

Harry Potter

Love Potion #9

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Contents

Love Potion #9.....	3
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	19
Chapter 3.....	33

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Chapter 1

Ginny pulled her cloak tighter into herself, wrapping it around herself to try and block some of the stiff, frigid wind that was blowing flurries of snow down the streets in London, coating only one side of the buildings, lamp posts, and people hurrying home.

The cold made her shiver, and remnants of the flu bug she'd been fighting for two days made their presence known in a mild ache of the bones. But at least she was able to get out of bed now.

It seemed as if it had been days since she'd seen Harry, or even been to work. He'd actually dropped by earlier this morning and brought her some fresh orange juice and a few other supplies—but it still seemed ages, as he'd only been able to spend a few minutes before he was dashing off again.

"Get well soon," he said as he stuck his head back inside the door to her flat, "I need my partner back."

The thought made her smile. Even though her dreams had been of playing professional Quidditch, a late season injury in her final year at Hogwarts had made that possibility almost unreachable. It was Harry who had casually suggested that she apply for Auror training.

She had a feeling he had somehow pushed her application through, or helped in some way, as she'd been approved right away. Her mother was mortified that her daughter had chosen such an unladylike profession, but Ginny loved her job.

And she loved being Harry's partner. There was rarely a dull moment around when the names on the office door read Potter and Weasley. It just wasn't the same Weasley that everyone expected it to be.

She glanced up once she got onto the block where Harry's flat was, and blinked at the sight of all the lights in his place blazing. It was unusual, but at least he was home.

The small walls of her flat loomed over her by this afternoon and Ginny decided that it was high time she got out and did something other than lay around. And Harry was usually around, and in the mood for a good laugh.

Her concern started to grow, however, when she climbed the stairs to his flat, tugging at her scarf and hat, and listening to the multitude of voices talking upstairs. Perhaps he wasn't alone after all, but that was more than one voice, and Harry's wasn't one of them.

Ginny pulled her cloak back and slid her hand along her wand, pulling it from the pocket on her jeans and rolling it in her hand as she pressed her back to the wall.

"Don't you worry, Mr. Potter, we'll take care of this one."

Ginny's mind registered the voice as Wilkins, one of the young trainees that she'd gone through the Academy with. He always held that note of awe in his voice when he spoke towards Harry.

“What the hell?” Ginny asked quietly as she came into Harry’s flat—the front door had been thrown wide open—and looked around. There were several Aurors in the flat and Harry was leaning against the back of the sofa, his hair disheveled and his shirt untucked.

He looked back over his shoulder at her and his face fell a bit before her turned so that she couldn’t see him.

Wilkins and his senior partner, Dulles, were levitating a woman toward the door. Ginny could tell by the way her eyes darted about that she had been hit with a body binding curse. There was a robe draped over her and for a moment, Ginny wanted to reach over and tug it off, but she was afraid of what she’d see.

A deep dread began to blossom in her belly and Ginny swallowed back the thickness in her throat.

“Another one?” she asked, moving so that she was in front of Harry.

He met her eyes for a minute, his green eyes dark with... something. Ginny wasn’t quite sure what to call the expression. There was anger there, but also guilt and a bit of loathing.

Harry didn’t answer her but that was okay, she understood he wasn’t ignoring her. He was embarrassed and wanted these people out of his flat as fast as he could possibly push them.

“Thanks for coming,” he mumbled, nodding at Dulles and then over to the other two Aurors, Holbrook and Adams.

“No problem, Mr. Potter,” Adams, the ranking Auror on the scene, reached forward and patted Harry on the shoulder. He winced a bit and pulled his hand back when Harry hissed in a breath. “Er... you be sure to call us again if... well, if...”

“I will,” Harry spared the man and nodded tightly. He gestured toward the door and Adams gracefully took the hint, rounding everyone up and herding them outside.

“Good to see you back, Weasley,” he muttered on his way past her.

“Thanks,” Ginny answered back automatically. Her gaze hadn’t left Harry, who was studiously avoiding her eyes.

Harry walked the Aurors to the door and closed it behind them before resting his forehead against the cool wood grain.

“She didn’t...” Ginny trailed off, not wanting to think about what might have happened to Harry tonight. It was all because of that damned article. Ginny had half a mind to go back down to the Witch Weekly office and hex that damned reporter once more, just to make herself feel better.

Harry made a low sound deep in his throat, half way between a groan and a whimper.

“Not all the way,” he admitted finally.

Ginny sighed and grimaced, moving so that she could sink down into Harry’s plush leather sofa.

"I just wanted a damned pint," he mumbled, moving away from the door. Ginny noticed the way his hand trailed along the sofa, perhaps steadying himself, before he sat next to her, melting into the cushions.

"You're not supposed to go alone," Ginny scolded softly, knowing he would growl at her scolding. Merlin knew he heard it enough from both Ron and Hermione. Harry didn't need Ginny being his babysitter. "You could have come and gotten me, you know."

"I just wanted a pint," Harry reiterated, whispering it this time.

Ginny looked at him and her hand fumbled for his, giving it a friendly squeeze. "I'm sorry," she whispered back.

"Not your fault," Harry said, rolling his head back and forth on the cushion. "I'm just tired of watching everything I eat, everything I drink. I'm going to have to start carrying my own flask with me, like old Moody used to."

"As long as it's not filled with Polyjuice," Ginny tried to joke. The corner of Harry's mouth twitched up just a bit, but then it dissolved into a firm grimace that Ginny had become all too familiar with lately.

"I went to a Muggle pub too," Harry finally said, tiredness seeping into his voice. Ginny wasn't sure if whatever potion the witch had used on him was making him seem worse than he was, or if this was part of the weight of being Harry Potter that he had to carry with him always. "She must have followed me."

"Stalker," Ginny answered scathingly. She was rewarded for her vehemence with Harry's squeeze on her hand. He always chuckled when she defended him, but secretly, Ginny thought he truly appreciated it.

"It's all down to that damned article," Harry said, finally shaking her hand loose and forcing himself out of the chair with a huge grunt. He was less shaky as he crossed the floor, but still didn't walk completely straight.

Ginny scowled as he rummaged inside the cupboard and pulled out a golden bottle of Firewhiskey. Harry didn't drink often—and when he did, it was usually just a pint or two—but he seemed intent on getting pissed tonight, if the amount of liquor he poured into his glass was any indication.

She sighed and pulled herself off the sofa just in time to stop him from downing the whole glass.

"That's probably not the best option, you know," she said, pulling the glass out of his hand and finding it necessary to take a small sip herself. "It could react badly to whatever it was she gave you."

"Nightshade," he grunted out, glaring at the glass in her hand, as if he could will it back into his own.

"Damn," Ginny said, shaking her head and setting the glass down. "You were lucky then."

Harry grimaced and leaned back against the counter, staring at her. He took his glasses off and set them on the counter, rubbing harshly at his face and growling into his hands.

Ginny had to swallow and look away when a wave of attraction broke over her. It was something she'd been fighting a lot lately. But they were friends, partners. Feelings like that had no place in their relationship right now. Besides, Harry had never really seen her like that. She thought he might have back in her fifth year, when she was dating Dean Thomas, but then everything had gone pear shaped with Dumbledore's death.

"Why didn't you call me?" she asked. Now that the shock of the situation was wearing off, she felt more than a bit hurt that he hadn't asked her to go to the pub with him, and that she hadn't been his first call when he was in trouble. That's what partners were for, wasn't it?

Harry looked away, guilt flooding his face. "You... you were sick."

"Still," she huffed, standing in front of him. "Harry, you were almost raped!"

"I was not," he rolled his eyes indignantly, crossing his arms over his chest. "I just..."

"Why is it so hard to admit that?" Ginny ranted, throwing her arms up and stalking across the room, and then back again. "It doesn't make you weak, you know. The little slag drugged you, Harry. That makes you the victim here."

Harry shifted uncomfortably and Ginny knew he wanted to protest, but he also didn't want to get into an argument right now. His eyes were glassy and bright green, but without his glasses to shield them, they also betrayed a bit of vulnerability that Harry rarely let show.

She moved to stand in front of him and clutched at his shirt near his waist on each side. "Don't ever doubt that I'm here for you, yeah?" she asked, her voice breaking in the middle. "You're my best friend, Harry, along with being my partner."

He nodded jerkily, but pulled her into his embrace and rested his chin on her head.

"I should have called you," he admitted.

That was enough of an apology for Ginny and she allowed herself one rare moment to love him completely, and pretend that he was returning that love. It was a childhood fantasy come true, for just those forty-six seconds before he pressed a kiss to the top of her head and Ginny knew that was all he was comfortable with.

"I will next time," he said, reaching for the glass of Firewhiskey and taking a small sip from it.

Ginny refrained from scolding, knowing that if she was in his place, getting pissed would sound like the perfect idea. And at least he seemed to be pacing himself.

"There won't be a next time," Ginny scowled. She hadn't moved from in front of him and still clutched his shirt, although more out of something to do with her hands than needing him to listen to her. "Because I'm going to find that reporter again and—"

“That won’t solve anything,” Harry grumbled. The way the corner of his mouth twitched, however, told Ginny that he was simply saying what he thought was best, rather than what he truly believed.

“It would make me feel better,” she protested.

“And be funny as hell,” he finally allowed the smirk to take over completely and Ginny blinked as another wave of attraction coursed through her. “What was it you hit her with last time?”

“Bowel loosening hex,” Ginny grunted out. “But your idea to run ahead of her and lock all the bathroom doors—that was pure brilliance.”

Harry chuckled and shook his head. “We’re lucky we didn’t get caught.”

“Wouldn’t have mattered if we did,” Ginny glared darkly at his chest. “The cow deserved everything she got.”

Harry’s arms closing around her as he pulled her to him again shocked her, and Ginny melted into him.

“Why are you so good to me?” he asked, his voice muffled in her hair.

“Because you deserve it, Harry.” It wasn’t the answer she wanted to give him, but it was everything she allowed herself to show to him.

“You’re my best friend, did you know that?”

His soft words shook her and she could only nod against him, fearing that if she opened her mouth, she might actually say what was repeating over and over in her head.

“You’re not so bad yourself, Potter,” she finally managed, pulling back.

“You’ve been wonderful through this whole thing,” he said, ruffling his hair. But his free hand found hers and wound through it—something he rarely initiated. “Putting up with my moods and sacrificing so much just to...”

“You’d do the same, and you know it,” Ginny protested.

“No one better say those things about you, Ginny,” Harry glared at her—although she knew he wasn’t angry at her, just... indignant at the thought that someone might splash her personal life all over the papers, as his had been. “Or I’ll...”

“You’d do the same,” Ginny protested softly. Their eyes met for just a minute and something passed between them—something that further ignited the old flame burning deep inside her.

“I just wish...” he said, trailing off at the end. Ginny blinked at him, not knowing what was going through his mind. “I wish none of this had happened.”

“Me too,” she answered back softly, leaning her forehead against his chest. “It wasn’t fair of her to eavesdrop at all, let alone put that story in the papers.”

Harry grunted, resting his arms comfortably around her back. “Part of it is my fault,” he admitted. Ginny fought the urge to roll her eyes; they’d had this conversation almost every day since the damned article had come out. “I should have known better than to talk about my private life somewhere where someone could overhear.”

“Harry,” Ginny protested, dredging up the same old words. “You cast a privacy charm and you were talking with your best mates about something personal. Anyone with any sense of manners whatsoever would have left you be.” The original anger returning made her cheeks burn, but she kept her face against his chest, afraid to look directly at him right now. “If I didn’t know better, I’d think that Simpson woman was an Animagus like old Rita was.”

Harry chuckled softly and rested his chin on her head. “I already looked into that. I have a feeling she was using Extendable Ears. I asked Ron and George to look into it.”

