

Letter to Ginny

by jmlane57

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Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 6

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A/N: This story is based on my earlier vignette, "Letter to Ginny."

DISCLAIMER: Everything belongs to JK Rowling and company except my imagination and this story.

ONE POIGNANT GOODBYE

Seventeen-year-old Harry Potter had never found anything as difficult to do as he did leaving Ginny. Around nine p.m. the previous night, the eve of his departure, he had come to her room and hesitatingly asked her if she would be willing to make love with him, if only to give them both a beautiful memory to cherish in the event something happened to him and they never saw each other again. Part of him was hoping she'd say no, another part was praying she would say yes ... and the latter part won out. At the time he hadn't considered the possibility of her becoming pregnant; all that mattered was being able to love her one last time.

When it was over and she was sleeping in his arms, he knew it had been the most heavenly thing he had ever experienced. He would never forget it as long as he lived ... for however long he lived. But time was running short. He, Ron and Hermione would be leaving soon, but he couldn't leave Ginny without some explanation, so he decided to write her a letter. There was so much he wanted to say, but unfortunately there were just no words; all he could do was write what was in his heart and hope she understood.

He conjured up some parchment and a self-inking quill, then began.

My dearest, most beloved Ginny ...

This is the hardest thing I've ever had to write, but I must. I am going with Ron and Hermione to fight Voldemort and search for the Horcruxes. I have no idea how long it will take, or even if we will all come back alive. At the moment, all that matters to me is being able to tell you what is in my heart.

Despite our breakup, I have never stopped loving you. I never will. Nor will I ever forget you or all that we've shared. Gin, you have given me many beautiful memories; I will cherish them. You will always be on my mind and forever in my heart. I wouldn't blame you if you don't believe these things, but they are true; I could not say them otherwise. Whatever my other faults, I could never lie to you or mislead you.

More than anything I wanted us to be together, have you fight by my side, but I don't want Voldemort and his ilk coming after you, and that would surely happen if we stayed together. I must find him, Gin, just as I must find the Horcruxes, or nothing in the Wizarding world can ever be safe again ... least of all you ... and that is what is of the utmost concern to me.

I didn't want Ron and Hermione coming with me either, but finally realized that I will need their help. Just the same, considering their involvement, which mirrors our own, it will be a classic case of three's a crowd ... and when it happens, that is when I'll miss you most of all...your gentle touch, your sweet kisses, your smile, the feel of your arms around me, the smell of your perfume, the beat of your heart and the warmth of your body against mine.

Gods, I wish I didn't have to do this, didn't have to leave you! I don't know how I'm going to stand it. The only things I'm taking are a recent picture of us together in Hogsmeade this past Valentine's Day ... you looked especially lovely that day ... and a handkerchief with your perfume in it. And considering all I'm feeling right now, I wouldn't be surprised if I got plenty of use out of it, if you know what I mean.

I watched you sleep for a long time before leaving. You're so beautiful, Gin. So very beautiful. I love you so much. How I wish I didn't have to leave you behind. Please take care of yourself for me. I pray that I'll be able to come back from all this in one piece, but in this uncertain time, I cannot guarantee anything. If at all possible, I will come back to you. Until and if that day comes, we must go on, endure as best we can.

I'd better close soon; Ron's getting impatient, and you know how he is when he gets like that. Just one last time I want to say it, though ... I love you. Please don't forget me, Gin, and please forgive me for leaving you. It's tearing my heart in two, but I've got to go. Pray for me, my love, but most of all, pray that fate will bring me back to you alive and allow our love to endure.

All my love,

Now and forever,

Your Harry

None of those concerned had any way of knowing that ten years would pass before they saw each other again ... and what's worse, how drastically events which occurred during that decade would change them.

TWO THE DAY AFTER

It was ten in the morning and the sun was flooding into the open window of Ginevra Molly Weasley's bedroom when she awakened, stretching languorously, remembering the tenderly passionate night with Harry even as she spotted her nightdress crumpled on the floor. Her body was deliciously sore in all the right places, yet at the same time, she knew she wouldn't have minded doing it all over again. Which reminded her ...

"Harry?" she called. No answer. She turned her head; the bed was empty save for herself, although it was obvious that he had been there. The distinctive smell of the soap and shampoo he used was there in the extra pillow she had gotten out for him when she put it to her nose and breathed in ... but he was gone. What had happened to him? She turned her head to the right and that was when she spotted the letter from him, propped on her bedside candlestick.

That was when it all registered. He must have left with Ron and Hermione to go after Voldemort and the Horcruxes! Ginny sat bolt upright in bed, uncaring that she was still naked; all that mattered was reading the letter and finding out if her hunch was right. She opened it and began to read, hearing Harry's sweet voice in her mind as she did so, hearing it as clearly as if he were there with her.

She read it several times before everything registered, but when it did, the realization was devastating ... and the further she read, the faster and heavier the tears flowed. Several times she'd had to stop because she could no longer see to read. There was both love and regret in the letter, especially regret for all the pain he knew his departure would cause her, but at the same time, a very final-sounding farewell in spite of his entreaty that she pray for his safe return, for the chance to start their love anew.

He was gone. He had left her behind even though he knew how much she wanted to accompany him! Never mind that he had said how much it hurt him to have to do it; how could he possibly leave her after all they had shared last night?

She put her fingers to her lips lips he had kissed so sweetly, so many times. Then she cupped her breasts ... breasts he had kissed and caressed every bit as sweetly as he had kissed her lips. She traced the outline of her body, recalling how his hands had gently but intimately explored every inch of her; then his lips had followed. Lastly, she touched herself between her legs, vividly recalling how it had felt to feel him there, feel his body possess hers with scarcely any pain at all, even though she had been a virgin before their night together. And he had not been small ...

She had not regretted a moment of it, nothing could ever make her do that ... it had been heavenly, literally a dream come true, but at the same time, she couldn't help feeling used. Harry had only made love to her because he was leaving and had no idea when or if he would ever see her again. Not that she doubted that Harry did have feelings for her very deep feelings indeed but they had broken up at Dumbledore's funeral, only three days before his departure. Bill and Fleur's joyous wedding two days later seemed to mock her grief, rub salt on the torn, bleeding wound which had once been her heart.

He had supposedly done it to protect her, or so he'd said, but it was just as likely that Voldemort an accomplished Legilimens would read his mind, see the memory of her and Harry's time together and come after her anyway. What had been the point of their breakup, much less leaving her behind, if she was going to end up the Dark Lord's prisoner anyway? How was that supposed to protect her?

She had tried to be unselfish about it, Merlin knew, tried not to make him feel any worse than he already did, but all the while, her heart was breaking and tears brimmed, threatening to overflow. All she could do was stare at his beloved face, hurting too much to speak. This was surely the worst day of her life! "Gin, please don't look at me like that," he had entreated, sounding as if he was also fighting off tears. "I feel bad enough already. Don't make it worse."

She had forced herself to turn away, not daring to speak, then get up and walk off, leaving him behind ... but at the same time, leaving a piece of her heart behind. Now that she was away from him, she could allow herself to cry ... but somehow the tears would not come. It seemed as if she hurt too much to even cry! Even now she could recall the poignant memory of the first time they had kissed ... the way Harry had pulled her close, the gentle strength of his arms, the sweetness of his lips. For those few moments in time, she had been in Heaven and didn't care if she ever came back to earth. Then last night ... the tenderness, yet the passion in his beautiful green eyes as he had unbuttoned her nightdress and slid it from her body.

"Gin ... you're beautiful. So very beautiful. I've wanted this for so long ..." Then he had carried her to bed, gently lowering her to the pillow as her legs seemed to part of their own accord to accommodate him.

All she could do was cradle his sweet face in her hands and kiss him with every ounce of love and desire she possessed. "Love me, Harry ... love me as if there were no tomorrow, no Horcruxes, no Voldemort to fight ... only us, only our love ..." And he had.

The last thing she remembered him saying before she fell asleep was, "Thank you for loving me, Gin. Thank you for the beautiful memories you have given me. If I survive this war, it will be because of you." It had been wonderful while it lasted, but now he was gone ... and only Merlin knew if she would ever see him again.

She clutched the letter to her breast as if it were the most precious treasure in the universe (and to her, it was ... possibly the only tangible evidence left that someone named Harry Potter had ever existed in the world much less that he had loved her, belonged to her for one bittersweet moment in time).

She had no idea she had begun to cry again, but she obviously had because she heard a soft knock on her door and her mother's voice. "Ginny, are you all right? Darling,

why are you crying?"

She was unable to speak as her mother approached her bed; Molly's eyes widened as she noted the nightgown on the floor and her daughter's tear-stained face, which registered before the fact of her nakedness did, not to mention the letter she was holding out to her. What could it all mean? She sat down beside Ginny on the bed as the young girl sat up, cross-legged, covering herself as best she could with a rumpled sheet ... a sheet that still smelled of her beloved.

"I know, darling. Harry's gone. He left with Ron and Hermione two hours ago."

"Mummy ..." Ginny sobbed, reverting to her childhood name for her mother. "Don't you wonder why I'm ... naked?"

Molly's eyes widened. "You mean, you and Harry ...?"

"Yes, Mummy. He came to me last night ... and we made love. He said he wanted a beautiful memory to sustain him through the war to come. Mummy, you know how I ... love him. You must understand why I could not ... refuse him. I had to know what it was like to be physically loved by him, if only for one night."

"But, Ginny darling ... you've broken up with him. And what's more, you're a ..."

"Not any more, Mummy ... and you want to know something? I'm glad I'm not one any more. I would far rather have just this one night, being loved by the one boy I love most in all the world than a ... lifetime with anyone else!"

"I can understand, darling, believe me, I can ... but what if you're pregnant? What will you do then?"

