

Harry Potter

These Small Hours

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Summary: Harry and Ginny look back to appreciate the small moments with their family. A Post-Epilogue moment of growth for the Potter family.

Ginny stood by the window, staring out over the garden, rather than down at the dishes in the sink she should really be washing.

At least the yelling from the living room had died down now. Lily's angry muttering followed by stomping up the stairs and slamming her door had just receded until it only echoed in Ginny's ears, rather than in the air of the house.

Perhaps she shouldn't have let Harry handle the situation, but really, the two had been headed for this for quite some time. It would be better after they both cooled down and remembered that they did actually love each other.

"I'm going out to fly."

Harry's voice was tight when he came through the kitchen, his old Firebolt resting on one shoulder and his mouth pulled into a taut slit that made more wrinkles on his still-handsome face.

Ginny sighed. "It's freezing out there, Harry." His eyes met her and she could see the press of parenthood weighing down on him. Even rebellious James and quiet, pensive Albus hadn't worried Harry like Lily did. But it was a much different sort of worry.

"She doesn't hate you," she whispered, coming over to wrap her arms around her husband. "She's just... fifteen."

Harry sighed deeply and nodded, his free hand rubbing Ginny's back. "I'll be back in a couple of hours."

Ginny bit her lip and pressed a kiss to his cheek, knowing he wasn't capable of saying much more right now. He slumped out of the door, stuffing his hand in his jeans pocket and shivering just a bit at the chill as it began to numb him.

Perhaps it was time for her to have a word with her daughter about tormenting the man she loved. Sometimes it was up to her to make the peace in the family.

That thought was rather ironic as it had been Ginny and her mother who had argued the most in the Weasley family growing up. Being the youngest definitely had its disadvantages; Lily usually had something to say on the subject as well, although James and Al had nothing on Bill, Charlie, Percy, Fred, George *and* Ron.

She took her time making up a tray of tea and Lily's favorite cranberry scones while keeping an eye on the clearing in the back. Harry had circled for nearly thirty minutes before disappearing. Ginny wasn't overly concerned; he was either at Ron's or down at the pub, drowning his my-teenage-daughter-hates-my-guts-blues.

Taking a deep breath, Ginny knocked on the ivory door that was covered with Harpies stickers, and red and gold Gryffindor paraphernalia. Lily was so much like her mother it wasn't funny at times. Perhaps that was the part of her that Harry butted heads with most often. What he loved in his wife

certainly wouldn't be as appealing in his daughter.

"I don't want to talk."

Ginny smirked, remembering answering her own parents through the door with those exact words.

"I have tea."

"I'm not hungry," Lily returned sharply.

Ginny sighed and used her wand to unlock the door. She should really scold Lily for magically locking it, but she knew that wasn't the battle she was prepared to have right now. Another time, perhaps.

"Of course you are," Ginny chided softly, levitating the tray into the room. "You always love my cranberry scones."

Lily looked up from where she was dramatically draped on her ivory bedspread, her red-rimmed eyes showing very little interest in the idea of a snack.

"I'm really not in the mood for this, Mum."

Ginny chose a seat on the end of the bed, rather than the chair across the room, and settled the tea service between her and her daughter.

"I don't know about you, but I'm always in the mood for scones with clotted cream and preserves—which is possibly why I can't seem to fit into my old jeans anymore." She sighed looking down at the body that bearing three children had forever deformed.

Really, she shouldn't complain that she wasn't as perfect and trim as she was when she and Harry had been married. Time and love had molded her into a much different woman than she had been back then. And if a few pounds and stretch marks were her badges of honor, she'd gladly wear them. Harry certainly wasn't complaining.

Lily didn't say anything, but scooted across the bed, folding her legs beneath her and accepting the small plate that Ginny held out.

"He's an ogre sometimes."

Ginny didn't have to ask who Lily was talking about, but she did have to chew her bite carefully to keep from choking on it.

"You don't really mean that."

"Maybe I do," Lily sulked as she licked cream off of her finger. "He's just so..."

"Protective," Ginny nodded. "I'm afraid that particular trait is never really going to go away."

