothing, sitting on her sofa until the sun peeked through the homemade curtains on the windows of the flat. And they’d laughed, each realizing that they had to work again in a few hours, yet not regretting the time at all.

“Sounds to me more like a ‘friends with benefits’ kind of thing,” Cramer, the sturdy Keeper, said as she sat next to Ginny.

“Just friends,” Ginny reiterated, hoping her cheeks wouldn’t flame bright red. It was the second week in September now. And New Years was just seventy eight days away—not that she was counting.

What started out as a joke, an agreement made after consuming almost a full bottle of alcohol, now seemed a real possibility. And the idea excited her.

Once she’d escaped the raucous guessing game that her teammates had started, trying to guess the identity of her secret rendezvous, Ginny hurried to a small pizza parlor just down from Harry’s flat. She ordered his favorite and decided to walk the few remaining blocks to his place, using the time to mentally rehearse what she was going to say.

It shouldn’t be something scripted, really, she knew. Because it didn’t mean a whole lot that she was dropping by, did it? It meant that she’d missed her friend while being away. She’d missed looking up into the stands and not seeing his thatch of black hair surrounded by the bright red Weasley crowns. She’d missed his casual humor and catching his eye when someone said something stupid to share a private joke.

It wasn’t overly late by the time she arrived, just after seven, but already she could see the glowing light in his front window, welcoming her inside.

Harry’s parting words when she’d told him about the travel schedule, ‘I’ll leave a light on for you,’ had become something she definitely looked forward to seeing. And it seemed as if all the lights in his flat were on.

“Don’t get too excited, girl,” Ginny scolded herself. “It might not mean what you want it to mean.”

But Harry swung the door wide when she knocked, grinning and bouncing on the balls of his feet, almost as if he’d been waiting forever for her to come.

“I missed you,” he admitted as they sat on the floor in front of the fireplace, eating pizza right out of the box and licking grease off of their fingers.

“I missed you too,” she admitted, feeling a bit shy now that they were here together. It was unreasonable, when she thought about it. There was no reason to act this way; it was *Harry* after all.

“I…I wondered if you’d come,” he said, finally tossing the remains of his fifth piece into the lid of the box.

“I wasn’t sure if I would,” Ginny shrugged herself. They sat in silence for a few minutes until Harry shifted the box away from them and sat with his back against the sofa, mirroring her position, and wound their hands together. Ginny tried not to read too much into his touch—they’d held hands occasionally before, although it was starting to happen with frightening regularity lately.

"What have you been doing while I've been gone, Potter?" she prompted, wanting to hear all about his days.

"Not much," he shrugged. He went on to tell her what he could about a few of the cases he was working, and about the Cannons game he and Ron had gone to.

"Ergh," she groaned. "Sounds better than two a day practices and running stairs for hours a day."

Harry chuckled softly. "I always thought Oliver Wood was a nutter, but maybe he was just like all the others. You have to be off to want to do that to yourself."

"I'm not a nutter," Ginny defended. She grimaced then, thinking of the things she put herself through just to play. "Okay…I am. But I've also seen some of the things *you* put yourself through, Harry."

Harry laughed then, a full-throated sound that sent chills all down Ginny's spine. She hadn't heard that laugh in a long time. It was almost as if Harry periodically forgot he *could* laugh that openly, and then occasionally remembered.

"We're both more than a bit off," he conceded. "Tell me about your trip. I listened to all of the games on the wireless…even when I was supposed to be working," he added guiltily.

"That must have gone over well," Ginny laughed, yawning widely.

"Kingsley knows it happens occasionally," Harry explained. "Kind of hard to ignore it when the blokes wander in and out of my office and a sporadic cheer bursts out. They all think I'm crazy for supporting the Harpies…but they sure do love to stare at that poster you gave me…the one with the whole lot of you looking so fierce."

Ginny's jaw dropped. "You have that up at work?"

"Of course," Harry laughed. "I have my own office, although Ron's in there enough that he really should just move his desk in. Plus…" he trailed off. "I like having a picture of you there."

Ginny grinned as Harry's cheeks flushed deep red, and promised herself that she'd get a genuine picture of herself taken, just for him.

"I have a picture of you," she blurted, not sure why she was telling him this. It would probably really embarrass him. "It was in your sixth year—"

"You were dating Dean Thomas," Harry said, a heavy tone to his words, as if that fact overshadowed all of the other much worse things that happened that year. Ginny wasn't sure what to make of it, so she went on, ignoring it.

"Yes. But the photo was of you and Ron and Hermione sitting on the sofa, and I'm not sure what you were talking about, but you and Ron are laughing. Sometimes I wish I knew what it was that made you smile like that, Harry, because I love your smile. You don't share it often enough." Ginny hadn't meant for the last phrase to slip out and bit her lip, waiting for Harry to start brooding, or at least to defend himself.

But he stared at her instead, something dark and intense lurking in his green eyes behind the thin glass. Just for a second, when their faces were held so closely together—only inches separating them, really—Ginny wondered if Harry wanted to kiss her as badly as she wanted him to.

"I was thinking, the other day, about that deal we made," Harry said softly, his lips barely moving.

Ginny blinked, thrown by the change of subject. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” he said, looking down at their joined hands and tracing the edge of her thumb with his other finger. “And I don’t really think it’s fair.”

Trying to catch up with his train of thought, and *not* think about how plump and perfect his lips looked right then, Ginny shook her head a bit. “Fair?” She very nearly rolled her eyes at her monosyllabic answers tonight. But Harry had this way of charming the pants off of her—not really, although she wouldn’t complain—

“Yeah,” Harry continued, finally raising his face, adorned with pink cheeks, to look at her. “I mean, we agreed to…to…”

“To have sex,” Ginny supplied, loving that his face flushed further at her words. Obviously, he’d thought about this just as much as she had lately.

“Yeah. And…we don’t even know, really, that we’re…compatible.” Ginny stared at him as he continued, stammering away. “I mean. We’re friends…good friends. You’re my best friend, these days,” he said down at their hands. “But…I just wonder, you know, if there’s…more.”

“More than being friends,” Ginny mused, finally catching on to what he was really asking, and not what his words were saying. “So…you mean if we’re attracted to each other, sexually.”

Harry shifted in his spot and nodded awkwardly. It looked as if he were about to answer no, but then changed his mind to actually tell the truth.

“Well, there’s not really a test for that sort of thing, I don’t think,” Ginny mused, turning toward him a bit. “You either are, or you aren’t,” she whispered, glancing down his body and then back up again. He definitely *was*, she surmised. “But maybe…”

“What if we…kissed?” Harry asked. He looked a bit relieved that he’d finally said it. And Ginny could tell that he must have been thinking about it all night, because his shoulders finally relaxed just a fraction.

She almost laughed, but managed to keep it to only smiling. “I don’t know…I mean, we’re really just friends, aren’t we?” she teased. Harry’s smile slipped off of his face until Ginny leaned forward, her lips barely brushing his.

Apparently, that wasn’t enough for him, because his hand came up and held the back of her neck in place, not harshly, but enough that she wasn’t going anywhere. His lips met hers again, firm and full, moving against her.

Ginny couldn’t help the moan that escaped her as she let go of his hand to grasp his shoulders, her fingers bunching the cotton of his t-shirt.

The kiss seemed to go on forever before Harry pulled back, a dazed expression behind his smudged glasses.

“One more, I think,” Ginny said, leaning forward and all but attacking him. This time, however, Harry opened his mouth and let Ginny have control of the kiss. Her tongue reached in and tasted his, nearly making her melt when he responded by wrapping his arms around her whole body.