"I'll deal with it, Mummy." Ginny's voice was uncharacteristically hard. "And don't tell anyone what's happened. It's ... none of their business. If it turns out that I'm ... pregnant, I'll need you to help me keep Harry's baby. Don't let Daddy or any of my brothers ... stop me."

"Never, darling. We ... women will stick together," Molly assured her youngest child and only daughter, pulling her into her arms and holding her tightly. However, she couldn't be sure how long she would be able to keep her promise. If Ginny was pregnant, it was only a matter of time before it would show and she would be forced to reveal her secret. Her heart ached for both her child and the boy she loved, whose streak of nobility had forced him to break both his own heart and that of the girl he loved in order to fulfill the prophecy made so long ago.

Harry was such an incredible young man; how could they ever have been so blessed as to be associated with him...or Ginny, to actually have been loved by him, if only for a bittersweet moment in time? "Oh, Mummy ... how will I ever live without him? How can I ... possibly forget him?"

"Don't even try, darling. That usually just reinforces the memory. Just try to fill your life with other things, keep as busy as possible, so you don't think about it ... or him ... so much."

"How can I, Mummy? Harry is everywhere I look ... literally in my blood ... a part of me, now and for all time."

"You must try," Molly entreated. "I'll ... do all I can to help you, darling. But you must do your part as well, or else it's not going to work."

"What are we going to do now, Mummy?" Ginny asked once she had composed herself.

"I'll use a Pregnancy Detection Spell on you, and that will tell us if you're pregnant. Then we can go from there." Molly pulled out her wand and touched the spot just over the place in her daughter's body where a baby would grow.

Once she had done that, the telltale blue tint on her daughter's skin showed up, telling Molly everything she would now have to do. For a long time she was uncharacteristically silent, then Ginny broke the silence.

"Well? What happened, Mummy?"

"It was positive, darling. You are most definitely ... pregnant."

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 of 6

Shortly before his departure, Harry writes Ginny a heartfelt, poignant letter pleading with her to forgive him for leaving her, never forget him, and pray for his safe return in order that they may have the chance to renew their love. And Harry *does* return. It just takes ten years for him to do so.

Chapter 3 TEN YEARS LATER

"Mummy, guess what!" Lily Ginevra Thomasson, age 9, came running into the house, her long black hair flying behind her.

Ginevra Weasley-Thomasson, age 26 and wife to one Theodorus Thomasson for the past nine years, having married him shortly after Lily had been born, turned around and greeted her young daughter as she ran into the kitchen, cooking up some more Contraceptive Potion on the stove along with the night's supper. "Keep your voice down, darling," she admonished quietly but sternly. "Daddy's trying to sleep." Theodorus Thomasson worked the night shift at the Ministry of Magic as head of the Aurors, and had just recently arrived home from work.

"Sorry, Mummy. I was just so excited that I had to tell you. I just got an owl from Grandma Molly! She says I can spend the summer with her!"

"Aren't you also supposed to spend part of the summer with Daddy's mother, your Grandma Rose? Remember, she loves you just as much as Grandma Molly and hasn't seen you since you were six years old. Don't you think she deserves first consideration?"

"I was thinking I could go see her the second part of the summer. That would still be a month and a half. That way I could see Grandma Molly for the first part of the summer."

"I think it should be the other way around, dearest. After all, Grandma Rose is quite a bit older than Grandma Molly. If you wait too long to see her again, she could die. I don't think you'd want her to die without seeing you again."

The young girl looked somewhat crestfallen, but had to admit that her mother was right. "All right, I'll do it that way. Just let me owl Grandma Molly back and see what she says to that, okay?"

"Go ahead, love ... but come back here as soon as you're done. Supper's almost ready!"

"Yes, Mummy." After giving her mother a quick hug, small Lily rushed out again, and Ginny turned back to the stove to check on the progress of the Contraceptive Potion upon checking the progress of the supper. Theodorus didn't know she was taking it and that's the way she wanted to keep it. She couldn't blame him for wanting a child of his own, but she wasn't keen on having another baby...especially one that wasn't Harry's. Of course, only she and Theodorus knew that the child she bore nine years ago had not been his and that she had gone into the marriage not loving him.

However, the years had fostered a great fondness between the erstwhile spouses, and Ginny found that she was content with her marriage, her child and her life. For the most part, anyway. She had been pleased to read in the *Daily Prophet* that Harry, Ron and Hermione had successfully destroyed all the Horcruxes and engaged Voldemort, finding it far easier to destroy him than anticipated since all the Horcruxes had been destroyed except for the piece left inside the Dark Lord himself by the time he and his minions caught up with them.

There had been a fierce battle and many of the Dark forces had been killed; unfortunately, there had also been casualties on the Good side too, most notably the Patil twins, Angelina Johnson and Neville Longbottom. That was especially sad, since she had heard his wife Luna Lovegood had only recently given birth to their third child. She and Luna had become good friends over the last few years, and their children played together often, both in school and at one another's homes.

She had also been quite distressed that Ron had been badly hurt by a *Locomotor Mortis* curse that had permanently paralyzed his left leg. According to her mother, he would have a lifelong limp and have to use a cane, even though he was still only in his twenties. Hermione had also not come out of the battle unscathed, having been on the receiving end of a particularly nasty *Sectumsempra* curse, bleeding profusely from her chest and abdomen before she had been able to receive treatment.

It had even been said that she had been pregnant at the time, and just barely managed to escape losing the baby ... a son, as it turned out, who was a carbon copy of his father. As for Harry, it had been said that he had received another disfiguring scar, this one a diagonal one across his abdominal area, as the result of a curse similar to the one that had hit Hermione. No vital organs had been seriously damaged, thankfully, but he would carry the scar as long as he lived, just as he had carried the one on his forehead.

However, the three friends had gone their separate ways upon vanquishing the Dark Lord, Harry going to the United States for a lengthy assignment tracking down American Dark wizards and witches, whereas Ron and Hermione got married and moved to a home of their own not far from the Burrow so as to be able to avail themselves of both Molly's child-rearing knowledge and her cooking. A year later, another child, this time a daughter who was the image of her mother except for her blue eyes, which came from her father, was born.

These children had also managed to become friends with Ginny's daughter. They had never questioned her as to the girl's parentage, but there was an unspoken knowledge and acceptance between them that it belonged to Harry. However, Ginny had never mentioned that to her daughter, allowing her to believe that her husband was her father. And in every way but biologically, Theodorus was ... and that's what mattered.

It may have been unkind to think this, but Harry had basically been little more than a sperm donor. A true father spent time with their children, helped them with schoolwork, dried their tears if they felt sad, rejoiced with them when happy, cared for them when they were sick. Harry had been far too busy with his own importance these last ten years. Not that he could be totally blamed for that, since he had had no idea she had become pregnant as a result of their final night together before his departure, but the rest of it was true enough. So much for his promise to return to her once the Dark Lord had been vanquished ... like most promises made in the heat of passion, it was a promise easily made and just as easily broken.

Merlin knew what kinds of things he had learned in America, if even half what she had heard about the wizarding ways there was true. It frankly wouldn't surprise her if he was all but unrecognizable now...at least in every way that counted. There had been pictures of Ron and Hermione in the papers after the vanquishing of Voldemort, but try though she might, she had found none of Harry, and couldn't help wondering why. He had never been one to seek publicity, but it was ridiculous to avoid it now, of all times ... just when he had managed to vanquish the most evil wizard who ever lived.

The last she had heard, he had returned to Britain after a five-year absence just a year ago, but that was the most recent news she had of him. Not even Molly had heard anything, and she had always been like a second mother to him. If he could cut himself off from her, he could cut himself off from everyone. Not even Ron or Hermione had heard from him in that five-year absence. What had happened to Harry to change him so drastically? If he could keep himself away from all close ties for this long a time, it was unlikely she would ever know.

It had taken her six months to meet Theodorus after her pregnancy began and three months after Lily's birth to marry him. He had been a good, faithful husband and loved her dearly, as he did Lily. He was frankly very much like Harry had once been...or at least as she remembered him being. Merlin knew what he was like now. Her marriage would have been perfect except for the fact that she could not muster up anything more than fondness for her husband.

The last passion she could remember feeling had occurred during the last night with Harry ten years ago...the night which had engendered her cherished daughter...and try as she might, Ginny was unable to do any more than submit to her husband and calculate the right amount of response sufficient to please him. Certainly Theodorus deserved better, and with a part of her, Ginny felt badly that he was only getting leavings ... but he seemed content with that, and she had to be as well because it was a cinch Harry wasn't going to come back, sweep her off her feet and take her away from all this. If he hadn't done it in nine years, it was unlikely he would ever do so. If she could only have known what the next three months would bring ...

FOUR JUNE 2007

Ginny had just sent her daughter off to spend the first part of the summer with her Grandma Rose, Theodorus's mother, and returned to her work on the Muggle computer she had obtained from her father Arthur (to this day even he assumed that her daughter belonged to Theodorus; Molly had kept her word and had neither told him nor her brothers the girl's true parentage). Not even Ron knew for sure, although Ginny was sure that both he and Hermione suspected, given the girl's black hair and green eyes...Harry's black hair and green eyes. Fortunately the hair was not nearly as unruly as his; instead, it had taken after hers and been thick and wavy. She had taught Lily to comb it every day and wash it several times a week.

She was doing accounting and database work for both her brothers Fred and George, whose business had expanded to several branches scattered over wizarding Britain, and similar work for the Order, finding it challenging and fulfilling. It gave her enough to have her own bank account, although Theodorus's pay was what kept a roof over their heads, clothes on their backs and food in their stomachs.