"But he doesn't need to be," Lily shook her head, setting her partially eaten plate down on her knees. "It's not like Roary was doing anything wrong. *I* kissed *him*! And Daddy had to go off on him. He doesn't realize how he's ruined my life."

“Try not to be quite so dramatic, dear,” Ginny scolded softly. “Your father didn’t *mean* to ruin your life.”

“But he did,” Lily pouted. “I’ll be surprised if Roary Finnegan ever speaks to me again.”

Ginny sighed and tried to think of the best way to approach the situation. Harry had definitely overreacted to finding his daughter on the train with her face stuck to a boy who happened to be the spitting image of his father. And he probably shouldn’t have pulled his wand and threatened to hex the boy’s bits if he didn’t ‘keep them in his pants’. But... then again...

“Roary will speak to you again,” Ginny nodded. “And if he doesn’t, then he isn’t worth the tears he inspired, is he?”

Lily gave her a very doubtful look but didn’t say anything.

“By the time you get back after break, you’ll realize that you and your father both overreacted and things will be all better. You don’t realize how alike the two of you are.”

“Dad and I are nothing alike,” Lily denied.

Ginny shook her head at how stubborn her daughter could be and nearly pointed out the similarity in the way their jaws set when they were angry, but that probably wouldn’t win points right now.

“He has no clue what it’s like to be young and in love,” Lily denied.

Teenage drama. Ginny very nearly laughed at the idea that Lily was in love with Roary Finnegan. Although, perhaps she really couldn’t judge the situation. Many people had assumed Ginny’s feelings for Harry at age fifteen and sixteen had simply been a passing crush.

“Your father knows more about love than most people,” Ginny corrected her daughter quietly. She sipped from her cup of tea and wondered how much she should really divulge to her daughter. She and Harry, right from the beginning, had tried very hard to shelter their children from the past, while not lying to them. There were some things that children just really didn’t need to know.

“How could he?” Lily went on, her pretty face screwed up slightly. “You and he have been in love... forever. Since you were both little. Uncle Ron told us all about it. Daddy never had to worry about other girls or his reputation. He was always famous.”

“Part of that is true,” Ginny conceded. “Your father was always famous. But that can be a double-edged sword, you know.”

“What do you mean?” Lily asked.

“You know as well as I do how your father doesn’t enjoy being in the spotlight.” Lily nodded at her mother’s words. “Harry was painfully shy when he was younger,” Ginny continued, memories of a very skinny, short, little waif of a boy standing on Platform 9 3/4’s flooded into her mind.

“And then he came into the Wizarding World, where everyone expected him to be this... hero.”

“And he was,” Lily said, confusion filling her voice. “Wasn’t he?”

“Oh yes,” Ginny nodded. “He was... simply amazing. It’s no wonder I was smitten with him from the very beginning. Poor boy didn’t know what hit him. But he was so... polite and wonderful. Imagine James at age twelve, having a younger girl stammering all over him and sticking her elbow in the butter dish.”

Lily’s eyes went wide and she gasped. “You didn’t!”

“Guilty,” Ginny admitted with a chuckle. “Your father later admitted that he thought it was very cute. But at the time I was mortified.”

“Urgh,” Lily grunted sympathetically.

“And then he rescued me,” Ginny sighed. “Which only stamped the poor boy even further into my heart.”

“Did Daddy fall in love with you right away?”

Ginny laughed outright at the statement and shook her head. “Surely Uncle Ron, or Uncle George, has told you this story.”

“I don’t think so,” Lily said, shaking her head. “They always tease Dad about witches thinking he’s cute, or whatever, but... they’re just taking the mickey. Aren’t they?”

Ginny raised her eyebrow at her daughter, wondering just how sheltered she and Harry had been able to make their children. She found it a bit sad that Lily didn’t even know the story of how she and Harry had fallen in love.

“Your father and I had a... rocky start, I guess you could say. Well, you know about the part he had to play in the war.”

Lily nodded. They’d been as honest as they could with the children, leaving out the worst details, of course.

“I had that horrid crush on him,” Ginny said, shaking her head in fond remembrance of it. “And after he saved me, he just sort of... drifted away, I guess you could say. You know how young boys are. They’re not at all interested in girls at that age.”