Ginny nodded, having already heard Ron’s ranting about this exact topic.

“It’ll all blow over soon,” Harry protested, just as he’d been doing since the article first came out—well, after he’d nearly destroyed the training room at the Ministry.

Sometimes it surprised her how quickly he seemed to recover from things that were thrown at him. Then again, Ginny could see how he never fully did recover, but just worked through the anger and pain.

“I wish there was more I could do,” Ginny protested, pulling back so she could look up at him.

Harry smiled slightly, his fingers coming up to brush her face. “I think there’s only one real way for me to take care of this.”

“I’m not breaking you out of Azkaban for killing that reporter,” Ginny scowled at him. “Besides, I told you I would do that.”

Harry chuckled, but then it died out and his cheeks turned a brilliant shade of pink. “Never mind.”

“What?” Ginny asked. But Harry just shook his head and dropped his arms from around her waist.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said again, reaching for the drink. “It was just an idea.”

Ginny stared at him, a strange idea taking root and thrilling her to the core, at the same time that it made her chest constrict.

One Month Earlier

“You look like you could use this,” Ron grinned as he set a round of Firewhiskeys on the table that Harry was seated at with George.

Harry sighed deeply and stared between his glass of ale and the small shot of amber liquid. He really wasn’t that much of a drinker. But it had been a long day—a long week, really—and he was in the company of friends. The only thing better would be if Ginny was here too. But she’d begged off tonight, in favor of doing something with Luna, who was only in town for a couple of days.

And Harry completely understood. It wasn't like Ginny had to spend all of her free time with Harry, as well as all of their time at work. She was free to do whatever she pleased.

But he had to admit that he usually had more fun when Ginny was around.

"Just the one then," he compromised, relaxing back into the booth and listening as George and Ron related a story about a couple of kids that had come into the shop this afternoon while on their Hogwarts break. In the end, it wasn't as funny as they apparently thought it was, but the liquor in his belly, and the warmth of Rosmerta's pub combined to make Harry simply glad to be here.

"How is Angelina feeling?" Harry burst out, just remembering that his former Gryffindor captain, and George's wife, had announced that she was expecting just a few weeks ago.

"She's great," George grinned. "When she was throwing up the other day, I swear I saw a boot come out."

All three men laughed and George seemed to glow.

"Nothing like getting your wife pregnant to make a man feel... virile and more... more..."

"Manly?" Ron supplied, grinning at his brother.

"Yeah," George nodded. "I can't explain it," he shook his head. "I think it's just one of those things you have to feel for yourself. Hey, you and Hermione should try for a kid."

Ron choked on his drink while Harry slid down in his seat, failing to hold himself up from laughing too hard.

"We're not even married," Ron protested, his cheeks and ears flaming bright red.

"Nothing says you have to be," George protested. Harry briefly wondered if he was serious, but then decided that he was most likely taking the mickey out of his younger brother.

"Mum might have something to say about it," Ron grumbled, his ears darkening to be almost maroon. Harry remembered hearing about the lecture Mrs. Weasley had given Ron when she found out that he and Hermione were having sex without being married first. Ron had hidden at Harry's flat for three days trying to avoid his mother's insistence that they should simply get married.

"Well, at least you're getting some," George shrugged, winking at Harry.

"Me?" Harry spluttered, wondering where he'd been pulled into this conversation.

George seemed taken aback by the idea, but then his grin widened. "Sure, let's talk about the Boy Wonder here."

Ron seemed relieved by the change of subject as well and Harry stared down at his Firewhiskey before tossing the whole thing back in one gulp. He hated to disappoint them, but...

"Nah," Ron said, shaking his head. "Harry's a right gentleman about the whole thing. Never kisses and tells—or tells anything beyond kissing."

Harry felt his face heat and he glanced around, hoping that the mostly empty pub was private enough for where this conversation seemed to be heading. He contemplated simply getting up and leaving, but the idea of going home to an empty flat was just too much right now.

And Ron was right, he didn't confide in anyone about his personal life. Ginny probably knew more than she let on, but that's simply because they spent most of their days together and she was very observant.

Taking a chance that they might actually commiserate with him, versus taking the mickey for hours, Harry cast a quick privacy charm and cleared his throat.

"That's because there's nothing to tell."

"Go on," George waved at him, "You're always too modest."

Ron stared at him a minute and Harry shifted, shrugging a shoulder. "No, I mean it. There's nothing to tell. I, er... I haven't... with anyone."

He prayed they'd get the idea, rather than making him say it fully out loud. But the dumbstruck look on their faces was enough to confirm they got the gist of what he was saying.

"You've got to be kidding," George said. Ron simply stared at him with raised eyebrows.

"You make it sound like I'm on my death bed or something," Harry said, looking away. "It's not that big of a deal."

George and Ron exchanged a look and George shook his head. "I'm surprised you're not on your deathbed."

Harry almost growled in frustration, both with the situation in general and specifically George's insinuation that Harry not having sex before he was twenty-three would kill him.

"It's not like I don't... take care of things, you know," Harry said, tugging at his tie until it came completely undone and hung loose down the front of his shirt. "I just... haven't had the opportunity."

"What's the hold up then?" George demanded, shaking his head in awe. "Surely it can't be lack of witches throwing themselves at your feet."

Harry grimaced, knowing that they'd never let him live that day down. Honestly, the witch hadn't actually thrown herself at him; she just sort of... tripped, and happened to land at his feet. The fact that her blouse was gaping open and the words 'Marry me, Harry' were painted all over... Yeah. That was never going to die.

"I just... I don't want to... with just anyone."

"Harry Potter, the Boy Virgin," George said, holding up the remnants of his Firewhiskey. He and Ron chuckled and toasted him, making Harry roll his eyes and reach for the shot glass that had refilled itself automatically.

“Maybe we should hold some sort of contest,” Ron said, his face lighting up at Harry’s surly attitude.

“Now there’s a good idea,” George nodded. “The first witch to get into Harry Potter’s trousers wins... What should they win?”

Harry downed the Firewhiskey, but the absurdity of their idea made him chuckle a bit. It was just so... bizarre and completely outlandish.

“They could get some products from the shop,” Ron shrugged.

George shrugged. “We’ll worry about prizes in a second. What should we call our contest?”

“Er...” Ron furrowed. “Help Harry... er...”

“No, no, no,” George scolded, swaying a bit in his seat. Harry wasn’t sure if it was his excitement about the idea, or the Firewhiskey he’d had—or maybe it was the drinks Harry had consumed instead that made the table look a bit... wonky.

“You have to be more creative about it,” George proclaimed. “It has to catch the public’s eye and make them want to participate. How about... Pop Harry’s Cherry and Win!!”

“Sounds like a bloody carnival game!” Harry guffawed, imagining the witches lining up to participate.

“Potter’s Virginity Quest!” Ron cheered out, fully getting into the game now.

Harry rolled his eyes. “How about ‘Let Harry Live His Own Life’? I like that one the best.”

George clucked his tongue. “Now, now, Harry, that’s not getting into the idea at all. You’ve obviously tried that for... twenty some years now, and how’s that working for you?” He batted his eyelashes flirtatiously and Harry glared at him.

“Now, let’s lay out the rules,” George said, grabbing a paper serviette and opening it up so that he could write on it with a quill. “I think there should definitely be some guidelines...”

The rest of the evening progressed with the entire serviette being filled up with more and more outlandish guidelines for George and Ron’s fictitious contest. Harry soon decided that joining them and having a few laughs was much more productive than stewing about the fact that he hadn’t had a real girlfriend... ever, and that he was apparently doomed to live life alone and completely sexually frustrated. He made sure at the end of the evening to confiscate the plans and set fire to them. George had drunkenly sung a funeral dirge as they watched hours’ worth of nonsense go up in flames.

Their ultimate goal of taking the mickey out of Harry, and making him relax a bit, had been achieved and they’d all gone home, hopefully never to remember the night again—except for fond recollections.

The headlines in Witch Weekly the next morning, proclaiming Harry’s virgin status and how he was

searching for the perfect woman to 'give his most precious gift to', made him want to vomit, even more than the leftover alcohol churning in his stomach.

* * *

Ginny swallowed roughly past the idea and silently debated whether she was willing to risk everything they had between them—their friendship and a damned good partnership—just for a chance to comfort Harry, and to help him out. What if he'd meant something completely different than what she was thinking?

"Harry," she said, her words being swallowed up in the heat between them.

His teasing smile had disappeared and he leaned down just a bit, his eyes glassy as they looked between her lips and her eyes.

When his tongue darted out to wet his lips, she took the chance. Clutching his arms just a bit, she cleared her throat.

"I can help you," she whispered. He looked confused for a minute before his eyes went wide.

"N-no, Ginny. You... you don't have to... It wasn't anything."

"But it was," she said, going up on her tiptoes to press her dry lips to his. The kiss was chaste and awkward for a minute before Harry tilted his head and pulled her to him. Ginny gasped at the overwhelming emotion pouring between them as they continued to touch, their lips moving slowly, memorizing and tasting and... almost cherishing.

The thought that this was how Harry Potter kissed a woman made Ginny's knees go weak and she wound her fingers into the sleeves of his shirt to hold herself up.

"Ginny," he moaned once they pulled apart. His lips traveled up her face and across her cheekbone to her ear, where his tongue darted out and licked the edge. A bolt of heat shot straight through Ginny, and she felt all her inhibitions fall completely away, discarded on the floor like an old newspaper.

"I can help you," she said again, pressing even closer to him when she felt his arousal brushing against her.

Harry groaned and thrust his hips into her even as his hand slid around to gently cup her breast through her shirt.

Ginny's lips found his again and she tried to simply let her body take over—knowing that she'd dreamed of this day for so many years—and keep her brain from protesting how this could easily ruin their friendship.

But all he had to do was agree, and Ginny would give him everything—freely and without regret. She'd always been his, in a way.

"I don't..." he trailed off, rubbing against her again. "I've never..."

“I know,” she said, winding her hands into his hair and pulling him down to kiss her again. “It’s okay, neither have I.”

He nodded absently. Ginny didn’t know what it meant—if he was finally agreeing with her, or simply acknowledging that he knew she’d never been with a man. They’d talked about it the day after the article came out—commiserated more like.

She began to relax when Harry began a gentle rhythm of rocking them together, thinking that she’d convinced him that it was going to be alright. They could do this together and then Harry wouldn’t have to dwell on it. She could be just a friend helping him out.

That idea made her a bit sick, but she knew she’d do it just for Harry. Anyone else suggesting the idea that she sleep with a friend, without it meaning anything more than sex, would have been hexed to Hades and back. But Harry... he could ask for anything, and Ginny would offer it up on a golden platter. Briefly, she wondered if he knew how much power he really held over her.

“We shouldn’t,” he mumbled, the words melting into the skin on her neck as he continued to kiss, lifting her against him.

“I want to,” Ginny protested, giving a small squeak when he lifted her into his arms. Not to be outdone, she wrapped her legs around his waist and kissed him fiercely.

Harry hesitated for only a minute before he matched her intensity, shuffling down the hallway to where his bedroom was.

Every place he touched her tingled, and Ginny gave herself over to the sensations, simply living in the moment. Perhaps tomorrow they would think twice about what they’d done, but for right now, in this moment, this was right for both of them.

Harry’s whole body was shaking when he set her down on the soft carpet of his bedroom, and Ginny could see both the indecision, and the excitement in his expression.

“Don’t think right now,” she commanded softly. “Just... just feel.”

His eyes grew huge when she tugged her shirt off over her head and then fumbled behind her back, releasing the clasp on her bra. Ginny’s hands were shaking when she undid the button on her jeans and lowered the zipper.