It was on a particularly warm and beautiful June day that she had gone to answer her door, having no idea who it could possibly be since she certainly wasn't expecting anyone. She was stunned to find a handsome stranger standing there, long black hair pulled back in a ponytail, a perpetual five o'clock shadow and thick bangs falling across his forehead. His clothing was virtually all made of black dragon-hide, including his knee-high boots, and clung to his slender, well-built but not overly muscular body like a second skin. The only thing familiar about him was his voice; she'd never have recognized him otherwise.

"Ginny?"

"Harry?" She could scarcely believe her ears. "Harry, is that you?"

"Guilty as charged," he smiled.

"Oh, Merlin, I hardly recognized you! You've changed a lot!"

"So have you ..." His voice trailed off. *And for the better!* he finished in his mind. "But ten years has a way of changing people."

"Ten years? Has it really been that long?"

"Fraid so," he confirmed. "I can tell you all about it if you'll invite me in."

"Oh, yes, of course. Sorry. Do come in."

It hardly seemed possible that Harry was actually back, actually in the same room with her again. He had not mentioned it to her, but the moment he had seen Ginny again, Harry knew the magic had started all over again. It had never really stopped ... and if he was feeling like this after just meeting her again, how must Ginny be feeling? In spite of himself, Harry felt his heart pounding double-time at her nearness...her eyes, her lips, her perfume. Her body had even become more full, more voluptuous; maybe it was motherhood that did it. Whatever the case, it made her all the more desirable to him ... and never mind that she was married.

After seating him on her sofa, she offered him some refreshment. "Firewhiskey, if you have it," he requested politely. It seemed like a strange request, since she had never known him to drink anything alcoholic before ... but as he said, ten years could change people. It had obviously changed him in more than a physical way, just as it had her.

"We have some, but not a lot. Theodorus doesn't like to have the temptation around," she remarked. Harry's eyes widened at the reference and he looked intently at her.

"Who's Theodorus?" he demanded.

"My husband. I've been married for nine years. We have a daughter."

"What does he do for a living?"

"He's head of the Aurors at the Ministry of Magic."

"So that's where I heard that name," Harry replied. "I thought it sounded familiar, but couldn't place it. He's a tall, slender chap with dark hair and eyes, right? And if I remember correctly, he wears glasses. Seems nice enough, even though as far as I can tell, he's a real git, doesn't seem to know his arse from his elbow about anything other than Aurors' work. Why did you ever marry him?"

Before Ginny could answer, she was surprised to hear Harry give a bitter, derisive laugh. "Hey, guess what my new nickname is now? 'Don Juan of the Wizarding World.' Witches, both young and not-so-young, from all over the world, are literally lining up to sleep with me."

Despite Ginny's own bitterness and pain, she could scarcely believe this was truly Harry speaking. If she hadn't known better, she would have sworn that this Harry was not flesh and blood at all, but instead a lifelike robot made to look, walk and talk like him.

"Why should you be so surprised at that, Ginny? The innocent, idealistic boy you once knew has become a jaded, cynical man."

"What happened to you, Harry? That doesn't sound like you at all."

"What happened? Ten years happened. Time can change anybody ... even me. It certainly has changed you."

"At least it hasn't made me jaded and cynical," she pointed out. "In fact, I still remember how you mentioned the three's a crowd bit in your letter to me ... and am constrained to point out that it could have been *four* if you had deemed me good enough to accompany you and fight by your side. Never mind what I did for you in the Department of Mysteries, never mind what I did for you the night Dumbledore died ... to name just two incidents."

"That was never the issue, Ginny. I was trying to keep you safe, for Merlin's sake! It was bad enough having Ron and Hermione's lives at risk without including yours in the bargain. I couldn't have lived with myself if something had happened to you. Just the same, there were so many times I wanted you so bad I could taste it, wanted to touch you, kiss you, hold you, love you ..."

"But not enough to call me to accompany you. You seem to forget that one is just as likely to be attacked in one's home as out in the field, but no, you know all the answers and to blazes with what anyone else thinks."

"Bloody hell, Ginny, what do you want from me? I risk my neck and all you can do is complain."

"That was your choice, not mine."

"And one I had to make. Voldemort had to be destroyed, and I was the only one who could do it."

"Oh, yes, the 'Chosen One' of the prophecy! I'm so bloody sick of hearing that that I swear if I hear it even one more time, I'll upchuck! Don't you get it, Harry? After you left, then never contacted me even once, not in ten years, I felt *used* ... as if I was just a toy, a momentary distraction from what was truly important to you...chasing after Voldemort. As far as I can tell, it's always been more important to you than being with me."

"That's not true," Harry insisted. "You were important enough that I didn't want to see you controlled like a puppet, tortured or killed simply because of your connection to me. Believe me, I would far rather have had my heart torn out of me than to have walked away from you ... but I *had* to, Ginny, I *had* to! I thought if anyone could understand my reasons, you would, but you don't. You didn't even try. For Merlin's sake, I was trying to protect you the only way I knew how! If there's something wrong with that, then I admit it. I'm guilty as all hell...and proud of it!"

"Listen, Mister Big Shot! For your information, I didn't *ask* to fall in love with the 'Chosen One'! It just happened to turn out that way ... and let me assure you, it wouldn't have if I'd had any choice in the matter!"

"Ginny ..." Harry's voice was hard and cold.

"Is it my fault that your stupid nobility, your totally mental obsession with anything having to do with Voldemort means more to you than I do?"

"Ginny, that's not fair. You have no idea how hard it was for me to do what I did!"

"Uh-huh," Ginny almost sneered. "Is that supposed to make me feel better, or is it simply something you tell yourself in order to attempt to justify breaking up with me? Did you ever consider that I might not want to be protected, but instead stand beside you and fight on equal terms? You seem to have a positive talent for arbitrarily deciding what's best for people without consulting them." She took a breath, then continued. "Consider this, Harry. How would you have felt if our roles had been reversed and I broke up with you ostensibly to protect you and never asked you how you felt about what I was doing, simply expected you to automatically understand why I was doing it and not object or feel hurt at being left behind?"

He was unable to answer that, so Ginny made herself leave the room to get him the requested drink, barely able to keep her pounding heart under control. Harry had been handsome before, but he was truly gorgeous...even devastating...now. Ten years had done nothing to change the attraction she felt for him. Damn it, why were his eyes still such a sparkling green, his lips still so temptingly kissable? Damn him, why couldn't she hate him?

"Where is your ... daughter now?" he asked as she came back into the room and handed him the glass of firewhiskey.

"Visiting her paternal grandmother for the summer," Ginny supplied. "Then she'll be going from there to stay with my Mum. Which reminds me ... am I the first...old friend you've looked up?"

"No, I finally managed to see Molly again. She updated me on everyone; that's how I knew where to find you. Sounds like you've done quite well for yourself."

"Yes; well, after what happened ten years ago, I had to learn," Ginny returned enigmatically.

Harry frowned at her in the midst of taking a swallow of firewhiskey. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"My pregnancy decided my fate. I needed to take steps to ensure that I would have a husband and that my daughter would have a father, especially since you never bothered to get in touch with me in the last ten years; I could only assume that you had decided that chasing Dark wizards and witches was more fun than coming back to me and settling down. How easily you forgot your promises, Harry ... and you never used to."

"Are you telling me that your daughter is my child?" he demanded, taking another swallow of firewhiskey and fighting not to choke at the knowledge. Her silence told him more than any words. "You never told me."

"How could I? I had no idea where you were ... and as I said, you never bothered to get in touch with anyone, never made it possible for anyone to contact you."

"Does your husband know that your daughter is not his?" Harry seemed to ignore her last statement.

"Yes, he knows...but he loves her like his own ... and I am content with him."

"Content? Not...happy?"

"When one cannot have love, they learn to be ... content."

"Then you're simply...content with your husband, as you put it? And does he know that you went into your marriage not loving him?"

"Yes, he does ... but he loves me. He loves my daughter. He takes care of us. That's enough for me."

"You need more than that to make a good marriage, Ginny."

Ginny laughed bitterly. "And what would you know about marriage, Mister 'Don-Juan-of-the-Wizarding-World'?" she shot back. "I believe I know my husband better than you do...and whatever his other faults, Theodorus would never leave me alone and pregnant as you did to go off and play Sir Galahad."

"It's kind of hard to be a father when one doesn't*know* that one is," Harry retorted.

"And whose fault was that?" Ginny countered.

"What if I wanted a relationship with my daughter?"

"That would be up to her. We would have to arrange a meeting and see how she relates to you. I will not force her. Don't you ~~you~~*are* be so arrogantly presumptuous as to assume that a simple matter of biology gives you the right to come in here and make demands, particularly after ten years of silence!"

"What the bloody hell am I, then? Chopped liver?" Harry shot back.

"You were, pure and simple, a sperm donor. A true father lives with his children until they are of age; he does not pick up and leave on a whim and stay away for weeks, months and even years, then expect them to welcome him back as if no time has passed. He helps them with their schoolwork, dries their tears and comforts them if they are injured or sick; he feeds, clothes and shelters them, gives advice if they ask for it ... Theodorus has done all this. *He has been a father.*"

In spite of herself Ginny found herself traveling back in time to when she and Harry had first known each other, first fallen in love. That Harry had loved, agonized, cried, sacrificed. This one would literally stop at nothing to achieve his goals ... just as she was now certain that he was capable of nothing more than physical lust for a woman, taking any who happened to appeal to him at the moment.

She wasn't even sure if he knew the meaning of the word "love" any more, not seeming to care who he used to accomplish his goals. In that sense, he was almost as bad as Tom Riddle/Voldemort. Harry seemed to guess what she was thinking and said, "I wouldn't go that far, Ginny. I only kill when I absolutely have to. If possible, I prefer to let others do that, then go from there. I also advise you to be careful what you think. I'm an accomplished Legilimens now. Part of my job."

"What about Occlumency? I hear that's supposed to be part of an Auror's job too."

"Yes, it is," he confirmed.

"But you always had problems with it," she recalled.