Lily smirked softly and began to pick at her scone, tearing small bites off and swirling them in the cream before chewing on them daintily.

“And I certainly wasn’t the first girl to turn his head, although your father will deny that if you ask him now.”

“Daddy... there was someone else?” Lily appeared shocked, as if everything she believed in the world just wasn’t so and Ginny could hardly blame her. The idea that Harry and Ginny Potter hadn’t always been completely in love was foreign to her as well, after all these years.

“For us both,” Ginny acknowledged, reaching over to smooth her daughter’s auburn hair. “Not exactly the fairy tale you imagined, is it?”

"It's not that," Lily protested. "I guess I just never really thought about Daddy seeing another girl... or *you* with anyone else."

"Don't get me wrong," Ginny went on. "Your father always had my heart. But..." she trailed off, staring up at the ceiling for a minute while she collected her thoughts and decided on the right way to say things.

"Let me go about this in order," she said finally. "Your father was a fairly typical thirteen year old boy the year after he rescued me. He probably noticed me more than I thought he did, but... he was still thirteen. And thirteen year old boys aren't concerned with girls chasing after them. They're much more focused on Quidditch and pranks and... boy things."

"I remember," Lily scrunched up her nose. Ginny wasn't sure if she was thinking of the boys at Hogwarts, or her own brothers.

"But fourteen year old boys, however, are another matter. And there was one particular girl who captured your father's attention."

Lily set her scone aside and pulled her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms around them. "Was she... pretty?"

"Yes," Ginny admitted grudgingly. "And not a bad Quidditch player... although she had nothing on me."

Her daughter smiled softly and chewed on her lip thoughtfully. "Did they... date?"

"Not so much," Ginny shook her head. "She was actually seeing Cedric Diggory."

"The Triwizard Champion?" Lily asked in shock. "But..."

"He died at the end of that year, yes," Ginny confirmed. She levitated the tea set out of the way and snuggled in beside her daughter, absently noting that Lily was almost the same size she was.

None of the Potter children had hopes of being overly tall, but Ginny was always surprised when they passed her. Al, at almost seventeen, was the same height as his father. And James was easily a few inches taller; perhaps having gotten some of his height from Bill or Ron, through her.

"But during your father's fourth year, he had quite the crush on Cho Chang," Ginny explained. "The next year... well, they ended up together for a bit."

"Wasn't that a bit... weird, for Dad, I mean? Her boyfriend had just died."

Ginny wanted to laugh, but she held it in. "I imagine it was. But... fifteen year old boys don't always think straight, do they?"

Lily shook her head slowly. Ginny could practically see the wheels turning in her head, trying to fit this new information into the puzzle that was her life, turning each piece this way and that, trying to make it work with who she saw herself as being.

"And I got tired of waiting for your father to notice me," Ginny said. "So I decided to get on with

my life.”

“Boys can be thick sometimes,” Lily said wisely and Ginny laughed.

“Yes, they can. I dated several boys before your father finally understood what was going on in his head. Nothing very serious, mind you,” Ginny clarified, “because I always felt that there was something more there with Harry.”

“I remember where your first kiss was,” Lily said softly. “Daddy told me all about that.”

Ginny nodded, smiling at the memory. “I knew you had to know *some* of this story.”

“I guess I did,” Lily shrugged. “But... there’s more, isn’t there? I mean, you didn’t just kiss and... fall in love.”

“Not at all,” Ginny shook her head. “I’m not sure when your father knew that he loved me, you’ll have to ask him that. But, for me, it was when he broke up with me.”

Lily gaped at her. “You... you knew you were in love with him *when you broke up!*”

Ginny smiled serenely at her daughter’s apoplectic face. “Yes.”

“When did *that* happen?”

“After Professor Dumbledore’s funeral,” Ginny calmly explained. “Your father was so... strong and determined then. He knew exactly what he needed to do and... and I knew that I couldn’t go with him. I have a pretty good idea that he was already in love with me then, but I don’t think he realized.”