“Just to make sure,” Harry mumbled when they broke apart, his lips caressing her cheek and then her jaw, moving down toward her neck.

Ginny knew this could get out of control quickly, they were moving so fast. And they really hadn't talked about any of this at all. Attraction was definitely not an issue, it seemed, on either of their parts.

"Harry," she said, finally gathering enough strength to nudge him away from her. "Harry, I have to go."

"What?" he asked as he pulled away, completely confused and looking absolutely adorable. Ginny knew they really needed to sit down and a have a real, honest conversation about this whole deal, and about how they were beginning to feel about each other.

But it couldn't happen tonight. Because Ginny needed time herself to analyze what was happening and why it was happening now.

"I have to go," she said again, reaching up to straighten his glasses. Harry's eyes darted away from her and he looked a bit guilty.

"I'm sorry, I didn't…"

"It's fine," she stopped him with a quick kiss. "Did I pass your test?" she whispered against his skin, causing him to shiver.

He didn't answer, but the guilt in his gaze was replaced with something definitely more dark and consuming. "When can I see you again?" he demanded as he helped her up. His hand found hers again and led her toward the doorway, even as it seemed he was pulling himself in that direction. Harry always did have a very strong will. Sometimes too strong, Ginny mused as she rubbed her face harshly.

"Soon," she promised, not really sure when she'd have a full handle on the situation between them.

Harry pulled her to him once more, their breath mingling and his body pulsing against her own. She supposed she should pull away, or be a bit shocked by how she could feel his desire for her. But she just couldn't. If there was a better way for her to communicate her own desire for him, right then, Ginny wished she knew of it.

They kissed again and Ginny's mind reeled.

It was then that she knew. Sleeping with Harry, having sex with him, would never be a mistake. Even if they didn't come out of it with a relationship, she would always treasure that memory. Being intimate with someone who held so much of your life in his hands could never be a mistake.

But Ginny needed to also be that person for Harry. Maybe that was selfish, but she felt she was entitled to be a bit selfish. This wasn't something casual they had agreed to, no matter the circumstances under which the deal had been made.

This was very real for Ginny.

"Goodbye, Harry," she finally said when they pulled apart.

Clarity only came once Ginny was back in her own flat, in the cold darkness of her bedroom. And the realization that six months just wasn't going to happen if Harry felt anywhere near what she herself was feeling dawned on her. That wasn't a bad thought. In fact, it was very pleasant thought that fueled her dreams that night.

(to be continued)

Rosemary's Babies Scavenger Hunt!

Ha! You have made it here. I hope you're patting yourself on the back. Unfortunately, you've got a way to go before you make it to the Puff at the End of This Book.

Now. Your next clue is very easy if you know the History of Andi. What is the second story she ever shared with the outside world?

Go!

Leaving A Light On: Part 2

Author: HGFan1111
Genre: Drama, Romance
Rating: R to NC-17
Warnings: sexual situations
Notes: Second half of the story. I think I caught all of the mistakes. If not, then I apologize. But it's finished and I can happy dance for the rest of the month while I work on everything else.

Leaving A Light On

Chapter 2

"You alright, mate?"

Harry looked over from where he'd been staring, at a rather unattractive view of a desolate desert in his magically maintained windowscape at the Ministry.

"Fine," Harry answered automatically. "Just…just tired." Really, he'd been thinking about how much he missed seeing Ginny over the past two days. Their schedules just hadn't cooperated enough to do more than send her owl, Archimedes, back and forth carrying notes.

Ron narrowed his eyes skeptically at his friend but then shrugged it away. "I asked if you wanted Hermione to ask that one witch in the Law Division to be your date for that Ministry Ball thing."

"What?" Harry snapped, his attention pulled completely away from Ginny and to the fancy parchment invitation that he'd had studiously been neglecting for the past two weeks.

"A date, Harry," Ron continued, a slightly amused smile on his face. "Or perhaps you've found one all on your own. Should Hermione and I double with you and *he?*"

"Shut it," Harry grumbled, although he shook his head in slight amusement. Two months and Ron still took the mickey out of him for Ginny's comment. Come to think of it, Harry hadn't paid her back for that. His mind drifted off thinking of all sorts of…interesting ways for him to get back at her. In fact, his morning showers lately had been a running tableau of ideas. Strangely enough, the Ginny in his fantasies really didn't mind the payback.

"Are you feeling alright?" Ron asked, peering at Harry as he perched himself on the edge of the desk, crumpling files and notes under him. "Maybe you should go and see Mum, get some Pepper-up Potion." He reached forward, holding his hand out to press it to Harry's forehead.

"Leave off," Harry grumbled again, snatching he parchment from Ron's hand, glaring down at it. "I don't know if I'm going," he admitted. "Hadn't really thought about it."

"You know you have to," Ron sighed. "The whole family is going to be there. And Kingsley specifically asked you to be there."

"And the press will be there also," Harry nodded, ruffling the back of his hair.

"They always are," Ron shrugged. "Never bothered you before."

The truth was, Harry *had* thought about the ball several times. He wanted to ask Ginny to go with him, as his date, rather than as a friend. But he hadn't quite got up the nerve yet. And now he only had less than a week left. Perhaps she'd already been asked by someone else, or just didn't want to go at all.

His mind drifted back to a few nights ago and the comfortable time they'd been spending together lately. But kissing her…wow. Harry had kissed a few girls in his time, but had never felt anything like he did when kissing Ginny.

This…something…between them was all encompassing and Harry wasn't sure he could even define it. He'd never been in love before, so was it really *love* he was feeling? Or was it something else.

He stood and walked toward the window, staring out at the dull brown landscape; the thought that Magical Maintenance must be angling for another pay raise entered his head, and then breezed right out again.

"Ron, how did you know you were in love with Hermione?" The words burst out of him before he could even really think about what, and who, he was asking.

"Er…" Ron spluttered and almost fell off the side of Harry's desk before righting himself. "Love?"

Harry looked back over his shoulder. "Yeah. You are in love with her, aren't you?"

"Yeah," Ron answered right away. They stared at each other for a minute before Ron came to stand beside him, his upper arm brushing Harry's shoulder. "You're in love?" he asked in a small voice. "I didn't even know you were dating someone."

Harry shifted about guiltily and opened his mouth to reply. "I'm not sure," he admitted. "And we're not really dating…more just…friends. But…"

"But you want to date her?"

Harry's heart pounded and he nodded. Ron looked at him for confirmation before a smug smile spread over his face.

"Do I know her?" Harry opened his mouth to tell Ron that he wasn't going to say anything, but Ron guessed what he was going to say. "Alright, alright, don't tell me. Just…you're serious, aren't you?"

"I…I think I am," Harry answered, awed that he was even considering this. A relationship with Ginny, or any other woman, really, had been the furthest thing from his mind a few months ago. He'd resigned himself that marriage and a family might not be in his near future, let alone a relationship that made his heart pound and his palms sweat. "I just…I've never felt anything like this and I don't know what to call it."

"How does she make you feel?"

Harry sighed, closing his eyes as he remembered kissing Ginny, and holding her hand, and talking to her. "Like I can fly without a broom," Harry answered. "Like…like my heart might burst out of my chest."

"Wow," Ron sighed, shaking his head. "Sounds like love to me."

"And sometimes we just…we can just sit and talk for hours, you know, and I don't even realize that time has passed at all," Harry continued, smiling now at the many memories he had with Ginny in them. She'd always been there, it seemed, just out of his line of vision until he really searched for her. But she was there.

"Are you going to ask her to come?" Ron asked, his voice quiet.

Harry looked down at the parchment in his hand, the scrolled lettering announcing the date and time.