Harry looked unsure where to put his hands, and they fidgeted around, playing with the tails of his shirt, and then lifting slightly, as if he couldn’t wait to touch her skin.

“You can touch,” she urged him, moving forward so that she could start to undo his shirt.

His hands settled at her waist, fingers digging in just a bit before he sighed her name, sounding almost like a prayer in the still darkness of the room.

The soft touches of his hands made Ginny’s insides quiver and she almost wanted to rush him along so that they could both get some relief. But she understood that going slow would be best. There would be plenty of time for either of them to say ‘no’ or to change their minds. Plus, Ginny didn’t

want to be like the other witches out there who simply wanted a piece of Harry.

That wasn't what this was about for her. This was about giving a piece of herself to him—rather than taking something of his.

When she finally had his chest bared, she winced at the few raw, red marks that ran down his skin—remnants of what the other woman had tried to do.

“Is this...” Ginny trailed off, leaning forward until she could press small kisses to the sore flesh.

“Yeah,” Harry mumbled. He seemed to be able to do little more than command his hands to caress her breasts and rub his front against her now and again.

Ginny looked up at him, seeking his permission before she reached for her wand and healed the scratches.

“Bitch,” she hissed, pressing new kisses over and over to the fading marks.

“Ginny,” he whispered again, his voice trembling as she slid her hand down his belly and into the front of his jeans, undoing the button and zip as she went.

“Is this okay, Harry?” she asked.

He bit his lip and nodded before reaching down and capturing her lips. His intensity pulled her off guard and Ginny giggled when he picked her up and placed her on the bed.

Harry laughed a bit himself as they bumped foreheads. He struggled to get out of his jeans, and then shyly removed his boxers, exposing himself to her.

Ginny sucked in a breath at the sight of him, and then reached for his hand, placing it on her belly and urging him, with just her eyes, to touch her.

He had to understand that she was giving herself freely to him—as a gift to him, for all that he meant to her, for all that he had done for her in the past, and all that they shared between them.

She just simply couldn't say the words right now. They got stuck in her throat and refused to come out.

Harry leaned down and kissed her, settling himself between her thighs.

“This is more than okay,” he whispered when they broke apart and he peppered kisses all over her face.

Ginny arched herself into him, eliciting a groan out of both of them as they made contact. She was still wearing her knickers, and fumbled with her wand to banish them, praying she was coherent enough to do so without doing any damage.

But Harry's hand on hers, made the spell melt in her mouth. “Let me,” he whispered, lifting onto his knees and slowly removing her lacy underwear. “So beautiful,” he mumbled, placing a few kisses to her knee and thigh before he lay back down in the cradle of her thighs.

His gaze was intense and Ginny's throat closed with the emotion of the moment. This was it. She could feel his penis right at her opening, and feel the way he trembled above her.

Still with no regrets, she lifted her hips against his, hoping that he would get the message.

"I... I should wear a... erm..."

"Oh," Ginny blinked up at him, grateful that one of them had a bit of logical thought left in their brains. She would have just stayed up for days afterwards, worrying that she might possibly be pregnant. "Yeah, yeah," she nodded, taking a deep breath when he removed his weight from her and rummaged in the bedside drawer. He swore twice and finally used her discarded wand to summon a small box to him.

Ginny sat up and watched as Harry fumbled with the small foil, and then tried to calm his shaking hands enough to put the condom on his erect penis.

"Can I help?" she offered, feeling her face heat. Really, she had no more clue than he did about how it was supposed to work. Although, the idea seemed fairly basic.

Her hands joined his as they pulled the condom down the length of him. Once they'd succeeded, Ginny kept her hands there, gently squeezing him and rubbing up and down while Harry breathed deeply and whispered something to her. She wasn't quite sure what it was—then again, Harry didn't seem to know either.

"Ohh, Ginny," he moaned, his head rolling a bit on his shoulders. Ginny smiled, a thrill flowing through her that she'd been able to arouse him this much with just the touch of her hands. "Lie back?" he asked softly, leaning forward to kiss her cheek, and then her nose, and then her lips.

Ginny did as he asked and spread her legs, ignoring the way her thighs shook as if they'd been hit by a jelly legs jinx. She took a few cleansing breaths and fought the urge to giggle at where she was right now, before Harry's weight was on her again, covering her fully and warming her until she couldn't remember ever being cold in her life.

He wiggled around a bit and Ginny prepared herself for the pain she knew was coming. But it was Harry's fingers that touched her first, making her eyes flare open. He smiled shyly at her, his cheeks flushing in the dull light of the room.

"You need to be ready," he shrugged a shoulder, as his fingers fumbled below. Ginny leaned up and pressed a kiss to his chin, adding her own fingers to his and showing them how to move, how to draw moans and shudders from her.

Harry pulled back and watched as her fingers guided his, up and down, around and around, before she removed hers and urged him onward with a small pat on the wrist.

His tongue darting out to moisten his lips as he watched his fingers trace every bit of her made the coil deep inside Ginny begin to tighten. His black hair flopped across his brow and small beads of sweat on his upper lip were highlighted by the harsh light of the hallway, falling over his body and showing off all the angles and ridges.

“Almost,” Ginny said, reaching up to clutch his shoulders. His tempo picked up and Ginny soared over the edge of orgasm as two of his fingers pressed inside her opening, curling just slightly in the heat of her.

“Harry,” she called out, arching her back and thrusting her hips in time with the contractions and his fingers.

“Merlin, Ginny,” he mumbled.

She was barely recovering from the explosion inside her when Harry nudged at her opening. She could see the stiff way he held his shoulders and felt the tremble in his fingers as he tried to guide his penis into her.

“Want you, Harry.” It was as close as she’d come to telling him the truth—that she was in love with him. And Harry surged forward—stretching and filling her completely.

Ginny couldn’t help but chuckle at the intensity on his face. She’d only seen him concentrate this fully when they were tracking a difficult subject, or when he was trying to hold back his anger.

“Sorry,” he mumbled, a shy smile blossoming his face—as if he had anything to be sorry about.

Ginny leaned up and kissed him then, trying to take his nervousness away. Harry’s movements below stilled and he poured all of himself into the kiss. But his hand soon strayed down to her hip, lifting her thigh against him as he pressed in further, grunting out when he was all the way inside.

“Ginny,” he breathed her name into the skin of her cheek, and then again into her neck as he licked and sucked there.

“You can move,” she whispered, tightening her leg around his back and bracing the other one.

Harry looked up at her, so much emotion and tenderness shining in his eyes that it made Ginny choke up. Despite what this had started as—at least in her own mind—Harry didn’t seem like he was here simply for sex. Other than them saying the words aloud, Ginny couldn’t imagine how this wasn’t making love with someone.

After kissing her once more, Harry pulled back and slowly began to rock his hips. His rhythm was jerky and out of sync for a few moments, but he caught on fast.

Any pain that Ginny had experienced with his entry was dulled now as the sensations of him sliding in and out of her took over.

It was different than she’d expected—so much more than she’d dreamed of—being here in Harry’s arms. It wasn’t perfect, but it was what she had right now.

It didn’t take long for Harry to finish. At least, she thought he’d finished. He stopped moving at any rate. Ginny guessed that wearing the condom had probably prevented the sensation she’d been expecting. But that made sense.

They lay there together for a long minute, Harry breathing heavily against the skin of her neck and

chest, before pulling back.

“Sorry,” he mumbled. “I’m probably crushing you.”

Ginny smiled at him, wanting to demand that he cover her again, keep her warm in his embrace forever, but she couldn’t take that from him right now. She could only take what he was willing to give.

“You’re fine,” she whispered back. Now that they were finished and had actually... We just had sex! Wow. It was hard to grasp any full thought and wrap her mind around the whole concept of the two of them together.

She knew what she wanted it to mean, and, logically, what it probably meant to Harry. But the whole idea was so much bigger than the two of them separately.

Thankfully, Harry seemed content to simply be there next to her. He gathered her to his body after banishing the spent condom, curling her into his arms as he pulled the blankets over them.

“Is it okay... if you stay?” he asked, entirely too shyly for what they’d just done together.

“I want to stay,” Ginny admitted, nestling back into his embrace and trying to calm her racing heart and mind.

Tomorrow. They’d deal with what this meant tomorrow.

Chapter 2

Harry woke to the most curious sensation—not that! That had happened many times—but this time, there was warm, bare flesh for his morning erection to press against.

Warm flesh that was curved perfectly against him and that smelled glorious—like spring flowers at the Burrow—against his face, and that shifted just right when he pressed his lips to it.

The idea that he was no longer Harry, Virgin Wonder Boy, slowly started to sink in. Ha! He could just rub that into Ron's—oh no. No. He couldn't.

Because it was Ginny in bed with him. Ginny whose naked body he was wrapped around, and Ginny who had so willingly given herself to him last night.

His head fuzzed a bit and Harry narrowed his eyes, focusing on one small patch of freckles that he could just make out on Ginny's shoulder. He wasn't sure if it was the leftover potion and small bit of alcohol in his bloodstream, or the thought that he'd actually had sex (SEX!) with Ginny Weasley, that made his head feel all light and full of air, at the same time making his chest tighten horribly.

What did this mean? What did she want it to mean? What did he want it to mean?

Harry decided he needed to figure that out before Ginny woke. Their friendship, and partnership, meant too much to him to ruin over... whatever this had been.

If he'd asked himself a few weeks ago if he could picture himself sleeping with Ginny, Harry would have laughed at the idea. Their relationship wasn't like that. Was it?

But looking back at it, Harry wasn't sure where the switch had flipped between them. When had it become okay for him to think of Ginny like this—the way her tight bottom pressed into his groin, and the way he could just see the curve of her breast through the sheet that covered them. He just wasn't sure.

But the fact that he now couldn't quite separate the fun loving, and sometimes deadly serious Auror Ginny Weasley, from the Ginny who had given herself to him, complete with sighs and moans of pleasure, in his mind made his heart race.

What if, in his greed, he'd ruined everything between them? They'd certainly probably broken at least... fifty Ministry rules. It was a rule that one couldn't sleep with their partners, wasn't it? It probably was. Hermione would know, even though there was no way Harry would ever ask her.

The idea of him strolling into her and Ron's flat and casually asking made him both grimace and smile.

He closed his eyes and tried to imagine not waking up next to Ginny, but the thought just wouldn't come.

Later, he scolded himself, when she's not right here, touching all of you and... just being so wonderful.

The memory of tasting her skin last night washed over him and Harry had to lean forward to remind himself whether it was strawberries, or peaches, that she tasted like. Whatever it was, it was Harry's newest favorite taste.

Ginny rolled just a bit as his lips left her shoulder, and Harry hissed when her bottom ground into his lap, causing all sorts of thoughts to fly into his head.

Now that he'd experienced sex, his body craved it. Every thought was connected to it in a way that it hadn't been before. And Ginny, lying in his arms, naked, did nothing to help him control his thoughts.

Surely she wouldn't want...

That would just completely complicate matters beyond anything...

"Harry," she mumbled, her hand rubbing up and down his arm where it wrapped over her belly. Another spark of lust, and attraction, and sheer terror coursed through Harry and he couldn't stop his hips from lifting against her, pressing his erect penis into the cleft of her bum.

"Morning," he mumbled when she smiled over her shoulder at him; a lazy, contented smile that he hadn't seen on her face ever. It reminded him of Christmas morning, and hot summer afternoons, and two-a-side Quidditch in the clearing.

"Morning," she whispered, rolling in his embrace before kissing him softly.

Something swelled inside Harry's chest as their lips slowly traced each other and Harry felt all... warm and wonderful inside. This was similar to last night, when they'd been moving together, but still different at the same time.

He wanted to tell her everything that she meant to him—but he wasn't even sure what that was right now.

She was brilliant. He didn't think that sounded right.