“I knew you were apart that year,” Lily shook her head, once again searching for reason. “But I guess I just assumed—”

“That we were still *together*,” Ginny nodded, understanding. “I guess in a way we were. But I didn’t speak to your father for almost a year, didn’t see him at all. I *did* kiss him on his seventeenth birthday and we talked for a minute. But the next day... he was gone. Or maybe it was the next minute—my old mind forgets things like that. Details just kind of... fade away.”

“You’re not *that* old, Mum,” Lily protested, bumping her shoulder into her mother’s.

“Come on downstairs and help me get dinner started with your old mum,” Ginny said, scooting toward the end of the bed.

“Only if you continue with the story,” Lily stated plainly as she followed.

Ginny chuckled and nodded. “I will. But Al will be home soon, and you know how he is...”

“Always hungry,” Lily nodded. “You should see him at school, always stuffing his face. I can’t figure out how he stays so thin.”

“It’s in the blood,” Ginny shrugged. “Ron only started to gain weight the last few years.”

"And Dad has always been thin," Lily mused as they entered the kitchen.

"You should have seen him years ago," Ginny chuckled. "When he was such a skinny thing. All hair and glasses, he was."

"But you still loved him."

Ginny nodded happily and sighed. "I did, Merlin help me."

"Was it hard to be apart those months?" Lily asked as she followed Ginny's direction and began chopping vegetables to go with the chicken Ginny was flouring and beginning to brown.

"It was," Ginny conceded, "but then again... not. I was terrified for your father, out there on the run. But there was so much to do back at the castle."

"Uncle Neville has told us a bit about those days," Lily shrugged. "And I remember bits and pieces from what you've said. But... I know you're not telling us everything."

"No," Ginny admitted, focusing on the food in front of her, rather than let her daughter see the tight grip on her emotions that she still had to use after all these years. "And I'm not sure any of us can still talk about those days."

"Daddy knows about them?" Lily asked in a small voice. Her knife had stilled and Ginny glanced over, seeing the concern on her daughter's face.

"He does," Ginny confirmed, swallowing back emotion. "It took me a while afterwards to be comfortable telling *anyone* much of anything. But... yes, I told your father."

Lily thought about that for a minute before nodding. Ginny was relieved that she didn't ask details. It wasn't as if Ginny had survived horrific crimes or anything-well, despite the use of the Cruciatus-or if she'd even suffered as much as Harry had. At least she'd been warm and fed, and not hunted like an animal. But for some reason, it seemed like a burden that Ginny and the other survivors needed to carry alone-or to only share with someone extremely close to them.

"Roary's dad was there," Lily admitted softly. Her tone had a sort of hollow sound to it and Ginny narrowed her eyes, wondering how much Seamus had told his children. "He... he won't tell Roary much. But we're not stupid, Mum, we can guess at what happened. There were Death Eaters running the school, for Merlin's sake."

"That's true," Ginny conceded, smiling sadly at her daughter, who seemed double her years tonight. Maybe they had all underestimated their children's coping ability and had hidden them unnecessarily from the truth all these years.

"Were you there?" Lily asked. "When Dad killed..."

"He didn't *kill* Voldemort," Ginny replied heatedly and then winced at her own tone. "I'm sorry. Yes. I was there. I was only a few feet away from your father."

"That whole day is still a bit of a blur, although there are parts that I remember as if it happened

minutes ago,” Ginny sighed. She absently turned the chicken in the pan, wincing as a splash of grease landed on her hand.

“Seeing your father again after those months,” she trailed off, the emotion thick once more in her throat. “It was like taking a deep breath of air after being underwater for so long. And he looked so... so much older. I remember wondering if I’d changed as much as he had.

“We lost each other in the fighting. There was just so much going on,” Ginny dismissed with a shake of her head. “And then Hagrid carried his body out of that forest. And I knew...”

Lily waited, looking up at her mother. “Knew what?” she finally asked.

“I knew that I’d lost the only man I could ever love,” Ginny said, smiling through her tears. “Of course, it turned out that he was alive.”

“He was only pretending,” Lily nodded, having heard this part before. “What about... after? After everything was over did Dad find you right away?”

Ginny used the edge of her apron to wipe away tears and added the vegetables to the pan before pouring the sauce over it all and using her wand to turn the heat down.

“Not right away,” Ginny shook her head. “We were all still reeling after... after Fred.”