"Yeah," he answered softly. "I think I will."

Ron turned to him then, a smile lighting up his face. "Finally!" he crowed. "Mum will be over the moon about you, and she'll leave me the hell alone about when I'm going to propose to Hermione and stop making her out to be some scarlet woman."

Harry laughed then, but the idea was sobering. Would Ginny's family approve of Harry's affection for their daughter? He'd never seen any indication that they might disapprove. The question was on the tip of his tongue, but Harry called it back in time. He really needed to talk to Ginny to make sure she felt the same before he outed them to her family.

"Oi!" Ron called when Harry began gathering his files and locking them away in his desk. "Where are you going?"

"I need to ask her now," Harry announced.

"*Now?*" Ron squeaked, staring at him as if Harry had voluntarily eaten something Fred and George had given him.

"Yeah," Harry answered, knowing it was extremely illogical to run off during the middle of the day, let alone the middle of his shift at work, just to ask Ginny on a real date with him. But then again, it also seemed the most logical thing to do as well. "Yeah," he affirmed. "No time like the present."

Ron continued to stare at him, but his incredulous expression gave way to something bordering between amusement and awe.

"You're gone over this woman, aren't you?" he asked.

Harry draped his cloak over his arm and stared down at his clean desk. "I am," he said, finally realizing it himself. The need to tell Ginny, to explain to her just what he was feeling pressed in on him again. "Make my excuses to Kingsley, yeah?"

"Er…sure," Ron said as Harry hurried past him. "I'll just tell him you've gone off your nut."

Harry didn't answer Ron's yell down the hallway, but picked up his pace, hurrying toward the hallway, and the lifts, and London, and eventually, Ginny.

Hoping to avoid a scene at the Harpies stadium, Harry tried Ginny's flat first. But there was no answer. Cursing himself for making the discovery of his feelings, or maybe just finally understanding them, right now instead of, say, three in the morning, where he knew she'd be a home and he could rouse her with a few knocks on her door. Better yet, if she had the light in her window on…

'You're kidding yourself, Potter,' he scolded himself as he Apparated to Holyhead and continued the trek to find Ginny. 'She'd hex you something fierce if you woke her at three.'

The image of a fiery Ginny, complete with bed head and rumpled pyjamas, yelling at him as she came up with the most creative mixes of jinxes and hexes imaginable made Harry grin. He could completely picture her right now, her cheeks flushed and her hands on her hips, the dark eyes he'd always loved flashing with intensity as she stared at him. His stalk slowed down to a meander as he let the fantasy take over in his mind, his body

reacting with interest.

Ginny would be yelling something horrid at him about interrupting her much needed sleep because she had a game in a few days, and Harry would brave the barrage of spells to get to her, taking her in his arms and leading her back toward her bedroom, which he could only imagine since he hadn't actually been there, where he would make it up to her by making love with her for hours.

"We're no' open ta visi'ors, sir."

The gruff security wizard who stood in front of Harry definitely meant business, startling Harry from his daydream. He glanced down at himself, wondering why the guard hadn't just stepped aside…

He wasn't wearing his Ministry robes. Where the hell had he left them?

A vague recollection of setting them down…somewhere…

"I'm not a visitor," he said absently. "I'm…well, I suppose I am." He could feel his face heat as the immovable guard continued to stare at him. "I'm…"

"I know 'oo ya are, sir," the guard nodded. "Bu' unless ya're family, or 'ere on official Ministry business, I'm afrai' I can't let ya past."

Harry nodded absently, his eyes straying past the bulk of the man out to the training pitch where he could hear Gwenog's demanding whistle and see the players running through their drills.

The urge to simply flash his Auror's badge and gain access was overwhelming. But it would also be wrong.

"It's worth more'n me job ta le' ya in, ya know," the guard shrugged. He actually looked a bit sympathetic, as if he was interested in letting Harry in, but knew he really couldn't.

"You could tell them I overpowered you," Harry joked, eyeing the size of the man in front of him. Sadly, it only brought a raised eyebrow in response. Apparently the guard had absolutely no sense of humor.

"I guess I'll just have to wait then." The realization completely deflated Harry as he gave one last glance toward what he could see of the green pitch outside. All the noise had stopped and he couldn't see anyone moving about.

"They'll be doon 'ere soon," the guard said as he crossed his arms. There was no need for him to emphasize his size and strength to Harry, but he supposed it was habit to seem as intimidating as he could.

"Thanks," Harry said, shrugging in resignation. The desire to see Ginny hadn't waned; in fact, it was more prevalent now that he knew he'd have to wait. He glanced down at his watch to see it was only two in the afternoon. Practice could, and had in the past, gone on much later than this. He'd go insane if he was forced to stand in front of Ginny's flat for hours waiting for her to come home. That, and he'd probably be hauled away when some nosy neighbor called the coppers on him.

Perhaps he could send a Patronus. The idea lit up inside of him, bringing new hope, almost as if a small Patronus had already been created inside of him.

Deciding to wait until he was out of the direct sight of the guard who still stood staring at him as Harry walked away—he really didn't fancy having to be peeled from the tile floor after being pummeled for being a threat—Harry picked up his pace. He pulled his wand the moment he was around the corner, and leaned his back against the wall, trying to decide what he wanted his Patronus to say.

Obviously, it had to be something calming, since the sight of his ethereal stag prancing toward her was likely to elicit excitement and apprehension both in her.

Finally deciding on something that sounded like it wouldn't cause panic, yet would impress upon her the urgency that Harry felt, he cast his Patronus and gave it the message.

"Go find Ginny, boy," he urged it, watching as it cantered off down the corridor and right around the corner.

Gasps and laughter sounded loudly from directly in the next corridor and Harry rolled his eyes as his own voice carried.

"Ginny, I'm here at the stadium. Don't panic, but I really need to speak with you. It's not an emergency. Well, it sort of is, but nothing too dramatic. No one is dying, or anything."

"Damnit," Harry cursed, rubbing his hands through his hair and contemplating his odds of making it out of the stadium without being seen, and then hiding forever in his flat. He may just have enough ale on hand to survive for a bit.

He resigned himself to melting into the corridor wall as the giggling came closer and closer.

Ginny's face peeked around the corner first, an amused expression on her face. "Harry?"

Unfortunately for Harry, the rest of her team, curious and smirking expressions intact, followed directly after.

"'lo everyone," Harry sighed, feeling his face flame brightly.

"Are you alright?" Ginny asked, coming to stand in front of him.

Harry stared at her, his jaw going slack and any words he had planned to say on his search to find her quickly flew out of his brain and evaporated at the sight of her.

Despite having just come from a practice that left her sweaty and disheveled, Harry couldn't remember seeing her as more attractive before. Or perhaps it was in light of his realized feelings that he was fully seeing her for how she always was.

"You're really starting to scare me now, Harry," Ginny warned, glancing back over her shoulder to where her teammates had slowly moved away, although they were still close enough to hear every word the two said.

"Sorry," Harry mumbled, tearing his eyes away from her body and finding her face. "I…is there somewhere we can talk? Privately."

Ginny eyed him warily for a moment before nodding. "If I wasn't sure it was you, Harry…" She trailed off and Harry shrugged, realizing how daft he probably looked and sounded.

"Everything's fine," he tried to reassure her. "I just…I need to talk to you about…something."

Ginny scowled at him again, even as she led him toward another corridor, this one completely empty. She quickly cast some sort of charm and Harry nodded at her competency. Really, he should be able to handle himself, being an Auror and all. The only excuse he had was that she was completely muddling his thoughts with how brilliant she looked and how he could smell the floral shampoo she used, over the top of her sweaty practice clothes, of course.