"I had a poor teacher. That was the main reason. Fortunately, while I was in America, I managed to find a good one. She was a top Occlumens, and she knew how to do it right. She strengthened me instead of weakening me as Snape did. As a result, I found Occlumency coming as easily to me as Legilimency did. Of course, my ... instructor didn't just teach me that." He gave her a sly wink and no trace of a blush as he once would have done.

"Then I may assume that that means you ... slept with her too."

Harry's face hardened. "'Sleep with'? I don't generally stay with anyone long enough for that any more. Haven't for years. Just long enough to complete the act, usually."

"Then I hope you at least have the common decency to use a Contraceptive Charm, that there aren't dozens of look-alike kids out there with unruly black hair and green eyes scattered all over the globe."

"Oh, don't worry about that. I found a long-term spell for that about five years ago."

Another thing Ginny had noticed, but which had not registered with her until now, was the fact that Harry no longer wore his glasses. It was very strange to see him without them. Again, he seemed to read her face, if not her thoughts, as if they were a book. "A bloke who wears glasses generally isn't considered very 'macho,' to use an American term. I got contact lenses about six years back, although I keep my glasses around for emergencies.

"As for love, don't be ridiculous. My relationships over the years, if you can call them that, were purely physical. I have not 'loved' anyone for years and I doubt I ever will again. Too much has happened between then and now for me to be anywhere near what I used to be."

"But *we loved*, Harry. You can't deny that. *We loved!* Deeply. Tenderly. Beautifully."

"That was then. This is now." His voice was hard and cold, but at the same time, as beautiful as ever. "And it was an innocent, childish, chaste type of love. Never did we ever go beyond kisses, a few tentative caresses ... and even then, nothing below the waist." *Not that I didn't want to. Oh, Merlin, how I wanted to, even then* he couldn't help thinking, even though he knew it was wrong to do so, especially considering the fact that she was married now and supposedly off-limits.

At least not until our last night together, just before you left she couldn't help thinking.

"I suppose you don't even kiss a woman any more."

"Right," was all he said. "You're the only one I've ever kissed ... more than once, anyway."*The only one I've ever cared enough for to want to kiss* he finished in his mind.

Of course, while he was thinking these things, she was thinking that he had definitely filled out over the years. Still slender, but now very well-built in all the right places, and height-wise, he crowded six feet ... not overly muscular, but enough...and his shoulders were to die for! Not quite as tall as Ron, of course, but still a respectable height. Harry had even looked like he'd actually had three square meals a day for a change, instead of looking like a refugee from a concentration camp. Not totally his fault, she knew ... those *horrid* Dursleys! Ginny hoped she never ran into them, for she would surely hex them into the middle of next week for what they'd done to Harry. Thank Merlin he was away from them forever!

"I also can't help noting that you don't call me 'Gin' any more," she observed.

"'Gin' is an alcoholic drink. Do you really want to be compared to one?"

If it means I can intoxicate you she thought daringly.

And she did. As the grown-up Harry gazed at the grown-up Ginny, his heart pounded in a manner that it had not done since he was sixteen and had first fallen in love with her. It was as if the past ten years since their parting had never been and he had become a lovesick, idealistic boy again. Bloody hell, why had he ever come to see her when he knew how she'd always affected him? Especially since he knew that she was married, but had still allowed himself to feel for her again? How could he possibly have been such a damn bloody fool?

Just the same, he knew when he had first loved her, he had loved as a boy. Now he loved as a man, with tenderness, but at the same time with fire and passion. His blood positively boiled just gazing at Ginny...her lovely red-gold hair and soft brown eyes, her full bosom and slender waist, her deliciously kissable lips. How very much he wished he could kiss them now ... again and again ... and never stop!

"Look, Ginny, even as much as I'd like to be able to, I can't simply go back to what I used to be. Too much has happened. I've lost my idealism. I've seen too much harsh reality, gone through too much hardship, seen too much death. I'm not the idealistic boy you originally fell in love with. If we're going to even consider starting again, we've got to take into account all the changes that have happened to us in the last ten years. In fact, we're diametric opposites to what we were then."

"Except for one thing," she remarked.

"Except for one thing," he echoed. "I know it's wrong, that you're married, but I ... still love you, Ginny. I never stopped. Not in ten years. Others may have had my body, but none ever had my heart. That has always belonged to you...and you alone."

"I never stopped loving you either," Ginny assured him. "I never will."

It was mere moments later that the distance between them had been crossed, and the one-time (and soon-to-be current) lovers moved into each other's arms, and their lips and hands eagerly, even hungrily, sought the other, and their clothes almost literally seemed to dissolve, they disappeared so quickly.

It was also fortunate that Ginny's husband was not due home for hours and their daughter gone for the summer at her grandmother's, for nothing save death itself could have stopped the pair from renewing both their romantic (and physical) relationship. What's more, it seemed as though they had both literally been starved for love; they just couldn't seem to get enough of each other. Truly, Heaven had come to earth for these star-crossed lovers, and now that they had been reunited, nothing would ever separate them again.

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 of 6

Shortly before his departure, Harry writes Ginny a heartfelt, poignant letter pleading with her to forgive him for leaving her, never forget him, and pray for his safe return in order that they may have the chance to renew their love. And Harry *does* return. It just takes ten years for him to do so.

FIVE AFFAIR

This was but the beginning of a three-month affair, made easier (at least for the time being) due to the fact of small Lily's being with her respective grandparents on the one hand and the fact of Theodorus's working hours on the other. Harry had seen to it that his own working hours were the diametric opposite, so he would be free to be with Ginny at her home ... either that or they went elsewhere for a rendezvous, such as a meadow full of tall grass and flowers after a picnic, the air fragrant with their scent, serving as a backdrop to the tenderly passionate lovemaking which went on there, especially one time after a swim ... and this time, Ginny did not bother with the Contraceptive Potion.

It was shortly after one of these interludes that the lovers cuddled together and talked, still naked, enjoying the touch, smell and feel of one another's bare skin too much to dress just yet. Harry was the one who brought up the possibility of a "dissolution," as it was called in the wizarding world ... very similar to a divorce, but something which required the couple who requested a dissolution to keep in touch with each other (if they were on friendly terms), especially when there was a child involved, which there was in this case. But even then, the only possible way to obtain a dissolution was to show to one spouse incontrovertible proof of adultery, and even then it had to be *long-term* adultery. Especially if said adultery happened to result in pregnancy...and the way matters were going between Harry and Ginny, that was a distinct possibility.

As far as Ginny knew, Theodorus had not caught on; she and Harry had been far too careful...but he wasn't stupid; he certainly suspected something was going on, but couldn't have said just what. She knew how wrong it was to cuckold him like this; he didn't deserve it, not for a moment, but for the chance to be with Harry, she was willing to risk it. Especially since she had been trying to figure it so as to make sure she was asleep when Theodorus came home so he didn't try to attempt sex with her. And when she couldn't truly be asleep, she found herself going to elaborate lengths to *feign* sleep.

Of course, by this time Ginny had showed Harry a picture of their daughter, and he had to admit that she was the image of him ... except for the obvious lack of unruliness of the hair. Ginny explained that that was from her side and that she had taught the girl to take care of it, washing and combing it several times a week, otherwise it tangled horribly. Lily had also been writing her parents every week, and so far Ginny had managed to intercept the owl posts; even the young girl had begun to suspect something, and both she and Harry agreed that they would soon have to tell her one way or another ... especially of the fact that he was her biological father.

Naturally Harry couldn't help noting that Ginny had seemingly named the girl after his mother...surely no coincidence, he was dead certain of that. Not that she had needed to do that, necessarily; just looking at the girl would be a reminder of him and what they had shared (and were currently sharing). Ginny had confessed she'd named the girl Lily because she reminded her as much of said flower as much as of her lover's late mother. Harry had seemed to accept that, but soon got back to the subject he was

bringing up more and more often.

"If it were up to me alone, love, I would do it in a minute. But I have to consider Theodorus's feelings, not to mention Lily's. Nor have I ever mentioned it, not even to Mum, that we are back together. She may love you like another son, but she is also notoriously old-fashioned. If she knew what we were doing, we'd never hear the end of it. We can't let her get even an inkling, much less any of my brothers...especially not Ron; he'd surely take you apart, best friend or not. And it's been very tricky to try to plan our get-togethers around the other children's visits. I frankly wouldn't be surprised if even they have begun to suspect something, even if they can't say just what.

"That is to say, I cannot ask Theodorus for a dissolution. He has to ask me ... and so far, he's not shown any indication of wanting to do so. Also, he is the only father Lily has ever known. She loves him and he loves her. I think, at the very least, he would want visitation rights."

Harry was not fond of the idea, but had to agree it was logical, so as not to disrupt the child's life any more than absolutely necessary. At the same time, they had to decide just when they were going to arrange a meeting between himself and Lily and see how they got along. She would be home within the next couple of weeks; perhaps they could do it once she got settled in again, one night when Theodorus was at work.

Just the same, Ginny had been unable to help noting that Harry had gotten a new owl. Only natural, she supposed, but it still seemed strange not to see Hedwig approach him; instead, it was another snowy female owl, this one with deep blue eyes, which he had named Amanda. She had been unable to help asking just what had happened to Hedwig.

"She died," Harry explained. "Three years ago. Owls only live about ten to fifteen years, remember, and I got her when I was eleven. Even then, she was about two years old."

They also agreed that should Ginny manage to get a dissolution, that she would have to either get her own owl or use Harry's...and if they hadn't come out into the open yet, that would involve some pretty fast talk so as not to arouse undue suspicion. At the moment she was using Theodorus's owl, a large tawny named Julius, but if they separated, she would be unable to continue doing so.