She was sexy as hell, and he couldn't ever remember being this turned on by anything in his life. That probably wouldn't go over particularly well.

She was... everything. That seemed a bit daft, as it made no sense whatsoever.

So Harry settled for kissing her instead. He tried to let what he was feeling come through in the way he buried his hands in her hair, and traced her spine down her back until it met the curve of her behind.

"Thank you," was the only thought he could manage to convey. And yet, it was so inferior to what he knew he should be saying. But he wasn't sure there were the right words—if there were, he certainly didn't know them.

"You're welcome," Ginny replied, smiling as her hands reached down and caressed his penis.

It was simply more than his brain could handle right then and Harry rolled from his side onto his

back, his body shaking with desire as she fondled him gently and used her finger to spread the small bit of liquid that leaked out of his penis.

“Can we...” She bit her lip and Harry had the insane urge to reach up and kiss the flesh there. She gave him a small squeeze and Harry could only nod in return.

She was amazing, truly, Harry told himself as he watched her study his body. His own fingers itched to touch her again and he lifted his hand, swallowing several times and begging permission with his eyes. Ginny nodded once and Harry sighed in relief as his fingers found her, warm and wet.

The moan she gave out nearly made him lose all control, and Harry had to clamp down on his urge, wanting to give what she had asked for. He was determined to help her enjoy this as much as he had last night. He was fairly sure she had orgasmed last night as well, but it was all a bit fuzzy after he sank into her warm perfection.

His fingers remembered the motions of the night before and Harry focused on Ginny’s face as she breathed deeply and rocked her hips in time with his movements.

“You’re so amazing.” He couldn’t help the words as they slipped out of his mouth, accompanied by kisses pressed to her shoulder. Intent on doing his best for her, Harry propped himself on one elbow and watched his fingers, trying to memorize what moves made her shudder the most.

His fingers moved inside shallowly and Ginny called out his name, one fist clenching the sheet near her side, and the other holding his bicep tightly.

He felt insanely pleased with himself when Ginny’s walls clenched around his fingers and her body rolled, her hips jerking up into his touch.

I did it again!

His celebration was short lived, however, when Ginny rolled them over, straddling his waist and pressing down onto him.

He almost asked about a condom again, motioning toward the box on the bedside table, but Ginny silently shook her head and used her wand to cast a contraceptive charm. A thrill rumbled through his chest and Harry thrust up against her. Last night had been marvelous—brilliant, really, but Harry was afraid he’d missed out on something by not being able to feel all of Ginny surrounding him.

She seemed to be perfectly happy to be in control this morning, and Harry couldn’t argue, staring up at her perfect body as she arched over him and sank down on his penis, taking him inside her.

She winced once she was fully down and Harry tried to sit up.

“Gin...”

“It’s okay,” she replied, leaning to press a kiss to his chin before putting her hands on his chest—whether to keep him in place, or brace herself, Harry wasn’t sure.

When she started moving her hips, Harry groaned in complete satisfaction. This was brilliant—

watching him slide in and out of her while her perfectly pert breasts bounced.

“Merlin,” he groaned, biting down on his lip to regain some semblance of control and to keep from thrusting up into her too harshly, possibly hurting her. He never wanted to do that.

“Move with me, Harry,” she said. He nodded and tentatively reached up to palm her breasts—the feel of her nipples against his hands making his orgasm imminent.

He managed to last a few thrusts before he exploded inside her, her wet walls milking him slowly, and completely.

Ginny finally stopped moving and Harry tugged her down to him, wrapping her fully into his arms and rolling them as he kissed her. They kissed for several minutes, first passionately, and then slower and slower until they were simply nuzzling their faces together.

“I don’t have the words,” Harry confessed, after wracking his brain to come up with them.

“You don’t need words,” Ginny protested.

He wanted so much to ask her what this all meant between them—what did this change? Because he knew that they couldn’t go back to simply being friends after this. And friends that occasionally—or quite regularly, Harry hoped—had sex didn’t seem right either.

But they hadn’t even talked about a relationship that involved more than meeting for pizza on nights when they didn’t work, or catching a Saturday matinee at the movie house down the street from Ginny’s flat. Would they now just fall into the type of thing that Ron and Hermione had?

Would Ginny expect to move in here, and share his bed from now on? The idea, right now, sounded completely brilliant. But Harry worried that he was over-thinking—or perhaps under-thinking—everything.

This small world they’d created last night, and then again just now here in this bed, was all that Harry could fathom right now.

“We need to work this morning,” Ginny said, although he could hear the loathing in her voice.

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her that they were both calling in sick, when she sat up, taking the sheet with her. Her face flushed just a bit when she uncovered him fully and walked toward the bathroom, glancing back over her shoulder, and trailing the white sheet like a magnificent set of robes.

Once she was gone, Harry swung his legs over the side of the bed and contemplated what he should do. The pipes in the walls groaned and Harry almost stood to go and join Ginny in the shower. But perhaps that was being too presumptuous.

Breakfast, he decided, was completely in order. That certainly couldn’t lose him points. A Weasley was always hungry.

Harry blindly stuck his hand in his drawer and removed a pair of pyjama trousers, pulling them on

over his bareness and deciding to forgo a shirt.

The bacon and eggs were sizzling in the pan, filling the whole flat with the wonderful aroma, when Ginny walked out of the bathroom, using his comb to brush through her hair.

“Smells wonderful,” she mused, her hand tracing along his back as she moved past him to pour a cup of tea.

Harry’s brain kicked in again as he stared at the food in the pan. He’d never had to wake up and deal with the ‘after’ of having sex before. What did Ginny expect from him? What did he expect from her?

He still didn’t know.

“I made one for you,” she mumbled, pressing a kiss to his shoulder and handing him a cup of tea.

Her soft affections helped to settle Harry a bit and he slid her bacon and eggs onto the plate.

“I thought you might be hungry,” he offered, feeling incredibly shy, and incredibly silly, all at the same time.

“Starved,” Ginny said, grinning at him.

For a moment, while they ate, it was easy to slip back into their familiar roles—friends and partners. They joked a bit about what assignment they were likely to get stuck with this week, and whether Ron would ever get up the nerve to propose to Hermione. These were safe subjects, and easy to talk about. Thank heavens, because Harry simply couldn’t get the image of Ginny on top of him out of his head. He knew he was in trouble when he stared at the piece of bacon slowly disappearing in between her lips.

‘It’s just a crush,’ he scolded himself, biting down on his lip and tearing his eyes away from her. ‘A simple crush, completely blown out of proportion because we had sex.’

Did everyone feel this way just after they had sex with someone? Or was it simply a consequence of the first time? Or because he and Ginny were supposed to be friends?

Again with the over-thinking! Harry very nearly growled aloud, but managed to turn it into a throat clearing cough. Ginny certainly wasn’t analyzing every move like this. Perhaps he should simply wait until Ginny let him know what she wanted to do. He certainly didn’t want to hurt her with disinterest—because that wasn’t what he was feeling at all—but he also didn’t want to pressure her into having a relationship, if that’s what this was all headed to. He wasn’t even sure he wanted that right now—simply because he’d never really thought about having that kind of relationship with anyone, really, let alone Ginny.

He took a deep breath and decided to venture a bit into unknown waters. “So, you’re, er... feeling up to coming back to work?”

Ginny’s left eyebrow rose and Harry swallowed his bite of fried egg, not tasting any of it. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

Harry used just a minute to try and decipher if this was some sort of trap. Hermione was good at using words to get both he and Ron to trip all over themselves. He wasn't sure if Ginny was the same—Did all women just naturally have that skill?—or if his brain was just going to fizzle out from thinking so much. Who knew sex could be so exhausting.

“Er... you had the flu,” he ventured.

“Oh,” Ginny waved her hand dismissively and smiled at him before taking another healthy bite. “I’m well over that now.”

“Oh,” Harry nodded. He let out a deep breath and tried to force himself not to think about this anymore. He was willing to take anything Ginny gave right now, and it seemed she didn't want to talk about last night, or this morning. “Well, then.”

Ginny used the last corner of her toast to soak up the remaining yolk on her plate and then cheerfully banished her dishes to the sink.

“I’d better let you get showered,” she smiled, gathering her cloak, hat and scarf.

Harry stood, awkwardly shifting back and forth, searching for the right words to say to her.

“Don’t stop for a pint on your way to work, yeah?” she asked, going up on tiptoe to give him a kiss on the cheek. At the last second, however, Harry gripped her elbow and turned his face, kissing her fully on the lips. Ginny pulled away with a gasp and stared at him.

Harry smirked at her. “I’ll remember that advice,” he mused, forcing himself to move back to the kitchen. “See you in a bit.”

* * *

Ginny chose not to dwell on either the way Harry hadn't said anything about them sleeping together, or on the way he'd kissed her at their goodbye this morning. Dwelling on things did nothing to help the situation, she had learned over the years; it just drove you insane until you did something stupid, like write in an enchanted diary, or compose horrid poetry.

No, it was better to let Harry have control over the situation between them. If he initiated something again, then Ginny would be forced to bring the issue in front of both of them. If he chose to let it be a wonderful memory shared between two friends... then so be it.

She still didn't regret last night, or this morning. Making love with Harry—especially while being able to watch his face—was one of the most amazing things that Ginny had ever experienced, and she didn't think she would ever regret it.

“Morning,” she greeted the few Aurors that were gathered around the coffee counter in the office, just as every other morning before. Strange how the world could go on so much the same when she felt so utterly different inside.

“Heard Potter had a rough night of it,” one of them called out. Ginny froze in her tracks, her heart jumping into her throat as she tried to analyze his meaning.

Harry wouldn't have—

"Someone slipped him a potion?"

Everything clicked into place and Ginny fought against the rising heat in her cheeks. "Oh, yeah. Damn witch thought she could slip it past him."

The Auror whistled and shook his head sadly. "Still can't figure out how he gets out of falling for those. I'd have been a goner."

"No one wants your sorry arse, Hayes," the lone female Auror in the group quipped before walking away. "They're all lining up for a crack at Potter since that article."

Ginny growled and snatched two cups of coffee from the counter, ignoring the renewed speculation that oozed out of the offices and trailed along behind her as she moved down the hallway.

Harry was in the office, his head buried in a thick file when she walked in. His earlier happy and relaxed demeanor had vanished, probably evaporated in the hallway like hers had.

"Hi," she ventured. "I brought you a cup of coffee. Thought maybe you could use it."

"Thanks," Harry grunted. He gave her a tight smile over the top of his file, took the cup she offered and set it on the edge of his desk where he promptly forgot about it. Ginny wasn't insulted however. He wasn't snubbing her, that's for sure. In fact, even when he'd been angry with her for bollixing something up, he'd never ignored her.

"What do we have today?" she asked, trying to be cheerful and ignore the strangeness between them—it was probably all in her head anyway.

"Paperwork," Harry grunted out, gesturing to the pile. "While you were gone, I had to stay out of the field, so I got landed with all the paperwork."

Ginny winced. As much as Ginny preferred to be out in the field, working cases, Harry's dislike for being inside, as well as paperwork, was legendary.

"I'll try to pitch in, then, shall I?"

Her only answer was a lifted eyebrow over the top of his file as he flipped through it.

Ginny chuckled and grabbed the first few files, making sure they were in order and all the signatures were where they were supposed to be. It was tedious, but she soon lost herself in the case.

"Harry, do you have a minute?"

Ginny was startled when Kingsley stuck his head into their office.

"Afternoon, Ginny," he greeted her and then ducked out.

"I'll be back," Harry mumbled. "Finish up and we can get some lunch."

Ginny nodded as he left and tried hard to quell the excitement that bubbled up in her. It was just lunch together. They had lunch together almost every day.