"Well it must have been urgent seeing as you've come all the way here during work hours—you *are* supposed to be working, aren't you?" she asked, utter confusion filling her face.

"Er…yeah," he admitted. Each minute he wasted not telling her how he felt convinced Harry that this was a colossal mistake and that he was being a complete and utter prat today—as opposed to every other day when he was just your regular, run-of-the-mill prat. "It's important."

Ginny gave him a look that said he'd better bloody well get on with it and Harry took a deep breath, trying to gather the resolve he'd felt back in his office talking with Ron not that long ago.

"I was talking to Ron today," he started out, relieved that she hadn't stormed away due to his sheer prat-ness yet. "And he was taking the mickey about this Ministry ball that is coming up, about how I didn't have a date yet and if Hermione should find someone for me to take.

"And I got to thinking…I'd rather just take you." He tried to smile as he said it, but was afraid it only came out as a grimace instead because Ginny just blinked at him.

Not the reaction he was looking for.

"If you want to," he added, shrugging a shoulder and cursing his own name. "If you don't, well, I'll understand. If I've completely bollixed it all up and misread the situation."

"You're asking me to be your date?"

Harry swallowed at the question that was too much of a question in his mind. Apparently he hadn't made himself clear at all.

"Yes?"

Ginny stared at him and he wasn't sure whether she was going to laugh at him, or pull her wand and begin hexing him.

"You came all the way out here to ask me to come with you to a ball," she clarified again.

Harry attempted to look pitiful, hoping that it would help his case, but Ginny just laughed at him.

"And," he added, breathlessly, praying he could redeem himself and possibly prove that he had any balls whatsoever, well, not really in *that* way. Although…

Focus, Harry.

"And to tell you that…that I think I'm falling in love with you."

The words seemed to take forever to travel the few inches in between them, or maybe it just felt that way.

"You…are you serious?" Ginny's jaw dropped and she stared at him before reaching up and trying to straighten her hair self-consciously.

He really wanted to tell her that it wouldn't help—because she was already beautiful—but he knew he'd just mess that up too.

"You are," Ginny pronounced. "You're serious."

“I am,” Harry said, blinking at the awe in her voice. He’d never really seen Ginny shocked quite so much and it was a bit unnerving. What did she think of his rather abrupt announcement? “But…it’s okay if you don’t…” He broke off, because that was a lie. It really wasn’t alright if she didn’t feel the same way. He’d live, of course, but would his life be worth living? That was a good question.

“Harry, stop being such a prat!” Ginny said, pressing her fingers into her temples as she began to pace back and forth in front of him.

This couldn’t be a good sign.

“I’ll just go,” Harry mumbled, wondering if there was a lake around he could drown himself in. Or a puddle. A puddle would be sufficient.

Ginny’s lips interrupted him by landing directly on his own. “I’m in love with you too,” she finally said when she pulled away. “I’ve tried and tried to convince myself that I wasn’t. But it’s no use. I just am.”

Harry stood, completely stunned, as his mind tried to catch up to what just happened.

“You…”

“And of course I’ll be your date to the ball.”

The words finally clicked in his head and a smile spread over his face. “You…yeah?”

“Harry, do try and keep up,” Ginny said before pressing herself against him. She giggled then and Harry decided there wasn’t a better sound in the entire world.

Harry grinned and leaned down to capture her lips, moving to trap her against the wall with his body. “And it’s not just because I’m randy,” he blurted, pulling away from her. “It’s not,” he defied when Ginny snorted out a laugh. “Well, I am…but…”

“I understand,” she nodded, kissing him again. Her hands slid to the back of his head and Harry moaned in satisfaction, completely losing himself in the feel of her up against him.

“We should probably talk,” Ginny said in between traded kisses. “And I really need a shower.”

Harry laughed and nodded. “I should probably talk to Ron too. I kind of ran out of the office in the middle of a conversation to talk to you.”

“Ron knows?” Ginny said, looking a bit apprehensive.

“Not about us,” Harry said, reluctantly pulling away just a bit. It would probably be best not to let his hormones take over and just…yeah, in the middle of the hallway.

“Meet you at your flat,” Ginny whispered against his lips. “Thirty minutes.”

Harry grinned. “I’ll—“

“Leave a light on,” Ginny finished, grinning at him.

Pulling his arms away from her was one of the hardest things he’d done in a long time. But the promise of thirty minutes was enough to hold him until then.

“Don’t take too long,” he whined and then rolled his eyes at himself.

“I won’t,” Ginny promised with a smile and a wink before ducking around the corner.

Harry leaned his head against the wall for a moment, trying to focus enough to be able to Apparate and not leave vital parts scattered all over Wales.

***

Ginny’s teammates just wouldn’t let the whole incident die. She nearly had to threaten them with every piece of blackmail she’d been hoarding over the years of flying with them to extract a promise that they’d keep their mouths shut until she and Harry were able to make their relationship public.

Cramer and Kinson seemed determined to make Ginny as red as possible.

“So…is that Mr. Friends-With-Benefits?” Cramer asked after Ginny allowed herself the luxury of a three minute shower.

“Who would have thought,” Kinson sidled up to Ginny’s other side and grinned. “I never really pictured Harry Potter as being quite so…”

“He’s adorable. Stuttering and stammering all over himself over you, girl,” Gwenog put in as she clapped Ginny on the back. “And don’t let either of these two take the mickey too much.”

Ginny laughed. “I can hold my own,” she promised. Most of her after-practice routine was skipped completely, although Ginny did remember to dry her hair and let it come down around her shoulders, remembering a comment Harry had made one of the last times they were together.

“See everyone later,” Ginny called out as she hit the doors running, ignoring the wolf whistles and raucous calls.

Her heart pounded away as she hurried toward an Apparition point. The whole day had been…well it was something. Something that Ginny really couldn’t define right now. Harry’s confession was completely out of the blue, although it pleased her to no end that he’d been the first to admit his feelings—and that they were real, not just based on his loneliness, or lust.

Harry Potter had always been an enigma in Ginny’s past. The early years of her schooling were spent dealing with the horrific crush she had on him, and feeling completely rejected and let down when he never returned those feelings.

But they’d become friends over those last years; very good friends, actually. And even though Ginny recognized that she was steadily falling in love with him, she understood that he was too involved in the war, too wrapped up in his destiny right then to return any of those sorts of feelings.

The Final Battle—watching Hagrid carry Harry’s lifeless body from the forest—had forced Ginny to face those feelings head on. And while she never told Harry about them, she was able to deal with them enough to set them aside so that they weren’t debilitating.

Her love for Harry faded over the years into a fond affection that would periodically roar back to life when he did something wonderful, or touched her in some way when she wasn’t prepared for it.

But it had never gone away.

And, in light of the way that Harry was so obviously smitten over her, Ginny was glad she was never successful at banishing the feelings completely. Now, basking in the light of his affection and obvious interest, Ginny shivered in the warmth they gave her.

Harry looked extremely nervous when he opened the door for her. She glanced around and smirked when she saw dirty socks peeking out from where he'd obviously shoved them under the sofa, and a stack of Daily Prophets hastily bundled near the dining room table. He'd made an effort to clean up a bit, not that Ginny really cared.

"Hi," he greeted her, his cheeks flaming red.

Gwenog was right, Ginny decided, Harry was adorable when he tripped all over himself and went all shy.

Ginny couldn't help herself and moved right into his embrace the moment the door closed behind her.

"You took forever," he whined before kissing her.

"Sorry," she mumbled, moving him toward the sofa, where he was obviously willing to be led, because he didn't protest at all.