* * * * *

As it turned out, Lily was brought back to Ginny's home via Arthur's Apparating with her one late afternoon shortly after Theodorus had left for work. The house was fortunately large enough so that if Harry happened to be with Ginny at the time, he would be able to remain concealed until the proper time in the extra bedroom they shared, so as not to violate the sanctity of the marriage bed. Not that she and Theodorus were really sleeping together any more, but the principle was the same.

"Mummy, I'm back," the girl called, her belongings having been returned home via the Floo Network and even now sitting in the fireplace. Once they were retrieved by Arthur, he carried them up to her room and looked for Ginny to let her know Lily was back. Harry had sensed his presence and warned Ginny to get out there immediately if she knew what was good for her.

Arthur looked askance at her upon noticing that she was still in nightdress and dressing-gown; she simply explained that she had gotten up early and went directly to the computer, having been too busy to change into day clothes. (Never mind that Arthur had already noticed that the computer was not only off, but cold, having not been used at all, much less all day.) It was while they were still talking that Lily came out of her room and greeted her mother. "I missed you, Mummy," she told her, greeting Ginny with an energetic hug.

"I missed you too, darling," Ginny replied, holding her cherished child close in her arms. If only she could have told her that her biological father was back in her life and wanted to meet her! But it wasn't time yet, especially not with Arthur still here.

"I just wanted to say that we got Lily her own owl, Ginny. I know she's a bit young, but I think she can handle the responsibility," Arthur explained. It was a young female, just over a year old, and honey-coloured with brown eyes. In fact Lily had already decided to name her owl Honey.

"I hope so, Daddy. I don't want to end up being the one with all the animal care responsibility. I have too much else to do," Ginny reminded him. "For the time being, we'll see how things go ... and decide accordingly."

"Well, dearest, owl us if you need anything and we'll be here with it straightaway ... within reason, of course," Arthur smiled. Their finances were still limited but easier to live on now that they didn't have to be spread out over umpteen children. "I've got to get back home now. I promised your mum I would take her on an outing today."

"Oh? Where are you going?" Ginny wondered.

"Haven't decided yet," Arthur said enigmatically. "But I've promised her that she'll enjoy it. Well, got to go now. Give my best to Theodorus when you see him."

"Of course, Daddy," Ginny returned innocently.

Arthur Weasley then stepped into the fireplace after throwing Floo powder over himself and saying, "The Burrow!" With a flash of green fire, he was gone.

"I have a ... surprise for you, darling," she hesitantly told Lily as she stepped into her young daughter's room. "An ... old friend of mine has dropped by and since I've been telling him a lot about you, he ... wants to meet you. He is waiting elsewhere for me to tell him he may come see you; if you'll go wait in the living room, I'll contact him."

The girl looked totally mystified, but willingly complied. As soon as she was gone, Ginny quickly Apparated to the bedroom where Harry was waiting and told him that Lily was waiting to meet him, warning him to come to the front door so as not to arouse suspicion. Harry looked askance at her but didn't argue, simply kissing her before Apparating out of the room. It was also Ginny who answered the door a few moments later; young Lily was sitting patiently on the living room sofa.

"Lily, darling, my friend is here."

The girl remained on the sofa, hands folded in her lap and head slightly bowed; it wasn't until Ginny gently spoke to her again that it lifted. She looked up to find a tall, handsome stranger dressed all in black standing next to her mother. "Hello," she said politely. "Are you Mummy's friend?"

"You could say that, yes," Harry smiled. "I'm Harry Potter."

The girl seemed stunned upon hearing the name. "The famous Auror? The one who killed the Dark Lord?"

"The same," Harry confirmed. "But I knew your mum long before that. We were ... close friends, in fact, while we were in school. I assume you've heard of Hogwarts?"

"The famous witchcraft and wizarding school? Of course. I've already told Mummy I want to go there when I'm old enough. Meanwhile, she's taught me some simple spells and potions and is going to let me use her wand until I get one of my own."

Harry and Ginny exchanged glances; he mentally asked her what was going on. She promised to explain everything later in private. A short time later, Harry and Ginny sat down on either side of the girl on the sofa; behind her back, he reached to hold Ginny's hand for a time, then kissed it briefly before replacing his own in his lap.

"Your mum has told me a lot about you, but I'd like to hear more. Have you a best friend?"

"Oh yes, her name is Dora Lupin; I've known her for two years. Her mum is a witch, Nymphadora Tonks, and her father was once a teacher at Hogwarts. You may have heard of him...Remus Lupin?"

"Yes. In fact, he was once one of my teachers, and Nymphadora is a ... good friend of mine. Remus was also ... a good friend of my parents. He even went to school with them."

"You're that old, then?" Lily asked, incredulous.

"I'm twenty-seven," Harry revealed. "Three times your age."

"You don't look that old," she observed.

"I'm not, really. Twenty-seven years only *sounds* like a long time, especially to a child. Once you reach that age, you find it's not so bad."

"I suppose not. After all, Mummy said she was twenty-six and she doesn't look old either."

"No, she definitely doesn't," Harry agreed, looking over the girl's head to meet Ginny's eyes and they smiled tenderly at each other.

"But I asked Daddy how old he was once, and he said he was thirty years old. How long is that?"

"Three ... decades. Do you know what a ... decade is?"

"It's ... ten years, isn't it?"

"Right. A little longer than you've been around. Multiply that by three and you'll have your ... Daddy's age." Harry seemed uncomfortable and Ginny couldn't blame him, for she knew Lily was referring to Theodorus, although he was thinking more and more along the lines of himself. But it still wasn't time to tell Lily that yet; it was necessary for them to become friends first before they could go any further. He then asked her what were some of her favourite things to do other than her witchcraft studies.

"Grandma Molly's been teaching me how to cook. I already know how to cook my own breakfast, in fact."

"Congratulations," the older couple told the child. "What else?"

"I want to learn Quidditch when I'm old enough," the girl stated baldly; Harry and Ginny again exchanged glances. Lily was definitely their child, that was for sure, to be so interested in the sport. "But Mummy says I'm not big enough or old enough to be on a team yet."

"And she's right. You must be at least eleven years old to be on a team," Harry stated, recalling when he had first begun playing. "And it involves considerable skill, especially if you happen to be Seeker."

"What does a Seeker do?"

"Their objective is to catch the Golden Snitch."

"That's a little gold ball with wings, right?"

"Yes ... and it's very difficult to catch, not to mention hold onto," Harry remarked. "I know. I was Seeker on my House's Quidditch team."

"Would you say you were good at it?"

"Fair," Harry returned modestly, although Ginny knew he was far better than that.

"How many points do you get if you catch it?"

"One hundred fifty," Harry told her. "And if you catch it before anyone else does, it's an automatic win for your team."

"Sounds like a lot of fun."

"Oh, it is, definitely. Did your mum ever tell you that she was a Chaser on the school team?"

"No, I don't think so. What does a Chaser do?"

"Passes the Quaffle, a large red ball, trying to throw it through the goal hoop. There are usually three Chasers on a Quidditch team."

"What other positions are there on a Quidditch team?"

"Keeper and Beater," Harry replied.

"What do they do?"

"The Keeper guards the goal hoops and Beaters protect the players from Bludgers, large black balls, usually by using a small bat to hit them toward opposing players. Bludgers have a way of trying to knock people off their brooms, so you've got to be wary of them."

"Do you think you would be willing to ... teach me?"

Once again, Harry and Ginny exchanged glances over their daughter's head. "That would be up to your mum. You're still a bit young, but if she's willing, I am."

"Mummy, can your ... friend Harry teach me Quidditch?" Ginny looked down at her child's face, seeing the entreaty in her beautiful green eyes, so much like those of her father.

"I ... suppose so. As long as I'm there to supervise, and maybe have Uncle Ron and Aunt Hermie there too."

Harry gave Ginny a strange look upon hearing that; Ginny mentally explained that Lily wasn't yet able to pronounce Hermione's name properly, so that's what she usually called her. "Maybe you could even ... join us, Ginny. After all, it's good exercise."

"I haven't played in years, Harry," Ginny protested.

"We wouldn't go that high, and even if you did fall off your broom, I'd make sure to be there to catch you." He smiled and winked provocatively at her, once again over their daughter's head. "First order of business, though, is a large enough pitch ... playing field," Harry explained when Lily looked up at him questioningly. "Then we'd have to make sure we had the necessary equipment...goal hoops, the Quaffle, Bludgers and Snitch, as well as the brooms. I could probably get the equipment; I think the Quality Quidditch Supplies outfit is still in business, and maybe rent some brooms."

"The closest pitch to us is Yorkshire Moors," Ginny recalled. "But we've got to play as quietly as possible, since it's fairly close to some Muggle settlements."

"It's a date, then?" Harry asked, looking at his two ladies sitting near him.

"How's Saturday morning at ten? That's when Theodorus goes into work early. In fact that's the ~~the~~ only day he does ... so it's perfect."

"Do you think you could get up that early, Lily?" Harry asked his daughter, who didn't yet know she was his daughter ... but that would change in the not-too-distant future.

"If it's for Quidditch," she assured him.

"Great. Ten o'clock Saturday it is. See you then." He then heard a yawn and looked down to see Lily attempt to stifle another. "Looks like we've got one tired little girl here." He smiled.

"That's right," Ginny agreed. "It must be time for your nap, young lady."

"No, Mummy. I want to stay and talk some more about Quidditch with Harry," she protested.

"After your nap, darling," Ginny half-promised. "Now, scoot! I'll be in to give you a kiss in a minute."

Once the girl left the room, Harry took the opportunity to steal a quick but deep and hungry kiss from Ginny. "Gods, it was so hard to wait," came the passionate whisper in her ear as he held her and moved sensuously against her.

"Tell me about it," she whispered back. "But I've got to go now. Lily's waiting."

"I'll be here," he promised, meaning every word, but secretly deciding to sneak after her to Lily's room, if only to be able to see them together without having to conceal his real relationship to them.