“Uncle Fred,” Lily mused quietly. Ginny felt a pang of sadness that her daughter had only gotten to know him through stories and old photographs. She’d never seen the real Weasley twins in action—which was a shame.

“And your father... he was just so... so worn out. I found him later, in Gryffindor tower.” Ginny felt her cheeks heat as she remembered climbing into bed with Harry, both of them filthy and exhausted. It had been relatively innocent, but they’d both taken comfort from simply being there together. However, that moment wasn’t for sharing with anyone else.

“And did he kiss you right away?” Lily asked, a dreamy smile coming over her face.

“The next day,” Ginny affirmed. “After we—well, after your father woke up, we talked a bit. And we just sort of... picked up where we left off. Some people thought it was strange...”

“Not me,” Lily shook her head. “It’s almost as if... as if you didn’t really break up at all, but just... put things on hold, because you *couldn’t* be together.”

“That’s it exactly,” Ginny nodded, grateful that their daughter understood. So many people back then had been so silly about the whole thing. Not that it really mattered; the people who really loved them had naturally understood that it was just the way things were.

“The next year was almost as hard, but for different reasons,” Ginny explained, remembering the stolen kisses during Hogsmeade visits and the endless hours of writing letters when what you really needed to do was reach out and touch the person you wanted most, simply to prove that you weren’t dreaming and that they were real. “Your father was off training to be an Auror and helping at the Ministry.”

"And you were stuck at Hogwarts," Lily nodded in commiseration.

"Not *stuck* so much," Ginny shook her head. "I *chose* to go back, even though it tore my heart out to leave your father. But we both had things that needed to be done. And the letters... I have stacks and stacks of letters that we exchanged during that time."

"Can I... can I read them?" Lily asked.

Ginny thought about that for a few minutes before sighing. "They're pretty personal, Lil."

"Oh," Lily looked a bit sad, yet her cheeks flushed brightly after a moment. She was probably realizing what 'personal' might mean for two people in love.

"Maybe one day," Ginny promised. "The rest, I think you can guess at. We got married the next year and had James several years later... with Al and you following."

Lily nodded absently, staring off out the window. "Do you think it will be like that with Roary and me?"

"I don't know," Ginny sighed, sitting down next to her daughter and wrapping an arm around her shoulders. The idea of her daughter really thinking about a future that way was... Well, Ginny certainly understood Harry's overreaction. Her chest was tight just thinking about it. "I certainly don't want something as tragic as all of that for you."

"But it makes a nice story," Lily offered with a lopsided smile—the same smile that Harry gave Ginny often.

"It does make a lovely story," Ginny agreed.

"You should write it all down," Lily suggested. "Years from now, maybe in some other country, people will want to read your story."

Ginny scoffed at the idea. "No one's life is *that* boring, love. No, I'm afraid that our love story is just that—ours."

Lily was quiet for a minute and Ginny glanced up at the clock, knowing that the three hands that were pointed at various locations would soon swing back toward 'home'.

"Why do you think Daddy hates Roary, Mum?"

Ginny sighed, feeling as if they'd finally come full circle in their conversation.

"Sweetheart, your father doesn't even know Roary, so he can't hate him. But..."

"I've never seen him like that," Lily said, her face paling as she remembered the scene. Ginny had only come along to see what was taking Harry and Lily so long in getting her trunk, to find Harry scaring the life out of Lily's boyfriend. "I mean, I know Dad's this big Auror and all—"

"Head of the Department," Ginny corrected proudly.

“But... to us he’s always been just... Dad.”

Ginny nodded her understanding. “And he’s worked hard to keep that side of himself separate from you kids.”

Lily looked as if she were going to ask something, but then changed her mind.

“He told me that I’m too young to be involved with boys,” Lily said, much less whining to her voice than had been there just earlier today when she had come crying to Ginny about the injustice of it all. “That... that I should be focused on school and not wasting my time. That boys only want one thing from a girl.”

Ginny scowled, wishing that Harry hadn’t fallen into the same trap that many fathers did, and even her own brothers had on occasion. She smoothed Lily’s hair down again and nodded.

“You understand that your father was very emotional about this whole thing?” Lily nodded, even though it looked like she wanted to protest. “And you know that when people are emotional, they don’t always say the most rational things.”