Once they were seated, with Ginny straddling Harry's lap, and his arms around her, his lips exploring the soft skin on her neck and causing chills to race up and down her back, Ginny pulled back.

"Harry, we should really talk about this."

He nodded, even as he screwed up his face, trying to focus. Ginny fought the urge to laugh, knowing he was trying very hard to do as she asked. She vowed to herself that once they were done talking tonight, she'd definitely reward his patience.

"Yeah," he nodded again finally, "we should talk."

"Why do you love me?" Ginny blurted out. Best get right to it, she decided. Hate to make the poor man wait any longer than he has to.

"Er…" Harry's hands went immediately into his hair before he laid his head back on the cushion. "Lots of reasons, I guess."

"But what was it that made you realize it?" Ginny asked, straightening his shirt a bit and fussing with one of the buttons that had a string loose on it.

Harry reached up and brushed a strand of hair back over her shoulder. "I don't really want to be with anyone else right now," he said simply. "And not just date anyone else…I don't have any interest in meeting the blokes down at the pub. I don't want to go to Ron and Hermione's for dinner, or even to the Burrow. Not when I could be here with you, or at your flat. I just…I want to spend all my time with you."

"When you're not here with me," Ginny said softly, picking up where he left off, "all I do is think about you. And during the day, I find myself thinking of things that I just have to tell you."

Harry smiled slowly, his mouth quirking up more on one side than the other. "On my birthday…I was having the worst time, but I didn't understand why until the next day. I was fine until you showed up with your hand in Coote's. And it didn't even register that I was jealous until later."

"Poor Ritchie," Ginny said, smiling sadly. "I completely dumped his moping arse at his flat and came back

here to be with you. I could tell you weren't having a good time."

"I didn't…not until you and I were out on the balcony."

Ginny closed her eyes and leaned forward, nuzzling into his neck and letting herself remember that night…the way Harry's hand felt in hers, his body wrapped around hers later that night. She realized something then.

"You…I haven't seen you smoke since that night. In fact," she said, leaning forward again to sniff at his clothing, "I don't even smell it on you."

"I quit," Harry shrugged, his cheeks flushing pink again.

"Why? Not that I'm complaining…"

Harry went even redder then and brought his finger up to trace her jawline. "You told me to. Besides, you were right. I still miss it sometimes, but not enough to start again."

Her jaw dropped just a bit at the admission. Harry rarely did anything because someone told him to. "If it had been Hermione who told you to—"

Harry snorted. "I would have ignored her strictly on principle."

"What's the difference then?" Ginny asked.

Harry laughed and pulled her to him, going serious again. "I never dreamt about kissing Hermione," he mumbled before brushing his nose along her cheek and placing a kiss to the corner of her mouth. "I never got jealous when Hermione would kiss Ron." His face heated next to hers and his voice dropped to being barely audible. "I never had thoughts in the shower about Hermione. And I…I never got off to those thoughts."

"And you…" Ginny trailed off, her voice abandoning her completely at the image of a nude Harry, water cascading down his body as his hand rubbed his erect penis. In her fantasy, she could hear him call her name over and over. "Me?"

Harry pulled back, an honest, although shy, smile on his face. "You," he admitted. "I…I've been thick, Ginny. I just…I didn't know what it all meant for me. I felt so…so dirty after thinking things like that. Because Hermione told me you were over me so long ago. And you're so brilliant and so beautiful."

Ginny kissed him then, her hands clutching the front of his shirt as she crawled even closer to him, pressing their bodies together intimately.

"When I woke up to you, the morning after my birthday," Harry explained when they broke apart, "I just knew that I never wanted you to leave me. I wanted to stay like that forever."

"Me too," Ginny admitted, burrowing into his embrace.

"And when we talked about…about having sex," Harry continued. "It didn't scare me like it probably should have. It just felt…right. Like it was something we should already be doing anyway."

Ginny chuckled, digging her fingers into his ribs and making him squirm. "I'm not *that* easy, Harry."

"That's not what I meant," he protested softly. "I just…"

"I know," she nodded, reaching up to smooth her hands along his face. "I know what you're feeling, because

I've felt it for years."

"I'm sorry," he winced, placing kisses on her eyes and forehead. "I wish I hadn't taken so long to see what was right in front of me. We could have had years."

"I'm not sure either of us was ready," Ginny protested, knowing that either of them could be right. Perhaps they would have been ready for a serious relationship at a younger age. Or perhaps it would have fallen apart like so many Hogwarts romances did.

"But I'm ready now," Harry protested softly. His eyes shown brightly and Ginny could see the truth of his statement in them. "I'm ready to build something real…something based on real feelings and not just…driven by hormones.

"I never wanted that."

"Me either," Ginny agreed. "One night stands and empty relationships do nothing for me."

"Good," Harry affirmed, pressing a kiss to the soft spot under her ear. "How do you want to do this?"

Ginny laughed, wiggling in his lap. "I may not be experienced, but I'm fairly sure tab A goes into slot B."

Harry laughed then as well. "Not *that*, I meant…us. How do you want to… Do you want to tell everyone? Or do you want to keep it quiet?"

"I'm afraid the secret thing wouldn't last long," Ginny protested softly, staring at the line on his face where his dark stubble was just beginning to show. She always thought his five o'clock shadow was sexy as hell. "The team knows about us now."

"Yeah," Harry mused, his fingers playing with the ends of her hair. "I wasn't very subtle."

"It was adorable," Ginny protested softly, kissing his cheek and then his jawline, grinning when he shivered under her touch.

"Adorable?!" Harry protested, pushing her back just a bit. "I don't want to be…adorable." He said it as if it was a dirty word and Ginny laughed. "Why can't I be…rugged and…and…"

"And brave," Ginny said, placing another kiss on his chin. "And handsome." His jaw. "And…sexy." Harry shivered when she kissed his neck, his hands clutching the shirt she was wearing. "You're all of those, Harry. To me, at least."

"Witch," Harry growled, leaning down to capture her lips with his.

"Your witch," Ginny agreed as she let herself get lost in his kiss. His hands, so controlled before, tentatively slipped around to her front and traced her breasts through her shirt and bra. Ginny hissed when his fingers found her nipples, making them harden instantly.

"Mine," Harry agreed, and Ginny could hear the smile in his tone. Her fingers fumbled with the buttons on his shirt until he was bare in front of her. Harry helped her remove her own shirt, and then pressed his face into her chest, shuddering underneath her hands as she held him there.

His hips began to rub against hers and Ginny knew he might be too far gone to talk anymore. She certainly wasn't interested any longer.

Harry's lips were busy with her breasts, tasting and exploring the lace that encased them when Ginny reached for his hand and placed it on the seam of her jeans, helping him get the rubbing movement down before she gave his hand a little pat.

"I love you," she whispered as she found his erection, pressing her hand along the ridge of it and loving how he responded both by whimpering and thrusting his hips toward her touch.

Their foreheads met and their eyes locked as they continued to rub and touch. For Ginny, this moment was the most intimate thing she could imagine, short of having Harry completely inside of her. But somehow, it still seemed too early for that. But this…this was perfect.

Harry's breathing was harsh and he opened his mouth, perhaps to tell her what he was feeling, but Ginny could read it all in his eyes, so she kissed him instead.

"Love you," he finally managed, although it was with a rather choked sounding voice as he intensified the movements of his hips. His hand fumbled and slid along her jeans frantically. It wasn't the best movement to bring about an orgasm, so Ginny used her free hand to hold his in place, putting pressure on her pubic bone as she rocked her own hips.