* * * * *

But the girl hadn't gone to her room immediately; instead she hid out of sight behind the corner that led to the hallway where her room was and saw the passionate clinch between her mother and her "friend." Her eyes widened in shock at the display, but she really wasn't surprised. Harry had not acted like she knew most friends should act, especially not around her mum. She wouldn't say anything for now, but fully intended to ask about it at the first opportunity, taking off quickly and jumping into bed after kicking her shoes off once she heard her mother's footsteps heading for her bedroom.

* * * * *

After Ginny had kissed her daughter and turned out the light in her room, she made her way back to the living room and Harry's waiting arms and lips. They held each other tightly, and he once again moved sensuously against her, kissing her hungrily as his hands moved deliciously over her body and her own did the same to him. "Ginny, I need you ... need you so much ..."

"I ... wish I could, Harry," she murmured back between kisses. "But Lily's nap only lasts an hour."

"I'll bewitch her so she sleeps longer," he crooned, breath feathering her nearest ear.

"Harry! That's your daughter you're talking about!" Ginny returned in a protesting whisper.

"And I'm very much in love with her mother. So much so that I can hardly stand it *Please*, Ginny ..." His beautiful green eyes blazed with a mixture of love and passion.

"All right ... You know I never could resist you when you looked at me like that." Ginny's voice was every bit as seductive as Harry's own, and they finally decided to Apparate to their regular bedroom, where for the better part of the next two hours they lost themselves in each other's arms, possessing each other's bodies and souls many times over in the space of that time. There was only one problem, though ... who was on his way home right now.

SIX - DISCOVERY

Theodorus Thomasson was a very unhappy man and he could not understand why...he had a beautiful wife, a beautiful child, a happy marriage ... Hold it right there! Not happy, not happy at all ... particularly for the last three months or so, which was the last time Ginny had consented to sleep with him. In fact she seemed to be living an entirely different life these days...a life *without him*...and he was determined to find out why ... and if what he suspected was true *with whom*.

He had known when he married Ginny that she had been pregnant with another man's child, but he had not held it against either her or the child; instead, he had welcomed them both into his life, into his home, with open arms...and loved them as best he knew how. He had also known that she had married him without love, yet up to three months ago, he could not have faulted her where showing affection was concerned, even in bed. Yet despite all this, even as many times as he had tried to get Ginny to agree to their having a child of their own, she had always claimed she was too busy with her work, too busy raising one child to consider having another, things like that.

Valid reasons, at least at first glance...but her behaviour had inexplicably changed since this past June (it was now September and almost time for Lily to start school again). He couldn't put his finger on precisely why, and she was never willing to discuss the subject...but there had been times he had seen Ginny sneaking upstairs to the spare bedroom and spending hours in there when she thought he was asleep, doing Merlin knows what ... and always with the door carefully locked. All he knew for sure was that when she came out, she always looked positively radiant with happiness, as if she'd literally spent the time in Heaven itself. Not to mention ... fulfilled. Fulfilled as he had never been able to make her, despite his best efforts.

He had known enough women intimately before his marriage to know what that look meant. But who could she possibly be seeing? He knew all her friends, both male and female, not to mention her family, and none of the males were the kind to whom she would give more than an occasional hug or kiss on the cheek. None that she would be willing to spend hours alone with, none who could ... fulfill her so completely as she had looked of late.

Was it someone completely new or someone from her past? She had never given him any details as to who it had been that had made her pregnant other than the fact it had been a former boyfriend with whom she had once been deeply in love, but who had left her to go off on some noble quest and never returned ... and no matter how he tried, could get no more out of her than that. Could this former boyfriend have come back into her life? Could they have actually resumed their romance despite the fact of her marriage? These and many other questions had troubled him greatly over the course of the last three months, and Theodorus was determined to get some straight answers this time, whatever he had to do.

Upon his arrival home, he did not announce himself as he normally did, but instead went upstairs to the spare bedroom. It was locked as usual, but that posed no problem for him; he knew an Unlocking Charm that would unlock virtually anything. As it did this time ... and the door opened, swinging wide and silently, to show him the interior of the room and *hopefully* the reason for Ginny's strange behaviour of the last three months.

The room was in gloom, the blinds drawn, but he could still see sufficiently well to know that she was sleeping in the bed in the room ... and not alone, either! In addition, she seemed to be naked...as was her companion, a handsome, black-haired man somewhat younger than himself with a ponytail and who obviously favoured black dragon-hide clothing, judging from the shirt, trousers and jacket hanging over the bedside chair, not to mention the boots in front of it. He also saw what was obviously Ginny's lacy blue nightdress on the floor on her side of the bed.

Her companion also looked somewhat familiar, come to think of it, but where had he seen him before? In addition, the bedclothes only partially covered the couple, so he was unable to help noting the scar on the man's abdomen. Where had he gotten it? It looked like a very nasty one, one that he was likely to carry all his life even once he recovered from the original wound. Theodorus didn't want to imagine how it must have happened, but knew that if he didn't get some straight answers soon, he was likely to inflict another one to join it!

With that, he reached for the light switch and turned it on.

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Harry sighed in deep contentment and happiness as he lay with Ginny cuddled close to him, her head on his chest and her long hair partially covering him. Truly, he had never been happier in his life than he was now. How could he ever have stayed away from her for so long, much less ever have shared his body with anyone else when it

belonged to her...and *only* her? It would surely take the rest of his life to make it up to her for the pain he had caused her, but it was a debt he was more than happy to pay, especially if it meant times like this, with the sweet warmth of her body next to him, her silky fragrant hair covering him, her perfume in the air ...

This was his own personal Heaven, just lying in her arms, simply loving and being loved by her. Remembering the sweetness of her lips beneath his, the gentle warmth of her hands caressing him, the fullness of her beautiful breasts in his hands and beneath his lips ... but most of all, the deliciousness between her short but slender and extremely lovely legs, which had so recently been wrapped around his hips ... Even now he felt himself becoming aroused again at the erotic thoughts, although it was unlikely that there would be time for them to do it again, at least not today, since her husband was due home soon and she had to leave before ... Wait. What was that? The light switch?

The next thing either of them knew, the lights flashed on in their faces, prompting Harry to put an arm up to block the sudden invasion; his movements partially awakened Ginny, and she sleepily murmured, "Don't leave, Harry ... we still have time," and reached for him to pull him down to her again.

But he pulled completely away from her, which prompted her to open her eyes and turn her head in the direction of the door. When she saw what (or rather, who) was there, glowering at her and her lover, his wand pointed threateningly at them, she was unable to do anything but stare at him, stunned speechless, she and Harry blindly but instinctively clutching each other.

"What the bloody hell is this?" Theodorus demanded. "Ginevra Molly Thomasson, you'll tell me who this person is right here and now or I hex you both into the middle of next week!"

Now Theodorus knew who Ginny's lover was ... Harry Potter, one of his fellow Aurors at the Ministry. Not only that, though, he was rumoured to be "The Boy Who Lived," "The Chosen One" and even "Slayer of the Dark Lord." Not to mention just as famous in America as he was in Britain for what he had done to help capture elusive Dark wizards and witches. Was Harry the father of Ginny's child? Had he been the former boyfriend who had left her behind ten years ago?

If so, why had Potter returned at this particular time? Did he want Ginny back? Did he know that Ginny's daughter was his child, and if so, did he intend to claim rights of paternity, never mind that he, Theodorus, had raised Lily as his own, loved her, fed her, clothed her, sheltered her? All the same, he could not force Ginny to stay with him if she truly loved Potter, nor could he deny the man his child, however much the thought of giving Lily up tore at his own heart. But he wasn't going to just let them walk off together into the sunset with her, either. Not without getting some answers, and right now!

It was several minutes before Ginny regained her voice. "Theodorus! I thought you'd gone to work!"

"I decided to take the day off for a change; things have been slow, after all. Besides, there is something I need to discuss with you ... your behaviour these last three months. Now I see the reason for it."

"I'm sorry, Theodorus. I meant to tell you long ago, but didn't want to hurt you," Ginny insisted.

"No. You'd rather cuckold me behind my back," he retorted, voice laced with pain and anger. "I won't lie to you and tell you it doesn't hurt, because it does, but I'm a fair man. If you want out of our marriage, Ginny, just say so. I won't force you to stay with me. I only ask that you grant me the right to see Lily. As well as answer me these two questions: How does this man ... your former boyfriend, I assume ... feel about you? And do you still love him?"

Harry opened his mouth to speak, but Ginny stopped him with a finger on his lips. "This is my problem, love. It's up to me to solve it." The lovers then sat up in bed and discreetly covered themselves as Ginny gestured to the chair. "Get the chair and I'll explain."

* * * * *

Ginny told him everything, right from the beginning, when she had first fallen in love with Harry to the time of their first kiss the day of the Quidditch Cup eleven years ago ... then their intense but virtually sexless five-week romance, at least until the day before he left on his quest for the Horcruxes and to destroy Voldemort.

"That was when your ... relationship changed to a sexual one?" Theodorus asked, still finding it hard to believe that Ginny could ever have met, much less known and loved Harry Potter. And what's more, Potter had obviously loved her! He had never heard of a more unlikely match in his life, given Potter's reputation with the ladies, yet it had obviously happened.

"Yes. This happened the night before he left on his quest for the Horcruxes and Voldemort," she revealed. "Harry said he wanted to have a beautiful memory to sustain him, and asked to ... make love to me. Despite our having broken up, we had never stopped loving each other, so I decided to grant him his wish. That was the night I got pregnant with Lily."

"Did he know of Lily's birth?" Theodorus inquired.

"No; there was no way for me to contact him to tell him. He didn't know until just a few months ago."

"In June," Theodorus remarked.

"Yes. I told him as soon as I could after that."