Lily’s face heated and she nodded, looking down at her hands. Ginny hoped she regretted her screaming proclamation that she hated her father and would never forgive him.

“It also doesn’t help that Roary is the son of Seamus Finnegan,” Ginny added with a smirk. “Seamus and your father shared a dorm for six years, Lily, and Seamus wasn’t... he didn’t have the best reputation, you have to understand.”

“You mean he...” Lily flushed thinking of it.

“I don’t know how much is true,” Ginny protested, “but I have no doubt that the moment Roary looked up at your father, Harry was only seeing Seamus in him.”

“That’s not very fair,” Lily said, but it was with a resigned sigh.

“Dads don’t have to be fair,” Ginny laughed. “I think it’s in the rules somewhere.”

Lily rolled her eyes, but the corner of her mouth quirked up a bit.

“Your father simply wants what’s best for you, Lily,” Ginny explained, rubbing Lily’s arm softly. “He may not always act rationally, or do what you want him to do... but he always acts out of love for you.”

“I know that,” Lily said softly.

“He wants you to find someone that you can really, truly love as much as he and I love each other.”

“I’m not sure that can happen,” Lily said skeptically. “I mean... I thought your story was amazing before. But now...”

“What your father and I have is anything but typical, you do know?” Ginny cautioned. “I mean, really, who meets the person they’re going to fall in love with and marry when they’re eleven?”

“Several people,” Lily chuckled and Ginny joined her, realizing she was right. It had worked out that way in several cases in the family. But not all.

“Lily, your father wants you to be happy, above all. But it’s hard for him to let go when he sees you moving on with your life. And, fair or not, he’ll always see the little girl who used to wrap around his leg when he got home from work. It’s hard for him not to be the most important man in your life.”

“Dad will always be important to me.”

“Yes,” Ginny agreed. “But he was the first man in your life. And it’s hard to accept that it won’t always be like that. Your grandfather was like that, a bit, with me when Harry and I got married.”

Lily glanced up, curious. “Grandpa loved Daddy, didn’t he?”

“He did... still does,” Ginny said. “Sometimes I wonder if my family doesn’t love him more than me.”

“Mum,” Lily groaned at the old joke that seemed to be a Potter family tradition to bring up.

The sounds of voices on the back porch stilled both women and they turned as Al and Harry came in the back door, looking so much alike that it nearly took Ginny’s breath away.

Harry’s eyes darted to his daughter, even as he placed a kiss on Ginny’s cheek. He smelled like fresh air and crisp cold, not the stale pub smell that she’d expected.

“James is going to be late, Mum,” Al called after rustling Lily’s hair and then ducking out of her arm’s reach. “I ran into him in Diagon Alley and he said that Uncle Bill wanted him to go out to Shell Cottage. He asked me to tell you not to hold dinner.”

Ginny nodded and noted the way that Harry’s jaw locked at the mention of James. Both Harry and Ginny had reservations about James’ career choice to follow in his Uncle Bill’s footsteps and become a Curse Breaker. It was only a matter of time before James would be off, running all over the globe. But they were still proud of him.

“Go and wash up,” Ginny prodded the children, keeping a hold of Harry’s hand so that he knew she wasn’t talking to him.

Al slung an arm over his sister’s shoulder and guided her out of the room, although Lily didn’t protest.

“I’m assuming it’s actually safe for me to be home now,” Harry mused as he wrapped his arms around Ginny’s waist and buried his cold face against her warm neck.

“I told you before that she doesn’t hate you.”

“I know,” Harry replied in a mumble.

“But the two of you do need to talk. Harry, she’s just... fifteen. We only have a few years left until she and Al are gone completely.”

"I hate thinking about it," Harry admitted. "That's why..."

"I know," Ginny said, smoothing down his thick hair, which was just now showing the beginnings of a few gray strands in it. "But..."

"Does it have to be a Finnegan?" Harry whined, making Ginny smile.

"He's *her* choice, Harry. Even if it's only for a quick snog now and again, or if they end up getting married later on in life."

"I know."