Their breath mingled and Ginny let a small moan escape her, trying hard to focus both on herself and pleasing Harry. He *seemed* to be enjoying it though, as the almost pained expression on his face, hopefully, meant that he was getting as close as she was.

He finally came with a great grunt, pressing his lips to the column of her throat and reaching up to gently squeeze her breast.

Ginny released with a pleased sigh. Perhaps it wasn't the most intense orgasm she'd ever had, but it was the only one she'd ever had with someone else—and being with Harry made it so much more satisfying than being alone.

She wrapped her arms around his head and pulled him in close while their hearts continued to thump heavily in their chests. Harry pressed small kisses to her neck and chest.

"We're not going to make it to New Years," Ginny observed with a chuckle.

"I certainly hope not," Harry agreed. He sounded extremely satisfied, although a bit tired and Ginny realized she was spent as well.

"That was perfect," she mused as they, almost as one, sank down to their sides on the sofa, cuddling together.

"No," Harry denied. "But it was almost perfect."

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"You're still not going to tell me who you're bringing?" Ron asked as he stuck his head into Harry's office one last time.

Harry chuckled and shook his head. "No."

"I'll give you twenty galleons."

"Is it really worth that much to you?" Harry sighed, signing the last form in his stack and closing his files. "Because you'll find out in a few hours when the ball starts."

Ron sighed and rubbed the back of his head. “No, it’s not. But…just promise me you’ll tell Fred and George I knew, yeah? They’re bound to take the mickey out of me if I don’t.”

Harry laughed again. He was quite sure none of the Weasleys would be able to keep in the fact that they hadn’t known about Harry’s new girlfriend.

Hermione came into the office carrying a stack of files and two books tucked under one arm.

“I thought you were ready to leave,” Ron commented, glaring down at the things she still had.

“I am,” Hermione said. “This is just…well, for later.”

“Did you get through to Ginny?” Ron huffed. Harry couldn’t help but smile at their byplay. He had no doubt that Hermione brought work home strictly to annoy Ron and to get him to do something about it. It was strange, but whatever worked for them.

“I did,” Hermione sighed. “She’s still not coming.”

Harry almost laughed, but managed to turn it into a throat clearing cough instead. Mrs. Weasley had been adamant that all of her children come to the Harvest Ball and drag their ‘significant others’ along with them. Harry had twenty galleons already bet with Ron on whether Fred would show up with two witches, or three. Her pleas, however, seemed to have fallen on deaf ears as far as Ginny was concerned.

“She still insists that it’s a waste of time unless she’s coming with someone she’s…hang on, let me remember the words...“absolutely, completely, head-over-heels in love with.”

Harry grinned at the words. The past few days had been like floating on clouds, or at least something as ethereal and amazing. He and Ginny had somehow managed to squeeze every last minute of time together that they could while still keeping up appearances. After tonight, however, that wouldn’t matter—

“Oi! She sounds like this lovesick sod here,” Ron said, nudging Harry and bringing him around to the present.

“I’m just glad he has someone to be sappy over,” Hermione said, making Harry blush.

“She really said that?” Harry couldn’t stop himself from asking. The whole concept of being in love, let alone having that person love you back was new and thrilling.

“She did,” Hermione said, narrowing her eyes just a bit. Harry flushed, hoping she wasn’t catching on to their deception.

“Well, I happen to agree with her,” he said, placing a locking charm on his file box. “No sense getting all dressed up for someone who is just there because of your name.”

“I know that’s happened in the past, Harry—“

“No harm done,” Harry waved off Hermione’s concerned look. Tonight would be completely different, he knew. Tonight he didn’t have to worry about what his date thought about him and what she expected of him. Because Ginny was very comfortable telling him exactly what she wanted.

“I’d better get going or my date won’t be happy with me,” Harry said, trying to shoo them both out of his office. Truth be told, Ginny probably couldn’t care less if he showed up in jeans and an old t-shirt to escort her to the ball. In fact, she’d probably insist on changing into the ratty old denim that she loved. Harry did have to

admit that he enjoyed the trousers as well, considering how much pale skin they showed.

"Not even a hint?" Ron demanded as Hermione pushed him out the door.

Harry just laughed and closed his door. He found himself whistling as he walked down to the Apparition point and several people noticed.

"Hot date tonight, Potter?" Seamus asked, waggling his eyebrows, as he fell in step with Harry.

"Maybe," Harry shrugged.

"Didn't know you were seeing anyone."

Harry laughed softly, knowing that was going to be the reaction all around tonight. "We've…we've kept it a bit quiet, actually."

"Good on you," Seamus slapped him on the back. "Best go get gussied up for me date."

Harry watched as his friend disappeared and then prepared to go next. He had three hours to get everything prepared. It certainly wouldn't take him that long to get himself ready, but tonight was going to be perfect for Ginny he'd decided.

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"I can't believe you told Hermione that," Harry complimented when he and Ginny arrived at the Ministry and went to check their cloaks. His breath caught in his throat again when Ginny removed her plain black cloak and exposed the gorgeous midnight blue creation she was wearing. It was revealing enough to be stylish, but covered all the right places to be tasteful. And the first time Harry had seen it, when she'd come out of her bedroom after he Apparated into her flat, he'd had trouble remembering that he had a tongue at all.

"I didn't lie, did I?" Ginny said, batting her eyelashes at him and then reaching up to brush some lint off of the lapel of his dress robes.

"No, you didn't," Harry grinned, holding out his arm so that Ginny could wind her hand through it. Years before Harry had managed to avoid going to these silly balls altogether, or he'd scrounged a date at the last minute.

But tonight, with the woman he was in love with on his arm, Harry felt like nothing in the world could go wrong.

"You ready?" Ginny leaned in and asked as they made it to the large double doors into the Ministry ballroom. They'd already started drawing stares and whispers as they had walked along the corridor together.

"Are you?" Harry chuckled. There was trepidation in his tone as well. By being with Harry, Ginny was exposing herself to all sorts of prying media and nosy gossips that wouldn't let their relationship stay quiet.

"Well, I figure you get the worse end of the deal," Ginny shrugged, a mischievous smile spreading on her face. "I *am* famous, after all."

Harry laughed loudly at that and had to nod his acceptance. "That's the most brilliant part of it," he agreed, leaning in to press his lips against hers before they walked in together.

"Hmm," Ginny mused, keeping a smile on her face. "I thought the best part was my shapely arse. That's what you seemed to be appreciating yesterday."

Harry snorted, drawing even more attention to them as they walked into the ballroom. “There is that,” he agreed, his body tingling as he surreptitiously tried to sneak a peek at her arse. Yes. That was another high point of this whole thing, he decided.

“Harry!”

Ron’s voice shouted over the top of the whispers and questions by the press as Harry reached down and took Ginny’s hand in his, welcoming the familiar comfort that she gave just by the warmth of her hand there pressed next to his.

“Where’s your date?” Ron said, staring at Harry and then at Ginny.

Hermione seemed to have caught on as she squealed loudly and leaned forward to hug both Ginny and then Harry.

“Ginny *is* my date, Ron,” Harry clarified with a smirk.

“Yeah, but…” Ron seemed to be taking forever catching on. “Oh, I get it. Your date couldn’t come…or she stood you up. So you picked up Ginny instead.”

Frustration welled up inside Harry as there were several gasps around them. The rest of the Weasleys had found them and were apparently understanding what was going on.

“Are the two of you…”

Bill asked before his wife nudged him, a knowing smile on her face.

“Harry and I are dating,” Ginny announced proudly, leaning into Harry more. He took the hint and wrapped his arm around her shoulders, a huge grin breaking out on his face.