"And you began your affair that day too, I take it."

Ginny bowed her head, unable to meet her husband's eyes or speak ... but her actions spoke louder than any words.

"I'm sorry, Theodorus. I never meant to waste your time ... or mine. You have been a loving husband and father, and I will be forever grateful to you for taking us in just when we needed it most. But now I believe it would be kindest to let you go and find someone who truly loves you, and that's what I want to do."

"As I said, Ginny, as long as you allow me to see Lily on occasion, I'm willing to grant you a dissolution. After all, it's me she knows as her father. Just answer me the questions I asked earlier and we can go get it done today. It's still early enough."

"Yes, I still love Harry. I never stopped ... and he says he's never stopped loving me either," Ginny confessed.

Theodorus looked up to meet Harry's eyes; Harry didn't speak, simply nodded his agreement ... but that seemed to be enough to convince the other man present. His lover's soon-to-be ex-husband. He could detect the pain in Theodorus's eyes, but appreciated his generosity at being willing to let Ginny and Lily go in order to make them...and him...happy. Visitation rights were a small price to pay in the face of such unselfishness.

"We'll drop off Lily at Ron and Hermione's, then go to the Ministry from there," Theodorus suggested. "That is, if it's all right with you two."

"That's fine," the couple agreed.

"Then let me know when you're ready and we can go. In the meantime, I'll spend some time with my daughter." Neither of the couple argued with him, because it was true. Lily may not have been the child of his loins, but she was obviously the child of Theodorus's heart...and it was the least they could do to grant him time with her for all he had done for her over the last nine years, when Harry was unavailable.

They could not bring themselves to tell Lily what was going on; it was best for her not to know just yet...until they could think of a way to break it to her gently ... or at least as gently as possible. Theodorus had also asked to be allowed to take her to Ron and Hermione's and neither Harry nor Ginny had the heart to refuse him; they would meet him at the Ministry and take care of things after that had been done.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 6

Shortly before his departure, Harry writes Ginny a heartfelt, poignant letter pleading with her to forgive him for leaving her, never forget him, and pray for his safe return in order that they may have the chance to renew their love. And Harry *does* return. It just takes ten years for him to do so.

SEVEN DISSOLUTION

Upon explaining the situation to the authorities and filling out some necessary forms, the marriage of Theodorus Thomasson and Ginevra Molly Weasley had been officially dissolved, with the necessary provisions made for the care and education of the minor child, one Lily Ginevra Thomasson, age 9. Ginny removed the wedding ring from her finger and handed it back to Theodorus; he pocketed it wordlessly, although she saw ineffable pain in his eyes. She did care about him and truly disliked hurting him, but a lot of necessary things can be ... and usually are ... painful, and they were finding that out.

"I wish you all the best in your life, Theodorus ... and hope we can always be friends," Ginny whispered as they embraced one last time.

"I'm willing if you are," he replied softly, touching her cheek one last time. Then they separated. "Every happiness to you and Harry."

"Thank you," she smiled, then went to join Harry. They linked arms and made their farewells; then Theodorus Apparated out of the room and the couple was left standing before the Ministry authorities.

There was an uncomfortable silence for a time, then one of them asked, "Do the two of you wish to be married at this time?"

If it had just been them, Ginny knew that they would have done it in a moment, but they knew they needed to wait a little while longer, if only to allow Lily to get used to the idea that her parents had separated permanently and that she would have a new father ... her true *biological* father, at any rate, although it could not be denied that Harry already loved his child dearly. But it would take time before Lily learned to accept him as a permanent fixture, and they had to take that into consideration ... which was the main reason why they decided not to marry immediately. Meanwhile, he and Ginny would continue their present relationship.

"Not at this time," Harry informed them. "We'll let you know when we decide to do so."

"Very well," said the Ministry authority who had addressed them earlier.

"We'd better go now, Gin. We've got things to do and plans to make," Harry told her with a smile and wink as she looked surprised at his calling her 'Gin' for the first time in ten years.

"Among them plans for a talk with Lily, how we're going to explain to her that Theodorus is gone and that you will be replacing him as her father."

Harry had to admit he wasn't looking forward to that; it was one thing to have the child think he was merely a friend of her mother's, quite another to move into their home and their lives, taking the place of the only father she had ever known or loved in her life. Just the same, it had to be done, and better sooner than later.

With that, the couple Apparated back to Ginny's home (Theodorus had signed it over to her), and the start of their new life together, eventually deciding to have the talk with Lily about the drastic changes in their lives about to take place upon her return home. The change in fathers would be only the first, since Ginny had just discovered that she was pregnant ... for the second time.

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In the end, Harry and Ginny decided to take things one step at a time; Ginny wouldn't show for several months, so she could conceal it, at least for a while. They needed time for Lily to accept him as a permanent part of her life (and eventually her father), although they fully expected her to maintain affection for Theodorus. Perhaps they could suggest that she call him Daddy Theo or something while using the same nickname for him ... "Daddy Harry" for now, and hopefully just plain "Daddy" later on.

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They were also stunned at young Lily's reaction to the news that Theodorus and Ginny had split up and that Harry would be in effect taking his place. She was stunned speechless at first, but soon came out with something her parents least expected.

"Can I still see Daddy...Theodorus?"

"Of course, darling. Just because he and I have split up doesn't mean we've stopped loving you. And I assure you, you had nothing to do with our break-up. It's just that Harry and I have become ... more than friends and wish for you to eventually accept him as your father, or more accurately, your second father, for we plan to ... eventually get married. Would you have any objections to that?"

For a long time she was silent and both couldn't help dreading the child's answer. Even if she objected, they would continue their relationship; nothing and no one could stop them from doing that...not after so many years apart...so at least unofficially Lily would eventually be made to accept the situation, if not Harry himself. They had seemed to get along fine up to this point, but Ginny couldn't help thinking that that might have been simply because she thought Harry was just a friend and not likely to become a permanent fixture. Now that she knew otherwise, of course, neither of them could predict *how* the child would react.

"I can't say I'm surprised." The nine-year-old came out with something that one might expect of someone far older than herself. "I have a confession to make, Mummy."

"Yes?" Ginny couldn't help wondering what secret her child had been keeping from her.

"I ... saw you and Harry together once. He was ... holding you very close to him and kissed you for a long time. Not only that, you kissed him back. That was when I knew you couldn't be just friends. I also knew what you guys were doing behind my back that one day we were talking about Quidditch."

"Why didn't you tell me earlier, darling?" She and Harry looked at each other, troubled. If Lily could have figured all that out without being told at her age, obviously there wasn't much that escaped her. It was yet another way that she proved herself to truly be their child. Neither of them were geniuses, of course, but a lot smarter than given credit for ... and their daughter was following in their footsteps.

"I didn't want you to worry," Lily replied for the first of what would turn out to be many times over the course of her life. "And it's all right for you to marry him, Mummy. After

all, I like Harry a lot and want to keep him around, if only to teach me Quidditch."

Both of Lily's parents looked at each other, shocked, then laughed and enfolded Lily in a group hug. "Thank you, darling. We're very glad to hear that."

Well, that was one thing less to worry about. All the same, both Ginny and Harry decided to wait to tell Lily about her pregnancy for a time in order to give the news of their marriage plans, Harry's intention to openly live with them until then, and the breakup of Ginny's first marriage time to sink in. Of course, if Lily's reaction to their original news was any indication, it wouldn't surprise them if she'd already figured it out.

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And they were right. In fact, it was Lily who approached them about it rather than the other way around ... or more specifically, Ginny herself. "Mummy, I need to ask you something."

"What is it, darling?"

"You don't seem to be feeling very well. I've heard you throwing up in the bathroom sometimes, and you don't seem to want to eat very much. And you seem tired all the time."

That was when Ginny knew the jig was up. "Yes, darling, it's all true. And I assume you want to know why."

"Yes, I do," Lily returned baldly. But before Ginny could say anything, Lily said, "You're going to have a baby, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," Ginny made herself say. "Are you upset about it?"

"Not as long as it's Harry's ... and as long as it makes you happy."

"Yes, to both questions," Ginny smiled, then laughed in relief and again hugged her daughter. "You're incredible, you know that?"

Modestly, Lily smiled and replied, "I know. But that's to be expected."

"What do you mean by that?" Ginny demanded.

"Harry is ... my real father, isn't he?" she threw back. "You only married Daddy Theo because he wasn't around when I was born." Harry's green eyes stared back at her in the face of his daughter, and she was unable to lie to her.

"Harry is your ... biological father, yes. Once he found out about you, though, he rapidly came to love you. But it was Daddy Theo who took you in, clothed you, fed you, sheltered you, dried your tears if you were sad and helped care for you when you were sick. Remember how he stayed with you all night after you had your tonsils out when you were seven in order to make sure you would be all right?"

"I do," Lily admitted. "But now that Harry is going to be ... living with us, he will do that too, won't he?"

"I'm sure he will," Ginny assured her child. "As I said, he loves you too."

"Have you told Grandma Molly and Grandpa Arthur that you are ... no longer with Daddy Theo, that Harry is going to be taking his place?" By this time, Ginny was convinced that Lily was a budding Legilimens and made a mental note to suggest to Harry that she be tested for it at the earliest possibility. Meanwhile, she had best tell him that Lily had figured out both the fact that she was pregnant and that Harry was her biological father, if only to get his reaction.

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"She's a quick study, I'll give her that," Harry laughed. "And you said she asked you if you'd told your parents about your splitting up with Theodorus and our officially getting back together?"

Ginny nodded with a smile.

"What a kid."

"Well, what do you expect? She's ours," Ginny reminded him with another smile.

"*Have* you told them yet?" Harry persisted.

Ginny had to shake her head. "But I was thinking we could go see them and tell them before we let them know about my breakup with Theodorus and your taking his place."