Harry's scent, even more masculine now that she'd smelled it and tasted it on his skin, seemed to linger in the air, punishing her with every breath she took.

"Focus, Ginny, focus," she scolded herself.

Harry was only gone for a few minutes, but he came back looking as pale as Nearly Headless Nick. He sank down into his chair and was quiet for a minute before Ginny finally exploded.

"What?!"

"Sorry," he mumbled, a small blush of pink filling his cheeks. "I, er... Kingsley had some information to give me about last night."

"Oh," Ginny said, letting herself fall back into her chair.

"The er... witch... she had taken a fertility potion."

The picture that made in Ginny's mind made her nearly vomit. Now Harry's look made complete sense. If he hadn't been able to break through the love potion...

"I'm certainly not ready to be a father," he mumbled across their desks, which were pushed up next to each other. "Especially with someone I know nothing about and was tricked into..."

He tried for a small smile, but it came off as more of a grimace, and Ginny had the insane urge to go over and gather him into her arms. She would never act on it—not in public, at least—but it was very hard to ignore after what they'd already shared.

"It didn't happen," Ginny assured him. She reached across the desk and let her fingers brush across his hand for a moment. Harry turned his hand up and captured them for just a minute before letting go. He swallowed a few times before continuing.

"Kingsley's going to issue a Ministry statement about all this nonsense. And there's going to be some law reform, or something."

"That'll be good," Ginny agreed. "Someone needs to control this before it get completely out of hand."

"I guess I'll just have to keep watching what I eat and drink for a while," Harry said. Ginny smiled tightly, wishing there was something more she could do for him. Having to live like this, always in fear of some woman and what she might do to him, was ridiculous.

"Too bad we can't just print our own article," he mumbled as he lifted the file he'd been working on earlier. His bright eyes met hers over the paper and she saw the edges crinkle just a bit. "After all, the contest has rather been won, hasn't it?"

Ginny opened her mouth to reply, but closed it instead. What more could she really say? The absurdity of the whole situation—the conversation, the article, the ensuing madness, and the

resulting trip their relationship had made because of it all—settled in the room like a heavy fog, making Ginny feel a bit hysterical.

“Do I at least get a gift certificate out of it?” Ginny pretended to be scorned. “Wasn’t that the deal?”

Harry snorted and dropped the file onto his desk, scrunching up his nose as he pretended to think. “I believe we were up to a gift certificate from Madam Malkin’s, your choice of Wheeze, a dinner from the Leaky, and a rubber chicken—just for fun.”

“Keep the rubber chicken, but I’ll take the dinner,” Ginny ventured with an exaggerated wink.

Harry’s face sobered and then split into a huge grin. “How about tonight?”

“I wasn’t serious,” Ginny protested, shocked that he thought she actually was.

“I am, though,” he pressed, his hands fidgeting with his file. He looked incredibly cute and vulnerable right now, making Ginny’s belly swoop pleasantly. She wondered if this was his way of validating what happened between them.

“Okay then,” she agreed.

“Besides,” Harry said, lifting his file again, “I’m getting really tired of eating my own cooking. And you can taste everything first, just to make sure.”

Ginny rolled her eyes, but couldn’t help the laugh that bubbled up and spilled out of her.

* * *

Neville was at the Leaky Cauldron when Harry and Ginny walked in. For the very first time in his life, Harry actually silently cursed the poor man. He knew it really wasn’t Neville’s fault that he was so friendly and wanted nothing more than to talk, and talk, and talk.

Harry could even see Ginny’s usual friendly demeanor beginning to crack. She kept eyeing a table near the back of the room, in the darkest corner.

“Listen, Neville,” Harry finally broke in when their friend began describing his duties under Professor Sprout’s internship, “I don’t mean to be rude, but Ginny here hasn’t eaten all day, and you know how these Weasleys get without their food.”

He paid for the comment with a vicious pinch to the side as Ginny glared at him.

Neville chuckled at their byplay and waved them off. “Wouldn’t want anyone to get maimed on my account. Enjoy your dinner.”

Harry laughed, still rubbing his side where Ginny’s fingers had not only pinched, but twisted his skin none too lightly. “We’ll get together soon for a pint.”

Neville nodded, but then gave a rather skeptical look.

“Or not,” Harry said as the reality of his words settled in.

“Harry, come oooooonnnn,” Ginny said, tugging on his arm, dragging him toward the back booth. “I’m seriously going to hurt you if I have to wait any longer. Food. I need sustenance.”

Both Harry and Neville laughed. “I’ll send Hannah right over,” Neville winked. Harry waved his appreciation as he followed Ginny to the table.

“Some things never change,” he mused, watching as Ginny perused the menu. She did this everytime they ate here, although she rarely got anything different than—

“I’ll have the roasted chicken, with veg,” she ordered as soon as Hannah got to their table.

“What about you, Harry?” Hannah asked, not even writing Ginny’s order down.

“Er... the same, I guess,” he said, not even looking at the menu. “But could you—”

“I’ll walk the meal through the kitchen myself,” Hannah assured him, giving his arm a friendly pat. “Neville mentioned the trouble you’ve been having with erm...”

“Yeah,” Harry said, sighing in relief. This was one of the reasons that Harry enjoyed coming here so much. Hannah really understood what it was like for him to be out in public. She’d even wielded a broom a few weeks back, defending him from a rather unruly mob of young girls while he and Ron made their escape out to Diagon Alley.

“Thanks, I appreciate it, Hannah.”

“No problem,” she said, winking at both Ginny and Harry. “Anything for some of my best customers.”

They waited until she was away from the booth before both performing several magical sweeps of the area and then erecting several spells to keep unwanted listeners out. It really didn’t even matter if they ended up talking about the weather, someone might take an innocent comment out of context and there would be another salacious article.

Harry smiled tightly at Ginny, feeling a sudden return of his nerves as the silence stretched between them. During the day they’d been great, their work provided a safe zone where they didn’t need to talk about what was, or wasn’t, happening between them.

But as the day went on, Harry couldn’t help but think that they really needed to talk about it all.

“Hermione stopped by while you were returning those files, just before we left,” Ginny said, her fingernail tracing a years’ old scar in the tabletop.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Harry winced at the awkwardness and searched his mind, trying to think of something to talk about. Somewhere out there had to be a safe subject that didn’t remind him what it felt like for her to be

underneath him, crying out his name as he brought her to climax, or losing himself completely in the feel of her surrounding him.

“So, erm...” Harry stammered, grimacing. “I, er... Wilkins offered me a couple of tickets to the next Falcons game.”

Ginny looked up and her face lit up a bit. Harry congratulated himself on picking just the right thing to talk about.

“Normally I can’t stand the Falcons, but... they’re playing the Harpies.” The fact that Harry had offered to purchase the tickets off of Wilkins for more than twice what they were worth just this afternoon while Ginny had gone to get them some more coffee, seemed irrelevant to mention.

“I haven’t seen a Harpies game in months,” Ginny moaned, her eyes sparkling.

“I was thinking we could maybe go, together, I mean,” Harry said, moving the salt shaker back and forth between his fingers. “If you want to, I mean. You might want to just, you know, go with someone else.”

“Don’t be daft, Harry,” Ginny answered automatically. “Of course I’d love to go with you. Who else, besides Ron, would bad mouth the Falcons as much as I do?”

Harry was afraid his face might just split for grinning so hard. But then it hit him. Would that be considered their second date? Because, technically, this was their first. Wasn’t it?

Then again, they were just at the Leaky. And they came to the Leaky at least once every few days together. Maybe Ginny didn’t see it as a date; maybe she just saw it as dinner with her friend, Harry.

Through the hours they had worked together—the whole time with Harry being completely neurotic about this entire situation in his head—Harry had finally come to the conclusion that he wasn’t going to let this get in the way of his relationship with Ginny.

Their friendship had forever changed last night; but that was alright. Wherever it led—either to them simply being closer friends, or more—was alright with Harry.

Really, how could he get much better than building something with someone he already liked—possibly even loved.

The word slipped into his mind now and he pondered that. What was love, really? And what made a person know that they did feel that way about someone else.

Harry knew that he always enjoyed being around Ginny, even when she was in a mood. They could, mostly, talk about anything. And Ginny knew things about him—especially now—that he had never shared with anyone else. Not even Ron and Hermione knew that he still suffered from nightmares, or that he’d seen a counselor for a few months when he was in training. Only Ginny knew those details.

And only he knew that she had actually sold Aunt Muriel’s tiara—after it had been gifted to her in

Muriel's will—to be able to afford the down payment on her flat. Who would have thought the old bat had been right about it being Goblin made after all?

Harry had offered to loan her the money, but Ginny refused, arguing that she would never actually wear the monstrosity anyway. There would, no doubt, be hell to pay once Molly Weasley found out, but Ginny would deal with that then.

They'd seen each other through the worst—training missions and horrific crime scenes—holding each other afterwards, while they both cried great wracking sobs. And they'd been together through the best—weddings and births and wonderful Weasley parties where, invariably, someone turned into an animal.

"Harry, Hannah's waiting."

Ginny's voice broke through his thoughts and Harry felt his cheeks turn red as he turned to release the spells that would allow Hannah to place their precariously balanced meals on the table, unburdening her arms.

"Thanks," she said once she was able to set them down.

"Sorry," Harry mumbled.

"No problem," Hannah waved them off. "You just let me know if there's something else I can get for you, since I won't be able to check on you." She winked and moved off, taking a seat next to Neville at the bar. Harry quickly erected the spellwork while Ginny pulled their two plates toward her.

He watched as she meticulously divided the roasted onions out of her vegetables and slid them onto his plate, picking out the cooked carrots from his and putting them on her plate.

The ritual seldom changed, and Harry was fine with it.

Ginny didn't care for onions; he had a thing about cooked carrots. Ron always called them both mental, but the arrangement worked well for them. Harry supposed it was more the idea that Ron ate almost anything, and he never really cared for people eating off of his plate.

The meal went on with them making plans for the Quidditch game and talking about some of the cases they were working.

Everything seemed brilliant between them, although Harry was very aware of everytime he happened to brush her hand while reaching for his drink, or bump her foot with his under the table. Had the tables here always been this small?!

When they were finished eating, they ended up staring at each other, the tension in the small bubble they'd created escalating unbelievably.

Harry licked his lips and drank from his glass of Butterbeer, trying to decide what to say. He knew what he really wanted, but was it being too presumptuous to simply ask Ginny to come home with him? You know, not necessarily so they could have sex again—not that he would complain—but just

so that he didn't have to say goodbye.

Deep in his mind, he knew he was only trying to fool himself. If he got Ginny back to his flat, he knew exactly what he wanted to do with her—if she was willing, that is.

"We should probably go," she mumbled, glancing around at the pub. Their little booth had drawn quite a few curious stares, but no one had approached, thanks to their spell work.

"I guess we should," Harry said, although he made no move to leave. "Er..." The words dried up in his mouth and, damnit, he was out of Butterbeer.

"I... I think I may have left my gloves at your flat last night," Ginny offered, glancing at him almost shyly.

Inside, Harry was doing a horribly embarrassing dance, while he tried to smother a grin on the outside.

"Oh, well, you might need those." He looked at her, trying to catch her eye so that he could confirm what he hoped her intentions were.

Ginny's eyes finally met his and were clear and dark, just as they had been last night, and again this morning.

YES!

"Come on, then," he urged, removing the spells. He wanted more than anything to reach out and take her hand—both to steady himself and to assure that she was shaking as much as he was—but they were in public, where anything completely innocent, or not, as the case may be, would be blown into a story of epic proportions.

"It's a nice night," Harry mused as they stepped outside. "We could... walk. It's only a few blocks."

In reality, it was more than a few, but Harry was relieved to see that Ginny probably needed as much crisp, cold air as he did. She nodded and they walked along, shoulders rubbing from time to time.