“No,” Ron shook his head, still looking back and forth between them. “But you…” he pointed at Harry. “You said you were in love with…no!”

“I am in love with Ginny,” Harry said. Someone surrounding them mumbled ‘about time’, and Harry had the distinct impression it was either Mrs. Weasley or Hermione.

“And I’m in love with Harry,” Ginny said, leaning up to kiss him softly.

Ron stood there gaping as the group around them cheered and flashes went off left and right.

“But…”

“You’ll catch on eventually,” Fred said, clapping Ron on the back before offering his congratulations. Harry was pleased to see that there were not two, but *four* witches swarming around Fred and vying for his attention. He hadn’t lost the bet, yet he hadn’t cost Ron twenty galleons either. How Fred had the stamina—

“Care to dance, Mr. Potter?”

Ginny’s voice in his ear made him shudder and his knees feel the desire to knock together. Harry nodded, not even really caring what she was asking right now. She could probably talk him into doing most anything if she looked at him like she was now.

"Love to," he finally choked out after his eyes traced the column of her throat and found her red painted lips, looking like ripe strawberries. The fact that he hated to dance really was completely pointless, since all this really seemed to be was pressing himself against Ginny and swaying back and forth. This he could manage.

The stares and whispers really hadn't bothered him all night until they made it to the middle of the dance floor. Harry scowled as he eyed several men appreciating the way Ginny glided in front of him.

"Relax, Harry," Ginny said when she wound herself into his embrace, her fingers ruffling the hairs at the nape of his neck. "I know we're in a crowded room, but I'm here just for you."

Her words, and the husky way she said them made Harry take a deep breath. He pulled her even closer to him and pressed their foreheads together as they began to move, slowly following the crowd around the dance floor.

"You look so beautiful tonight, Gin," he finally managed after a few calming minutes in her arms. She was right, the more he focused in on her, the easier it was to ignore the fact that there were even other people in the room.

"You clean up pretty well yourself, you know," Ginny complimented, a smile brightening up her face. "Although I do think I prefer you more casual."

"I can't remember you ever looking this…done up before," he said, using his finger to trace a strap on the gown, watching as the fabric sparkled under his touch. "It's nice."

"Don't get used to it," Ginny snorted and then tucked her head under his chin for a minute. "It's not really who I am, but sometimes it's fun to pretend."

"I know that," Harry mused. "I know who you are."

They danced together for several songs before Ginny looked up at him. "When do you think it's socially acceptable for us to leave?"

Harry laughed softly. "Neither of us have ever been worried about things like that."

"I know," Ginny said, her cheeks going pink as she adjusted his tie. "I just…I just want you to hold me."

Harry nodded, glancing around the room. He wasn't sure where he was looking, or if he really needed permission to leave at all. They were both adults after all.

"Will you stay tonight?" Harry chanced asking, his voice soft next to her ear.

Ginny's hands clutched at his back tightly and she nodded. "Yes."

Harry's heart thundered away in his ribcage as his mind played out the possibilities. They hadn't spoken directly of choosing tonight as *the* night, it was more just implied.

The idea both excited and terrified him. But the timing was right, for both of them. They were in a relationship that, while only officially a few days old, had been there, just under the surface, for a long time. Being intimate seemed like the natural progression beyond sharing that they were both in love with the other.

The past couple of nights they'd snogged and touched on the sofa for hours before reluctantly breaking apart and spending the night at separate flats. But not tonight.

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Ginny's heart was in her throat as she said goodbye to her family and waved to a few friends that were scattered around the ballroom still, dancing in pairs.

"I thought Seamus and Demelza were together," Harry commented as he helped her on with her cloak. Ginny glanced around them to find Ritchie Coote with his arms around Ginny's friend. She grinned widely at him and winked.

"Apparently Ritchie decided to pick up the pieces," she shrugged. Harry stared at the dancing couple for a minute before shaking his head.

Ginny chuckled. "Believe me, it's a sad, sordid tale."

"I'm sure I'm much better off not knowing," he sighed.

Ginny gave one last glance into the ballroom before taking Harry's arm and allowing him to lead her to the Apparition point. It was still early, but not so early that they were drawing stares by leaving. Hermione had given Ginny a knowing look when she and Harry announced to the family that they were leaving, but Ginny was pretty sure everyone else didn't suspect anything, or just didn't care. They were all thrilled that Harry and Ginny were dating, even Ron who had gotten over the shock eventually. And Ginny had to promise her mother, no less than three times, that she'd be over soon for lunch, no doubt to rehash all the details of the relationship.

But Ginny was hopeful that neither she nor Harry had openly broadcast their intentions around tonight. *That* was not a newspaper article she wanted to wake up to tomorrow.

Although, considering where she was planning on spending the night, Ginny rather doubted that she'd care a whole lot in the morning.

"Do you need anything from your flat?" Harry asked discreetly as he wrapped his arms around her.

"No," she said, looking up at him and, once again, admiring how nice he looked tonight. She really did prefer a much more casual look to him, but as they'd decided earlier, dressing up every once in awhile was nice too.

"Hang on," he mumbled, dual-Apparating them to his flat.

Ginny blinked in surprise at how different the flat looked. Harry had charmed candles to float near the ceiling, giving soft light to the room. And there were bunches of flowers everywhere.

"I wanted tonight to be special," Harry shrugged, obviously seeing the shock on her face.

Ginny chuckled and shook her head at him. "Harry, you know you didn't have to do this."

"I know," he protested. "But…" He looked away and Ginny moved closer, laying her hand along his cheek.

"What is it?"

"I don't want you to think…this isn't just so I can get into your knickers."

She snorted and rested her forehead against his chest as his hands came up to hold her waist.

"I know that, Harry."

"I…I want to make love to you, Gin," Harry said, his voice cracking in the middle. He swore softly and Ginny smiled up at him.

"I want that as well."

Their eyes met and an intense look passed between them before Harry leaned down and brushed his lips along hers gently. They swayed in the middle of the room to unheard music as they kissed lightly, tongues caressing and exploring.

Ginny reached up and released the clip on her hair, making the curls cascade down onto her shoulders. Harry moaned in appreciation and buried his hands in her locks. He brushed against her and Ginny sucked in a deep breath as her nipples hardened against the raw silk of the dress.

"Harry," she whispered as his kisses along her jaw and neck grew more intense. She clutched at his shoulders, not really sure what she wanted him to do right now, but just knowing he needed to do something.

"Come on," he said when he finally pulled back, his eyes dark behind his glasses and his face flushed. His hand felt clammy and shaky in her own as he led her toward the bedroom, kicking his shoes off in the process. Ginny removed her own right next to his and walked on her tiptoes on the cold floorboards. The fabric of her dress made a soft swish-swish sound in the small area and Harry looked back over his shoulder, perhaps to make sure she really was following him and it wasn't just his imagination.

Because it certainly felt like a dream to Ginny.

"I don't want to push you," Harry said when they came to his room. It, too, was lit with soft candles and scattered with bunches of red roses.

Ginny blinked at the room and then turned to him, sure that this must be a dream now; it was certainly following all her girlhood fantasies of having sex for the first time.

"I never would have pegged you for a romantic, Harry," she said, smiling up at him.

Harry shifted in his spot and ruffled the back of his hair. "You don't think it's too much?"

Ginny stared at him as she reached behind her to slowly lower the zip on her dress.

"It's just right," she said softly, never removing her eyes from Harry's as he watched her drop the gown to the floor and step out, revealing the extremely expensive knickers her teammates had insisted she *had* to have for tonight. "Just like you."