And she knew he really did know. It was just the idea that time was marching on, and taking their children with it, that he was fighting. Although if Roary Finnegan was anything like his father... Ginny might just have to have her *own* talk with the boy.

"She's a good girl, Harry," Ginny informed him. "It's futile to tell you not to worry about her, because then I'd be a hypocrite. But, we've done well in raising them all."

Harry pulled back and kissed her lightly. "That's mostly due to you."

"No," Ginny protested softly. "The credit goes to both of us. We worked hard to give them 'normal'."

Harry nodded thoughtfully before leaning down and brushing his cold nose against hers. "Yes, we did." They kissed again and Harry moved so that Ginny was pressed against the counter.

They didn't get far, however, before Al and Lily came back into the room, groaning and complaining at walking in on them. Again.

Ginny rolled her eyes and ran a hand through her hair as Harry chuckled and scolded the kids to help with dinner. Al came over and pulled his wand, intent on levitating the dishes over to the table, but Ginny stopped him.

"You're not seventeen yet."

"Mum!" Al moaned and tucked his wand away. "You never got on James like this... or even Teddy."

Ginny's jaw dropped at the untrue comment. She'd been very careful to treat all of her children, even Teddy who wasn't really theirs, as fairly as she could. But Al's knowing smirk caught her and she simply swiped the dish towel in her hand at his head for trying to rile her up.

Across the kitchen, Harry had approached Lily as they both place silverware on the table.

"I... I'm sorry about what I said earlier," Harry mumbled, focusing on straightening the setting with Hermione-like precision.

"I didn't mean what I said either," Lily admitted, glancing up through her lashes at her father. "About... about hating you. I don't."

“Good,” Harry said, his mouth quirking into a smile. “And... maybe... maybe we can have Roary—is that his name?”

Lily nodded, her eyes brightening with hope and darting over to her mother.

“Maybe we can have Roary over this break,” Harry stammered out. Ginny was extremely proud of him right now and mentally promised to reward him later. It couldn’t be easy for him to admit that he’d been wrong, let alone that he was willing to let the boy into his home.

“I’ll write him tonight,” Lily said, launching forward to wrap her arms around Harry’s neck, making him nearly choke in her enthusiasm.

They pulled back and Ginny’s eyes filled with tears at the tender look on Harry’s face.

She’d seen it quite a few times over the years, but the first time stood out so clearly to her that it seemed like just yesterday.

The house was dark, but the absent sounds of the baby fussing woke Ginny. It should be about time to feed her again. Harry’s side of the bed was empty and cold, surprising her. Harry rarely woke when the babies cried at night, having worked hard during the day providing for their little family.

Ginny pulled on her dressing gown, slid her feet into well-worn carpet slippers and made her way down to the living room, following the soft light that a glowing fire created.

Harry was sitting on the sofa, baby Lily cradled in his arms. The two were staring at each other, seemingly memorizing each feature of the other’s face.

“Having a girl scares me.”

Harry’s soft voice startled Ginny and she supposed that he’d heard the boards on the stairs creak.

“Why is that?” Ginny asked, curling up next to him and smiling when Lily caught sight of her and began to squirm and whine. Harry handed the baby over and watched with rapt attention as Ginny slid her gown open and let the baby latch on to nurse.

“Because I’m afraid she’ll be just like you,” Harry admitted, his finger brushing over Lily’s cheek softly, and then brushing the edge of Ginny’s breast. “And someday, someone out there is going to fall in love with her, just like I did with you.”

Ginny lay her head back along the sofa and regarded him with amusement and love as he studied them both.

“That’s a good thing, Harry,” she said softly. “Because then she’ll have everything she’ll ever need.” Her hand fumbled for his and wound them together. “No need to be scared that she’ll be loved.”

Harry nodded softly. “I just wish...”

Ginny made a guess about what he was thinking. “She can’t stay this little forever, Harry.”

"I know," he sighed. "I'm always going to love her, though."

"And she'll love you too," Ginny affirmed. "The most we can do is enjoy these moments, Harry. And tell her every day how much we love her. And then teach her how to love someone else in return."

Ginny's eyes caught Harry's over their daughter's shoulder and she wondered if he was thinking of the same moment in time. Those little moments that never lasted long enough.