Once they were several blocks away from the Leaky Cauldron, Harry's hand fumbled for hers and she answered by threading their fingers together. Never had hand holding warmed him up as much as it did tonight.

It took them nearly an hour to walk the blocks to Harry's flat, but it seemed like only minutes, really.

"You're probably cold," Harry mused as he pulled out his seldom used keys and fumbled to get the right one in the lock. "Come in and warm up with a cup of tea."

He winced at how completely transparent his excuse sounded, but Ginny smiled enticingly and agreed. Harry very nearly shouted for joy, but he managed to keep it hidden behind a smile.

"Where have you been?!"

For a very brief moment, Harry tried to figure out what Molly Weasley was doing in his flat, and how she'd known he was planning to have sex with her daughter.

"We've been waiting here for over two hours."

But it was Hermione, flanked by Ron, who was trying to calm his rather irate girlfriend. It wasn't working.

Chapter 3

Ginny very much wanted to defend Harry against Hermione's verbal attack, but she supposed Hermione and Ron had every right to be a bit upset with Harry, and by extension, her as well.

"And you didn't even contact us after last night," Hermione continued, breaking away from Ron's calming grip on her shoulders and pacing in front of the two of them.

She glanced over at Harry to find a mix of emotions playing across his face: shock, probably at being attacked when he first came into his flat, repentance since he hadn't contacted them, and a bit of disappointment and resignation.

Her body tingled all over at the last two. Although they hadn't said it outright, it was fairly obvious to Ginny what they had both given themselves plenty of reason to come to Harry's flat to do. And it certainly had nothing to do with gloves or tea.

"Do you know how I found out that some witch attacked you?" Hermione asked. Wisely, Harry kept his mouth shut, his eyes widening as he watched Hermione's rant build and build. Ron was smirking just a bit, although Ginny wasn't sure if it was because of Harry's helplessness, or his girlfriend's growing fury.

"I had to read about it in a case file that was handed to me by my receptionist. Everyone knew about this before me."

"That's technically not true, love," Ron tried to interrupt. "I didn't find out until that one file clerk—what's his name?—came into the shop."

"I'm sorry—" Harry began, only to be cut off again.

"You're sorry?" Hermione yelled, narrowing her eyes at him.

Ginny cleared her throat. "It was rather late by the time they'd dragged her out of here, Hermione. And you can't really blame him for being a bit... preoccupied," she shot a sly glance over to Harry who, she was pleased to see, had to hide a smirk.

Hermione's ire died down just a bit and she stopped pacing. "I understand all of that, but do you know how bad I felt when I had to read about it in a file?"

Harry sighed and removed his cloak before sinking down onto the sofa. "I really just wanted to forget that whole incident happened, Hermione. I'm sorry that I didn't think to contact you."

"You're alright, though?" Hermione said, all trace of anger now gone in favor of her mothering.

Ginny chuckled softly and hung her cloak next to Harry's taking a stolen moment to breathe in the fresh scent of him there before turning around and choosing a seat opposite Harry. What she really wanted to do was to sit next to him and reach for his hand—her fingers were still warm from where his had been only minutes ago. But that wasn't for the best right now. Harry seemed to want to keep things quiet right now.

That is, if there actually was anything between them. As the hours in the day passed, Ginny's hesitation and nervousness about their relationship had grown with Harry's silence.

It was only at the end of dinner, when he seemed so reluctant to part from her, that Ginny's heart began to thump again with the possibility.

It was completely unspoken between them, but Ginny knew exactly why they were coming back to the flat. And she was determined that once they'd had sex again—why mess up all the fun with talking—she was going to force the issue.

But it didn't seem like either one of those things was going to happen tonight.

"I feel horrible," Ron mumbled. Now that she looked at him, Ginny had to admit he looked a bit green. "And George is trying to figure out a way we can repay you for—"

"You don't have to do that," Harry shook his head, sighing. He ruffled his hair and Ginny smirked at seeing the frustration oozing off of him. "I was a willing participant in the whole conversation."

"Neither of you could have known how far it would go," Hermione defended.

"Or how many desperate witches there really are out there," Ginny offered with a bit of a smile. Harry bit his lip and chuckled softly.

"This isn't a joke at all, though," Hermione defended. "These women are serious. That witch yesterday is facing severe criminal charges."

"Too bad the Ministry won't do anything to that reporter," Ron piped up.

"They may still," Harry said, glancing at Ginny. She wasn't sure what he was trying to convey to her, or if it meant anything at all, but his looks were making her feel uncomfortable, in a delicious way. He wanted her there, that was for sure. "Kingsley came in today to tell me about some new legislation that's going to be proposed before the Wizengamot."

They all turned to Hermione, who looked a bit red in the face. "I couldn't say anything until it was announced officially."

"It will be tomorrow," Harry shrugged.

"Good," Hermione nodded. "It's scandalous what they can print nowadays and have no consequences."

"Well, I wouldn't say there were no consequences," Ginny mused, a sly smile on her face while she caught Harry's eye.

"Did you do something to her also?" Ron asked, perking up.

"Ronald!" Hermione huffed.

"What?" he defended. "It was George's idea!"

“Oh, come on,” Harry called out, laughing. “Now we have to know what you did.”

Ron’s grin spread across his whole face, crinkling his eyes at the corners. “It was brilliant...”

“It’s not something they’ll have to arrest you for, is it?” Hermione eyed him warily. Ginny was just about to protest, but then she saw the way the corners of Hermione’s mouth twitched upward just so.

“Like I would,” Harry defended his friend.

“First George made up a huge batch of Canary Cremes.” Ron grinned and almost giggled at the thought of it, making everyone but Hermione, who looked caught between being proud of her boyfriend for defending Harry, and telling him off, laugh. “Then he, er... he got into her flat.”

“I don’t even want to know how,” Hermione mumbled, pressing her fingers to her temples.

“And he hid the whole lot of Cremes everywhere—in drawers, in cupboards, all over the place.”

“Wouldn’t she be smarter than that?” Harry asked. “After she ate the first one...”

“Well,” Ron shrugged. “She could, except that George did this impressive Compulsion Charm on them all.”

“I always said the twins were too smart for their own good,” Ginny muttered, shaking her head in amazement. “Both of them could have had all their N.E.W.T.’s, you know.”

“How long did it last?” Harry asked through his grin.

Ron shrugged a shoulder casually. “For all I know, she could still be carrying some around. George stuck around for a bit after she got home—”

“In her home?!” Hermione protested.

“Like that was any more of an invasion than what she did to Harry,” Ginny huffed. “If you ask me, this was far less intrusive. You don’t know what he’s had to go through, Hermione.” Ginny felt her face heat after defending Harry. What she’d said wasn’t completely true; Hermione did know most of what had gone on. But Ginny had been the one to see Harry’s personal, private struggles with it all; it touched her in a way that it never could Hermione, because of how she felt for Harry.

“I can just imagine her turning into a canary all over the place,” Harry mused, smiling slightly. He caught Ginny’s eye and gave her a small wink, gratitude for her defense of him shining in his eyes along with something much more primitive.

Ginny shifted in her chair, feeling her low belly stir in a new, yet comfortable way. Their gazes locked for a minute and Ginny wished—for just that minute—that she could see inside his head, just to know exactly what he was thinking about.

“Fred would have approved,” Ron said with a firm nod, and Ginny had to agree.

“How did you manage to get past the Nightshade last night, Harry?” Hermione asked. Harry blinked

at her several times and ruffled his hair, a sure sign that he really didn't want to answer her, but probably would anyway.

"It hadn't gone too far," he said quietly, squirming in his spot on the sofa just a bit. "We were here... on the sofa, kissing and..." he glanced at Ginny and grimaced. Ginny tried to be supportive by smiling at him, but she knew that it was tight and forced. The thought of someone trying to seduce Harry—someone he'd never met, and who wanted to ruin his life just for... for whatever it was the witch wanted to prove, or gain. Well, it all made Ginny furious, but also sick.

"And I honestly don't remember a whole lot of it," Harry finished lamely. Ginny knew he was lying, and so did Hermione, if the look on her face was any indication.

"Leave off, Hermione," Ron scolded gently. "I've heard that Nightshade is rather nasty stuff. Messes with memory."

All four of them saw through the line completely, but Ginny appreciated what Ron was doing for Harry.

"The Auror Matron said the potion was off anyway," Harry said with a shrug. "Wasn't made right."

"You're lucky all it did was disorient you, you could have been poisoned."

"Or worse," Harry muttered. He seemed to weigh something for a minute, his eyes on the floor in front of him. "She was... she was on a fertility potion. If we had..."

"I think we all get the picture," Ginny interrupted, not wanting that picture in her head again. It was criminal enough for the witch to try and drug Harry into being with her, but to involve an innocent child in all of it. Not only that, but to bring that child into a relationship founded on lies and deceit was just... vile.

"I let my guard down," Harry shrugged, trying to shrug it off, like he always did.

"We can only hope that she gets what's coming to her," Hermione huffed.

Ginny bit her lip and looked over at Ron and Harry, who were both smirking. It sounded like the reporter had definitely suffered lately—not that there was anything wrong with that. The little slag deserved everything that was heaped on her.

"In the meantime," Ron said, a slow grin coming to his face. "I was thinking of catching a Cannon's game this weekend..."

* * *

Ginny sighed, glancing at her watch. It was well after midnight now and Harry looked as tired as she felt. Ron, however, looked as if he could go on talking all night long.

She and Harry certainly weren't going to get to talk tonight—or do anything else, for that matter.

Ginny was disappointed. Even though it had only been once, the thought of waking anywhere but Harry's bed sounded sad and lonely. Then again, maybe she'd been reading too much into the whole

situation—like usual. Perhaps Harry had only been after a shag tonight, and then when that couldn't happen because his friends were at his flat, he hadn't hurried them off or made any excuses. He'd offered them something to drink and made polite conversation; because he was Harry, and that's what Harry did.

'You're just tired, Ginny,' she scolded herself, praying that's all it was.

"I'm going to go," she said, faking a yawn. The doubt made her avoid Harry's eye as she stood to gather her cloak.

"I'll, er... I'll walk you out," Harry said, standing himself.

"Don't worry about it," Ginny tried to dismiss him. She prayed it was just tiredness, or possibly hormones, making her feel so emotional right now. Everything seemed so close to the surface right now—so ready to ignite at just the slightest touch, or look.

"Don't be stupid," he mused quietly when he helped her slid her cloak up her arms and onto her shoulders. "Of course I'll see you out."

Guilt coursed through her for doubting Harry. Of course he wasn't in this only for a quick shag. If he was, last night wouldn't have been so wonderful. But he also hadn't said anything about it, other than their joking about Ginny winning the "contest" earlier today.

She didn't like to think of herself as one of those women that over-analyzed everything, but, she supposed that it was no use fighting human nature.

"I'm sorry," Harry said once they were outside his front door. Ginny glanced back at the door, thankful that he had closed it behind him most of the way. "I... I had no idea..."

"No," she shook her head, thankful that the air outside was so brisk, because it cleared her head a bit. Being so close to Harry always made her feel something—but the feelings had never been this overwhelming and... almost suffocating before. "I know you didn't know—"

She couldn't finish her thought, however, because his lips were on hers, demanding, yet gentle at the same time. But they couldn't get too carried away, because Ron and Hermione were just on the other side of the partially open door.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Ginny said as she pulled away. Harry looked like he might stop her, but then Ron opened the door and stuck his face out.

"Do you remember that bloke who ordered all the dungbombs?"

Ginny shook her head at Ron's comment and at the slightly annoyed look on Harry's face.

"I'll see you at work tomorrow, Harry."

Harry stared at her for a moment, completely ignoring Ron's question, before nodding. "At work tomorrow."