"I'm not perfect," Harry said breathlessly. "But…you are."

Ginny felt her face heat and the blush traveled down to her chest. "I'm not," she denied, moving closer to him and resting her finger on the button in the middle of his chest.

"Close enough for me," Harry said as he leaned in, placing small nipping kisses on her lips and cheeks. Ginny clutched at his robes as his hands brushed her breasts, making her shiver all over.

"I'm no expert, Harry," Ginny said as his tongue traced the shell of her ear, "but I'm pretty sure it would help if you're naked too."

Harry laughed; a throaty, full sound that made his chest jump under her fingers.

“Get to work on that, will you?” he said, looking down through the bottom of his glasses at her.

Ginny grinned up at his challenge and reached up to take the glasses off. “Can you see without these?” she asked, narrowing her eyes as she put them on herself.

“Not a whole lot,” Harry admitted. His hands held onto her sides, just above her hips and Ginny laughed when he gripped her, tickling the flesh there. “Only things that are…close,” he said as he pulled her into contact with him.

The brush of the fabric of his robes on her bare breasts made Ginny hiss in a breath. She snatched his glasses off of her face and tossed them toward the bed. Harry didn’t seem worried about them as his gaze hadn’t left her face when she did it.

Staring up at him, Ginny slowly began to unbutton his robes, tossing his tie away when she’d undone it. Once there was bare skin showing, she leaned forward and kissed it, breathing in the masculine scent of him and loving that he shivered under her touch.

She hoped he mistook her own shivering for excitement rather than complete nervousness, because she really had no idea what she was doing. The things she’d done with Harry already were as far as she’d ever gone with any man. It had just never seemed right. And Harry had admitted the same thing last night when she’d been bold enough to open his trousers on her sofa and take his penis in hand to bring him to orgasm.

“You’re driving me crazy,” he chuckled, his hands now clutching her upper arms. She took a deep breath, glad that she’d managed to do just what she wanted to.

One more kiss to the center of his chest and Ginny had his robes completely undone. Harry shrugged them off of his shoulders and stepped on the toes of his socks to pull them off, leaving him in only a pair of black boxers which were tenting out tellingly.

“Sorry,” Harry said, looking down at himself.

“I’m not,” Ginny smirked, reaching forward to caress the length of him through the soft fabric.

“Ginny,” Harry shuddered, pulling her to him again and pressing his lips to hers. His hands explored her back and down to her bum, pulling her hips to his and grinding against her just a bit. She could tell he wasn’t completely in control and the idea excited her just a bit.

She had done this to him. No one else in the world had ever seen Harry Potter this way. The feeling sent a shiver all down her body and she moved backward to the bed, bringing Harry with her.

“Are you sure?” Harry asked against her lips.

“If you ask me that again, Harry…”

He chuckled as they both climbed onto the bed and lay side by side, facing each other.

“Gin…I love you,” he whispered, bringing his finger up to brush the tip of her nipple.

“I love you,” Ginny said, leaning forward to kiss him again. Her heart raced in her chest and she was comforted to feel Harry’s match hers beat for beat. It was rather reassuring knowing that he was just as inexperienced as she was. This was something they could learn together.

They rolled together and Harry covered Ginny’s body with his own, his hands bringing her thigh up to clutch

his hips and thrusting into her center.

"I'm not going to last," Harry said apologetically. He kissed her again and held himself up so that Ginny could remove her knickers. While he was there, she took the liberty of sliding his boxers down for him as well. He hissed when they were finally bare and his penis bobbed against her low belly.

"I have a c-condom in the drawer there," he motioned his head toward the bedside drawer and Ginny reached up to caress his cheek.

"I'm on the potion."

He nodded and slowly lowered himself onto her, watching her face closely for any sign of discomfort. They kissed again for a few minutes before Harry moved off of her. His face flushed when his hand caressed her hip and then slowly moved down between her legs. He apologized softly when they fumbled and Ginny reached down to help him find what he was searching for.

It wasn't perfect, but they were able to smile and chuckle their way through until they found the right rhythm and Ginny felt Harry had enough confidence. She removed her hand from his wrist and moved it to his penis, smiling and biting the corner of her lip when he swore softly.

A small drop of fluid leaked out and Ginny smoothed it all around the head of him, loving that Harry was now almost panting. She slowed her movement down, guessing that he was barely holding onto control as it was; he obviously didn't need the added attention to distract him.

His eyes returned to hers when she rested both hands on his shoulders and allowed herself to focus solely on the way his hand was touching her; the way his fingers traced her opening before delving shallowly in, the way his thumb brushed her clitoris without even realizing that was the perfect thing to do.

"Love you," she whispered as she palmed her own breasts, plucking at the nipples and giving herself over to the pleasure that a small orgasm brought.

Harry kept rubbing and Ginny reached down to still movement, nudging his penis with her hand while he leaned down to kiss her.

"Love you too," he muttered as he placed the head of himself at her opening and gave a small nudge.

Ginny splayed her hips wider, taking a deep breath to relax as Harry found purchase and gave a thrust. Unfortunately, he slipped along the surface and not inside.

"It's okay," Ginny reassured him, placing a hand on his side when he flushed. "Just try a bit slower this time."

He nodded and bit his lip in concentration as he lined up again. This time he gave a steady, slow push and slid all the way inside.

Ginny's muscles took a second to get used to the feel of him and Harry breathed deeply above her, peppering her face and neck with kisses.

"Gin, I have to—"

"Move," she commanded softly, staring up at how beautiful he looked above her. Short of seeing him standing over Voldemort's body in the Great Hall, Ginny was sure this was the most powerful looking she'd ever seen Harry—and yet, the vulnerability and emotion on his face was so moving that it brought tears to his eyes.

“You’re so amazing,” he mumbled, leaning down to kiss her as he slowly pulled back and thrust in again. His whole body shuddered in a satisfied groan as he slid further and further inside of her.

Ginny wiped at the tear that escaped and cursed herself for being so emotional right now. But Harry seemed to understand as he wrapped his arm around her shoulder and held her to him, clutching her as they moved together; slowly rocking, their bodies meeting and then pulling apart again.

“You’re everything to me, Harry,” she whispered, looping her arms around his back and pressing kisses to his ear and neck.

“Love you…love…” Harry’s rhythm faltered and he began to rock harder, his arms shaking around her.

“Let go, Harry,” she pleaded, needing to feel him release deep inside of her. This was the moment she’d been waiting for so long—the moment she and Harry finally shared all of themselves with each other.

Harry grunted heavily and thrust deeply when he came, all movement stilling as the energy drained out of his body.

“I’m sorry,” he said softly, kissing her cheek and then her lips. “I wanted to last longer.”

Ginny couldn’t help but laugh at his words. “Harry, shut up,” she demanded playfully. “Just kiss me.”

Harry laughed and moved off of her, pulling the side of the duvet over them both as they cuddled together. “It wasn’t perfect.”

“Yes, it was,” Ginny disagreed. “It was messy and fun and wonderful. Just like it’s supposed to be.”

Harry brushed his hand down her hair, smoothing the curls away from her face. “I don’t think I could have ever done this with someone I didn’t love.”

Ginny smiled, thinking that he’d stolen the words right out of her mouth. “You don’t regret making that agreement then?”

Harry chuckled. “If only I’d known what I was getting myself into.”

Ginny laughed, wrapping her arms around his head and sliding a leg up and over his hips. “You thought you were simply going to get laid…and instead, you got a girlfriend.”

“I got to realize I’d already fallen in love with the most wonderful woman,” Harry corrected as he returned her embrace.

“Lucky you,” Ginny said as she leaned over to kiss him.