Harry's bed had never been as uncomfortable as it was tonight. He hadn't even been able to do more than doze off and on without thinking of Ginny. His hand kept reaching out toward where she had slept the night before and brushing along the empty sheets until he woke, almost panic stricken, searching for her.

"I'm doomed," he told the empty room. If this was how bad it was after just one night together, how would Harry ever survive a normal relationship?

Once again, he looked at his watch, peering at the arms to see they pointed to three thirty. And, once again, he almost got out of bed to Apparate to Ginny's flat.

But her parting words about seeing him at work tomorrow kept sounding in his head. Perhaps she hadn't been as interested in being together again as he had. Maybe he'd misread the situation completely.

All he knew was that they couldn't go on like this.

Harry wanted nothing more than to be with Ginny—and not just for sex—but for everything. He wanted to be able to hold her hand in the middle of Diagon Alley, and not care if there was someone watching them. He wanted to be able to wake up in the morning and see that she was there in his bed, wanting to be with him as much as he wanted to be with her.

If that's what love meant, then Harry supposed he was in love with Ginny.

The idea made his stomach churn pleasantly and he smiled into the darkness.

"I'm in love with Ginny," he announced to no one but himself. Repeating it seemed necessary, so he did, over and over and over again, ending by flopping back on the middle of the bed, arms spread wide, and laughing at the ceiling.

The idea popped into his head that he simply had to tell her, right then and there, before he lost his nerve, or had the chance to second guess himself. Haphazardly, he tugged on a pair of pyjama trousers over his boxers and rummaging for a t-shirt in the drawer, not really caring what he came up with.

It wasn't until he was reaching for his wand that Harry wondered if Apparating into Ginny's flat was the best idea after all. At best, she'd probably hex him for waking her—at worst, she'd hex his bits for even contemplating coming to her flat in the middle of the night, proclaiming his love for her like some... lovestruck teenager.

Slowly, he sank to the edge of the sofa, burying his hands in his hair.

"Shite," he swore as he noticed he had two different shoes on. And only one sock. He hadn't even noticed. "She'll kill me if I show up like this."

No. It needed to be better than this. Showing up at her flat at three in the morning, barely dressed, wasn't suave and endearing. It was... stalkerish, really.

Perhaps what he should do, instead, is plan something for her—some way to explain to her what he

felt for her and how he wanted to know what she felt for him—no matter what it did for their relationship.

Flowers popped into his head, but Harry dismissed them fairly quickly. Ginny wasn't necessarily the flower type of witch. She had a way with killing plants. Neville always said it was a shame that she had such a black thumb; but even he'd been unable to tutor her in Herbology.

Chocolate? It was cliché, yes, but he knew she loved chocolate. That was an option. At least then her mouth might be too full to laugh at his pathetic little declaration of love.

It was no use. Harry didn't have a romantic bone in his body.

He flopped back dramatically on the sofa and stared up at the ceiling, doubts beginning to creep into his outlook on the whole situation.

Perhaps he was simply seeing everything through rose colored—actually, it was more like sex colored glasses. He was a randy bloke, and Ginny had offered a way out of the situation he seemed to have stuck himself in.

No, it was more than that. If he truly believed that, then he wouldn't be worrying so much about all of this, and making himself sick about it all.

Now that he thought about it, his stomach did hurt a bit. Maybe he was just hungry.

His mismatched shoes were discarded by the sofa and his lone sock tossed somewhere over his shoulder, before he delved into the fridge, pushing aside this and that, searching for... something. Anything to make him feel a bit less empty than he did right now.

* * *

Ginny felt horrible. This was so much worse than the flu had been. And the fact that she'd completely done it to herself made it even worse.

She almost called in sick today, but then Harry would just show up at her doorstep and... they'd still be stuck where they were.

Which was absolutely nowhere.

Granted, only twenty-four hours had gone by since they'd... well. But nothing had been really said about it. Nothing!

And as much as she thought she could handle the change in their relationship, Ginny knew that this last shift was more than she could take without breaking.

The only sleep she had managed had been the fifteen minutes that her forehead had rested on her plate of breakfast this morning. Which, because she was already running late, meant that her hair was all greasy, and she smelled like... like bacon and eggs.

Her robes were all rumpled and she was fairly sure she had on two different socks, but at least she hadn't chickened out completely.

'You can do this,' she reassured herself over and over again. She must have said it allowed, as well, because everyone in the lift was staring at her. Or perhaps she still had bacon stuck to her forehead. Surreptitiously, she reached up to check—just in case.

Taking a deep breath as the floor for the MLE came up, Ginny dug deep to find the courage that she'd always thought rested so close to the surface inside her. Maybe that was only for things like fighting Death Eaters and standing up to bullies.

Telling the man she'd been in love with for years that she was, in fact, in love with him certainly didn't fall into the same category. This was far more intimidating.

"Just do it," she muttered, ignoring the Aurors at the coffee counter, where they always seemed to be.

By the time she had reached her office, Ginny was all worked up again. "Just fucking do it!" she scolded herself before opening the door wide and stepping inside.

Harry was sitting at his desk and looked up when she burst in.

"I think you and I need to talk," she said. Her legs felt like jelly and her hands were shaking.

"Er... Ginny... I don't think..."

"Listen," she continued on, running right over his words. "I know that we slept together, and I know that maybe that really messed up our friendship. But I don't want it to. Sex can just be about sex, right?"

Harry's face paled dramatically and then turned vividly red as his eyes darted away from her. "Gin..."

"Or, if you wanted more out of it, you should have said something, rather than making me completely neurotic and... and like some kind of crazy woman, running around smelling like bacon. Because it's not just about what I want, Harry. It's about the two of us together, and what we might have if we took a chance on the two of us..." She trailed off, the words sticking in her throat as someone cleared their throat behind her.

"Miss Weasley."

Shit.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

Ginny tried to swallow as much air as she possibly could. She knew that voice.

"Minister." Her throat closed completely around the word, taking all reasonable thought with her.

"Ginny, maybe we'd better go—"

"Percy!" Her eyes flew open wide when Kingsley moved aside to reveal her older brother, gaping at her and redder than she'd ever seen him—even darker than the time she'd walked in on him and

Penelope Clearwater in that abandoned classroom on the third floor, and his hand had been up Penny's skirt.

The urge to burst into tears, no matter how sympathetic Kingsley seemed to be at the moment, was overwhelming. But Ginny hated to cry. So she did the only thing she could think of and ran; out the door and down the hallway, ignoring the Aurors and receptionists who were calling to her, and even ignoring Harry, who she could hear yelling for her to stop.

"Damnit, Ginny!" he said when he finally caught up to her and put his hand on her shoulder, spinning her around. "Will you just wait a minute?"

"Why?!" she demanded, knowing that only holding to her anger would be the only way to avoid breaking down in front of him—something she really didn't want to do. "So I can make an even bigger fool of myself."

"So I can talk to you, for once," he went on. Both of his hands were on her shoulders now, but Ginny couldn't bring herself to look at him. If his face was full of pity, she'd... Well, she didn't know what she'd do, but it wouldn't be pretty.

"I can't talk right now, Harry. I need to go... drown myself or something."

"Did you mean what you said in there?" he demanded. Ginny took a minute to try and figure out what he meant. "About us... about taking a chance on us." She allowed herself one peek at him, only to realize he was so close, all she could really see was his Adam's Apple, bobbing up and down as he swallowed.

"I don't want to ruin what we have, Harry," she shook her head.

He blew out a breath that ruffled the hairs on her forehead and looked down until she met his eyes.

"I'm in love with you, Ginny Weasley."

His words were soft—barely a whisper, actually—but she could tell he meant them. Harry never said anything he didn't mean. But it seemed to take forever for them to hammer inside her brain, and the noise was almost deafening in the silence that reigned.

"You..."

"And I'm sorry that it's taken me so long to realize it."

"You..."

A slow smile stretched across his face and his fingers tightened on her shoulders just a bit. "Bit slow today, are we?"

"I'm wearing two different socks," she proclaimed, not sure where the thought had come from, or why it had leaked out her mouth like that.

"I can live with that," Harry said, chuckling softly as he reached up and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, his fingers brushing her cheek softly.

"I slept in bacon, so... I smell like... bacon." She winced as another random thought popped out. Yeah, drowning was sounding good about right now.

"I like bacon," Harry whispered, leaning down to press his lips against the side of her mouth. "But I love you."

Ginny leaned up and kissed him then, ignoring the sounds of people cheering from far away... down some sort of tunnel, or something.

"How long have you known?" she asked, breaking away and glaring up at him. "Because I've been going insane, worried that if I told you—"

"Told me what?" Harry said, grinning in that infuriating way he had that simply melted her.

"That I'm in love with you, prat," she clarified with a swat to his chest. "But then I was worried that I might have scared you away the other night when we..."

"When we had sex," Harry said.

"Yeah," she said, glancing around, grateful that people seemed to be moving away now. Several of their fellow Aurors were herding onlookers away and erecting privacy shields.

"No," Harry shook his head. "I think I knew when we had sex."

"Oh." Ginny opened her mouth and closed it, not sure what to say to that.

"I'm sorry that it took me so long to figure it out," he said, leaning in again and tenderly kissing her forehead. His hands cradled her head and Ginny's knees shook. "I... I almost came to your flat last night... or I guess it was really this morning."

"You should have come," she protested, winding her hands into his robes and burying her face in them, drinking in the scent of him.

Harry chuckled. "I was close. But then I realized I was only wearing one sock... and two different shoes."

Ginny chuckled into him and rolled her eyes.

"And I think my shirt might have been on inside out," he admitted in a soft voice before lifting her chin. "You wouldn't have wanted to see me like that."

Ginny snorted and kissed him again. "I think I would have forgiven it."

"I decided I was going to tell you today," he said, murmuring against her lips as his continued to press against hers, moving slowly, savoring each movement that she responded to.

"Shit," Ginny said, the scene in their office coming back to her like a Bludger to the head. "I think..." She pulled back, pressing her fingers into her closed eyes. "I think I just got us fired."

Harry's laughter wasn't what she counted on, and she pushed away from him, annoyed that he

would laugh at their predicament.

“We’re not fired.”

“Harry!” Ginny protested, spinning away from his reaching grasp. “I just admitted to our boss that we’ve been shagging. We’ll be lucky if all he does is fire us.”

Harry finally succeeded in pulling her to him again. “Kingsley is not going to fire us. And there are no rules that say we can’t be involved... or even sleeping together.”

Ginny froze, blinking up at him. “There aren’t?”

“No, there aren’t. Don’t worry; I thought there would be too. So... that’s why I asked Kingsley to come in and talk to me about it.”

Ginny’s brain felt as if it were frozen, and the words were taking forever to make any sense to her at all.

“Kingsley knows... about... about us?”

Harry laughed, this time throwing his head back. The sound echoed down the hallway a bit and bounced back to them from the charms. “He does now! I was talking to him about a purely hypothetical situation—although I’m sure he saw completely through me. He said that while the Ministry doesn’t encourage it, they can’t forbid it either. There have even been Auror partners that have been married couples.”

Ginny groaned and buried her face in Harry’s chest again.

“Now Percy, on the other hand...” he laughed again. “I think you might have broken him.”

Ginny swore softly. But there was really nothing for it; as much as she was mortified by her outburst, she wouldn’t take it back now. Because Harry was in love with her. And she was in love with him. Everything else seemed rather out of place except those two facts.

“Think he’ll tell George and Ron?” she asked, the stray thought erupting out of her, as they were wont to do today. Something about Harry made her say, and do, the strangest things.

“It’s a possibility,” Harry mused as he leaned down and kissed her again. “I can’t stop doing that.”

“I think we both need a sick day.”

Harry chuckled at that and tugged her further up into his arms. “I think they’ll buy that.”

* * *

Harry woke to the most amazing sensation. Something wet and warm was moving around his chest. He blearily looked down, watching as Ginny pressed her lips to several places on him, her hands tracing the planes of his stomach, making him suck it in when she reached the sides.

“Ooo, a ticklish spot,” she mused, her lips barely leaving his skin. “I’ll have to remember that.”

“Witch,” Harry mumbled, stretching his legs out on the sofa and wrapping his tingling arm around Ginny’s back.

Next to waking up in his bed, wrapped around Ginny, taking a nap with her on his sofa after snogging for several hours was probably the most amazing thing ever.

“Yes,” Ginny drawled, pulling up so that she was even with his face. Somewhere before they had fallen asleep, Ginny’s shirt had disappeared, and his had been undone.

Grinning, Harry leaned up for a kiss and slid his hand around her back to unhook her bra. It took several tries, sprinkled with giggles and whispered instructions from Ginny, but his fingers finally cooperated and the band loosened.

“Think we can manage on the sofa?” Ginny asked, eying the cushions behind them warily.

“I’m pretty sure we can manage,” Harry mumbled, kissing her throat and down to her chest. Ginny hummed slightly above him when he took a pink nipple into his mouth, marveling at how amazing it could feel. Her hip came up over him and rubbed along his erection, causing Harry to groan in appreciation.

And suddenly it wasn’t enough for them to be like this. He needed to be closer to her—as close as he possibly could.

“Gin,” he moaned, rocking up against her. “I love you.”

She grinned down at him, placing soft kisses all over his face. “You don’t have to say it, you know. You’re going to get lucky anyway.”

Harry chuckled, but then pulled back, serious. “I want to say it.” His fingers tangled in her hair, gently cupping the back of her head. “I want to say it forever.”

“Who would have thought,” Ginny mused, shaking her head slowly. “Harry Potter, a romantic.”

Harry couldn’t help but snort, as he rolled them so that she was now on the edge of the sofa. “Shhh, that’s a secret. Don’t tell anyone.” He growled softly when she giggled and buried his face in her neck, licking and sucking until she was squirming underneath him.

He pulled back and Ginny’s hands caressed both sides of his face. “It’ll be our secret then.”

“I like the idea of us having secrets,” Harry said. His eyes traced every bit of her face, memorizing, once again, things he knew were already there; the three small lines that formed next to her eyes when she smiled widely, the cluster of six freckles right at the tip of her nose, the dimple that formed right above the left side of her smile. He’d always appreciated they were there, but now that he was this close to her, and allowed, he savored every one of them, tucking them away in his mind like treasures. They were Ginny.

“I like having our secrets too,” Ginny said, kissing him. “Although I think I probably ruined a couple of them today.”

"Maybe someone will write an article," Harry smiled, not really caring if they did. He was sure that he would care later, but right now, there was just so much of Ginny to love, and to explore, that his brain was a bit preoccupied.

"They probably will," Ginny said, a hint of annoyance creeping into her voice as her fingernails scratched a hypnotizing pattern on his scalp.

"Don't think about that," he commanded softly.

"We should really—"

"Ginny," he huffed, pressing his finger to her lips. "I'm about to make love to you, could we not worry about what the headlines in the paper might be tomorrow?"

Her face split into a wide smile and her hand fumbled down on the ground, coming up with her wand and pointing it toward the floo. "Probably a good idea."

"A very good idea," Harry agreed, snatching the wand from her and locking the door as well. Ron had a habit of forgetting to knock at times. And Harry didn't need to spend an hour on the paperwork explaining why it had been necessary to memory charm his best mate.

Ginny took the wand out of his hand and kissed him before focusing and performing the contraceptive spell. The wand then dropped out of sight and she turned back to him.

Harry rocked against her several times and Ginny held his sides, rubbing herself on him until he couldn't take it anymore. He moved off of her and quickly worked to divest both of them of their trousers and underwear before he settled behind her.

"Is this okay?" he asked softly into her ear as his hands caressed up and down her body, his lips tasting the skin on her shoulder and neck.

"Mmmmm, yeah," Ginny said, arching back into him and moving so that they were completely spooned together.

"I thought about this yesterday morning," Harry admitted, lifting her leg to rest on top of his as his fingers traced her folds. Ginny shivered next to him and reached back to clutch his hips, rocking her behind into his groin. Her other hand found his above their heads and laced their fingers together.

"I dreamt about it," she agreed softly, her voice breathy and full of need.

Harry's fingers moved swiftly, trying to remember the place that made her...

"Yeah," Ginny said, arching back into him as her fingers dug into his hip, "right there."

That was the spot. His penis ached and Harry lifted his hips against her, feeling the cool fluid leak onto her low back just a bit. But it offered him a bit of relief to press against her.

"So close," she muttered, twisting her fingers around his until he almost couldn't feel them anymore. Harry buried his face in her neck, breathing in her scent as they rocked together.

With a satisfied groan, Ginny climaxed, arching into him. Harry rubbed for a moment more before he reached down between them, trying to guide himself inside her.

The first stroke missed and he slid along the surface, swearing softly.

Ginny chuckled and arched her bottom, giving him a different angle. This time he sank shallowly in. Keeping his hand in place, Harry grunted and pushed his hips forward until he was completely encased in her. It felt amazing; not and pulsing all around him—it felt like home.

“You’re so amazing,” he whispered as they moved slowly together. Unlike the two times before, Harry didn’t feel the overwhelming urgency to finish right now. He wanted to savor being with her, being wrapped around her completely as they moved intimately together.

“Feels so good,” Ginny moaned as she swiveled her hips with his movements. Her breath was coming in small pants and the sound right next to Harry’s ear made him falter in his movements.

Trusting that he would stay inside her, Harry lifted his hand and plucked at her nipple, rolling it between his fingers and smiling when Ginny’s breath caught.

“They’re sensitive,” he mused, cataloguing that fact away. The flesh puckered and hardened against his fingers.

Ginny nodded. “Especially when I’ve just...”

“Hmm,” Harry said, kissing her ear and then her cheek. The urge to move faster was building in him, so he wrapped his arm around her hip, his fingers finding her folds again, searching for the right spot.

Ginny helped him out by adding her own hand and they rocked together, his penis moving perfectly in and out of her, slick sounds of skin sliding against skin filling the air, along with the heady scent of sweat and sex.

“Love you,” Ginny said as she clenched around him again, whimpering. Harry braced one foot on the arm of the sofa and thrust up into her, giving a loud grunt when he released. His legs and lower back tingled as he continued to rock, Ginny’s body accepting all of him.

“Love you so much,” he murmured, whispering the words into the skin at her neck and shoulder.

Their coupling had drained them both of energy, so they stayed there on the couch, still connected. Harry summoned his wand off the table and conjured a blanket for them to cuddle under.

“What are we going to do now?” Ginny asked, trailing her fingers along the hairs on his arm, making him shiver and hold onto her tighter.

“I think another nap sounds about right,” he mused quietly.

Ginny chuckled softly. “I meant... later.”

Harry understood what she was asking, but he honestly didn’t know how things were going to work. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “I guess it’s just something that we need to figure out together.”

Ginny was quiet for a minute before sighing. "I think I can be patient enough for that. Besides, it's kind of an adventure not knowing, yeah?"

Harry snorted out a soft laugh and nuzzled her neck with his face. "Yeah."

"And now I have the right to hex any woman who gets near you," Ginny chuckled.

"As if you didn't before."

"I never hexed anyone!" she protested, rolling toward him and wrapping her arms around his body. "I wanted to, but I never did."

"Perhaps you should just write 'property of Ginny Weasley' all over my bits," Harry chuckled, meeting her lips for a sloppy, involved kiss.

"Mmm, or all over your body," Ginny said, running her hands down his back and squeezing his bum. "I want the whole thing."

Harry grinned and mirrored her movements, causing her to squeak. "Only if I get the same privilege."

Her eyes darkened and she stared at his lips a moment before meeting his gaze. "Always. I'm an equal opportunity kind of witch."

"Good thing," Harry whispered, kissing her again.

* * *

"You seem... extraordinarily happy today," Ron mused as Ginny fiddled with some sort of... something, wrapped in bright paper and sitting on the counter in the shop.

"Can't I be happy?" Ginny defended. She had to admit that she was smiling a lot lately. Then again, she had every reason to smile. It had been almost a week since she and Harry had admitted their feelings to each other—and no one seemed the wiser. Or, at least no one had said anything.

Apparently, after their rather abrupt departure from the Ministry that day, Kingsley had gathered all the MLE staff together and restated the Ministry's policy that private lives were to be kept private—not gossiped about through the hallways and traded from floor to floor.

Ginny knew it was only a matter of time before someone slipped. But that was alright. She and Harry rather expected all the papers to be yelling about the relationship the day after. The silence was blessed, but they both knew it was very short lived.

"Well, yeah, I guess so," Ron shrugged, eying her closely. "You're just not usually this... smiley."

Ginny chuckled. She and Harry had visited the Burrow just last night, telling her parents their secret—or at least that they were dating. The news that they were also sleeping together was probably best left for another time. Much, much later.

Percy had really surprised her by keeping completely silent about the whole thing. She even made it

a point to visit his office the next day, both to apologize, and to inflict a bit of damage control. But before she could get a word out, he held up his hands.

“Ginny, I know the basics of what happened yesterday, but I asked Kingsley to memory charm the worst of it away for me.”

Ginny stared at him, her jaw dropped. “Why?”

“Some things are better left between two people,” he said quietly. “And I really don’t need to dwell on whatever it was that was said. My imagination can fill in the blanks just fine without confirmation.”

She had hugged him then, and whispered a quick ‘thank you’, before teasing him a bit about the new girl he’d started seeing.

She sighed and rolled her eyes at Ron, glancing at her watch and wondering if Harry’s meeting was going to run over. They were supposed to meet Neville and Hannah in a few minutes.

“You can’t think of any reason at all why I might be ‘smiley’,” she asked, showing all of her teeth in an exaggerated grin.

Ron narrowed his eyes at her and then turned as George walked in, carrying a few boxes.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you about the reporter and those Canary Cremes,” Ginny said, before Ron could sidetrack her. “You know, I don’t think the punishment was quite fitting. I mean, it was funny, but...”

“Never underestimate a Weasley,” George said, wagging his eyebrows. “Did you know that after repeated consumption of Canary Cremes, the person tends to begin adopting characteristics of a Canary?”

“Brilliant,” Ginny breathed.

“I hear it’s been quite... festive over at Witch Weekly lately,” George chuckled. “Feathers everywhere and all.”

“What’s different about Ginny?” Ron demanded, inserting himself back into the conversation.

“In general?” George asked, winking at her. “Or just today?”

“I mean, she’s all happy and...”

“Smiley,” Ginny put in, giving her cartoonish grin again.

George chuckled and shook his head. “I can think of several reasons she might be like that.”

All three turned as a rooster crow announced the opening of the front door and Harry walked in.

“Hi, everyone,” he greeted them. Ginny almost giggled at the wide grin that stretched his face. “You ready?” he asked, holding out his hand to her.

Ginny glanced at it before taking a breath and sliding her palm against his. Deciding to make the shock complete, she moved up to kiss him fully. “Ready as I’ll ever be,” she mused, rubbing the tip of her nose on his.

“See you later,” Harry quipped, smirking at a gobsmacked Ron, who had dropped the box of Cremes he was holding, vividly wrapped candies now covering his feet.

“Yeah, that would be a reason I hadn’t considered,” George mumbled.

Just before they ducked out, Ginny glanced back over her shoulder. “I believe you owe me one gift certificate.”

Harry threw back his head and laughed loudly.

“Oh,” Ginny grinned, “and a rubber chicken.”