"When did you want to do that?" Harry wondered. "This next weekend? I'll be off on Saturday. Maybe we could go then."

"Sounds good to me. Now let's get back to bigger and better things, if you get my drift." This time, it was Ginny who gave the sly wink and provocative smile in Harry's direction ... and he swept her off her feet and into his arms to carry her to their bedroom...which would now be the master bedroom, now and from this moment on.

EIGHT CONFESSIONS

As usual, Harry was welcomed with open arms once the lovers arrived at the Burrow, having left Lily with Ron and Hermione, but whether or not that affection would continue, none of them could have said...particularly once they knew it all. Once they had settled in and were relaxing at the table, Harry and Ginny holding hands under said table while drinking pumpkin juice and eating with their free hands, they knew that confession time had come.

"Arthur ... Molly ... we have some confessions to make," Harry revealed quietly.

"What kind of confessions?" Molly asked; Arthur's eyes echoed her question.

"Ginny and Theodorus have broken up. And it was because of ... us, because I had resumed my romance with Ginny shortly after my return. Believe me, I knew what I was doing, and that it was wrong ... but I loved, and love, Ginny so much ... I could not resist." He stopped speaking and bowed his head, waiting for their judgment of his actions so far. But even after several minutes neither had said anything and Harry wasn't sure if they had either heard or understood what he'd said. "Did you hear and understand what I said?"

"Of course, Harry. There's nothing wrong with our minds ... or ears," Molly assured him. "If it was what you both wanted, and if Theodorus consented to a dissolution, and if Lily is ... okay with it, then we wish you both every happiness. You're both old enough to know what you want by now, so it's not for us to judge your actions."

"Theodorus did ... consent, as you say, and that procedure has been taken care of. Not to mention telling Lily. I have been spending as much time as I can with her and we have become quite close. However, we have agreed to allow her to see Theodorus now and again because she still has ... great affection for him."

"Most generous of you," Arthur remarked. "I'm sure Theodorus appreciates it."

"That's what he said, anyway," Harry confirmed. "And some other things ..."

"Yes?" Molly prompted.

"Lily knows I'm her biological father, and accepts the fact. In addition, Ginny is pregnant again. But I assure you, I have every intention of 'making an honest woman' of her at the earliest opportunity. You may be certain of that." Harry and Ginny were facing her parents across the table, now openly holding hands above it. "I have no intention of ever leaving her again. There is no longer any reason to do so, now that Voldemort has been ... taken care of. I truly regret the pain my actions...or non-actions...have caused her, but I assure you now, for the record, that I will spend the rest of my life making it up to her ... and Lily." He then raised Ginny's hand to his lips and kissed it before their eyes met, and they smiled tenderly at each other.

"When did you plan to get married, then?" Arthur wondered.

"We agreed not to until Lily has fully accepted me as her father, as well as the fact that I do intend to ... marry Ginny. We have no idea how long it will take, but in order to assure you that I am indeed serious about marrying her, I'll prove it to you right now." With that, he got out a small red velvet box from his pocket and turned to Ginny, suddenly seemingly unaware that anyone else existed in the world other than her and himself.

Harry then opened the red velvet box and showed her the ring inside. "This was my mother's engagement ring. My parents left their rings to me; they were placed in my vault until I came of age. However, I had ... no cause to use them until now. Ginny, my darling, will you make me the happiest, luckiest man ... and wizard ... in the world and do me the honour of becoming my wife?"

Ginny was stunned speechless for a time, although the fact of Harry's proposal had definitely registered; her eyes were brimming with tears of happiness. "Yes, Harry. Yes."

"Are you sure? After all, I've put you through a lot of heartache and pain."

"Harry, I've waited ten years for you to ask me. I assure you, my love, I am *positive*!"

"Thank you. I promise you, I will do everything in my power never to give you cause to regret accepting my proposal. And I will love you and cherish you with every beat of my heart, every fiber of my being, until I draw my last breath."

Ginny held out her hand so he could place the ring on her finger; it had been magically treated to fit the finger of any woman Harry might decide to marry once it had been placed on her finger, which was why it fit Ginny's perfectly even without professional sizing. Once it was there, both somehow knew that it would never leave her hand unless she wanted to have it...both rings, in fact...set aside for Lily to use on her own wedding day, just as they would be for Harry and Ginny.

"Just as I will love and cherish *you* with every beat of my heart, every fiber of my being, until I draw my last breath, Harry James Potter." Her heart was in her eyes and on her face as he raised her hand to his lips, then released it and drew her close for a lingering kiss. Somehow it didn't matter that Arthur and Molly were watching; all that mattered was the fact of the other's nearness.

Once the couple finally separated and recalled Arthur and Molly's presence, they couldn't help noting the smile on Arthur's face and the tears of happiness in Molly's eyes that accompanied her own smile. "I think we realize that you are ... very serious, Harry...and we couldn't be happier."

Harry merely smiled and nodded in their direction by way of acknowledgment. "Since we will likely be too busy making plans, could you inform the rest of your family? We'll tell you all the details once everything has been ... finalized."

"Of course, but wouldn't you rather tell Ron and Hermione yourselves? They're your friends, after all," Molly pointed out.

"You have a point. The rest of the family, then ... *except* for them. We'll go do that after we're finished here. We have to go pick up Lily there anyway."

They finally went back to their meals and finished them, then pushed their chairs back and stood up to leave. "Thank you for your understanding, Arthur, Molly. Ginny and I will be ... forever grateful. We'd better go now."

There were hugs and kisses all around; then the couple Apparated out of the Burrow, heading for Ron and Hermione's home a short distance away.

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They did basically the same thing there that they'd done at the Burrow except for the proposal part; Ginny simply showed off her ring, and that was sufficient to convince them that Harry was serious, particularly when he told them where it had come from.

Again, there were hugs and kisses all around and Ron smiled upon hugging his friend affectionately, then releasing him. "Welcome to the family, brother-in-law. Remember to always take good care of Ginny now ... or else you'll have six extremely ticked-off older brothers to contend with...and I'll be at the head of the pack."

"You may have no doubt of that, my friend," Harry assured him.

"I'm so glad for both of you, Harry. I was frankly wondering when you would realize how wrong it was to leave Ginny, especially for ... this long a time." Hermione hugged both of her friends, then said, "And as Ron recently said: welcome to the family, brother-in-law."

Harry smiled in acknowledgment of the second pronouncement. "You may be assured that I will never do such a thing again. Once was definitely enough." Then after a few minutes of small talk, they asked where Lily was.

"Off playing with Dora and our kids, Billy and Jane, I think," Hermione supplied. "Want me to go get her?"

"No, we'll go find her. Thanks anyway. See you all later. Give our best to your kids. Come on, Gin." Harry had begun calling her that again only recently and Ginny was frankly still getting used to it, but knew it was only a matter of time until she did ... and they were able to permanently take up where they had left off ten years ago. The couple Apparated outside and began to search for their daughter, who left her friends and playmates to join them.

"Ready to go, darling?" Ginny asked as Lily reached them. "Your ... father and I wish to go home now, but if you'd rather stay ..."

"No, Mummy. I've had ... fun, but would frankly rather go home now."

"Then say goodbye to your friends and we'll go." After Lily had done so, she rejoined her parents and they all Apparated back to their home to resume their lives together. All that was left to do now was the official wedding ... and all knew that would happen as soon as they had been assured that Lily had been convinced of Harry's intentions to remain with her and her mother permanently.

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Which took roughly three months, far sooner than anyone expected or believed possible. On the other hand, considering how quickly Lily had caught on to other things that had happened between Ginny and Harry, it really didn't come as that much of a surprise. The couple even decided to marry on Valentine's Day; for one thing, it was the day for lovers, and neither would be likely to forget that as an anniversary, if only for that reason.

They even asked her if she would like to be flower girl at their wedding, and Lily's reaction was predictable ... which prompted Ginny to owl her mother and ask her help to make the dresses for both herself and her daughter, which Molly was more than happy to do. But considering the large Weasley family, it was going to take longer than overnight to finalize the preparations, especially if all of them decided to come to the ceremony.

The guest list eventually grew to such proportions that Harry and Ginny discussed it with Molly and it was agreed that the wedding should be a small, intimate affair with just their closest family and friends there. The reception, on the other hand ... In the end, it was decided (or more accurately, Harry insisted) that he pay for the rental of the reception hall where the large wedding reception was to be held. Arthur and Molly were going to have enough to contend with just setting up the wedding ... and in true Weasley fashion, it had been decided to hold it at the Burrow, even if it had to be magically expanded.

It had also been decided that each of the bridal couple would have at least one attendant ... Ginny chose Hermione; Harry chose Ron. Blue had also been decided on as the colour for the wedding; Ginny and the other women would wear lacy pale blue dresses (Ginny's being a maternity one and therefore Empire-waisted, since she would be around six months pregnant by the time the wedding date rolled around) and the men pale blue tuxedo-type robes with dark blue accents, including ties and lapels.

Things were somewhat rushed because of Ginny's pregnancy, for obvious reasons, but with the help of Madam Malkin, the renowned wizard and witches' robe-maker and her staff, they managed. Just the same, if they hadn't had magic on their side, they'd never have made it. Arthur would be looking after the children who would not be in the wedding party, among them Lily's friend Dora and Ron and Hermione's daughter Jane; Ron and Hermione's son Billy had been chosen ring-bearer and would have a miniature version of the tuxedo-type robes of the grown-up males.

In the midst of everything else, Molly told Ginny that she had heard from Ginny's six brothers and they were all coming, even Percy, if only to the reception. By this time he and Penelope were married, and she would be just about as pregnant as Ginny herself by the time of the wedding, if her due date of June 15 was to be believed. By this time Fleur and Bill had been married ten years and had two children, a five-year-old boy named Pierre Sebastian and a two-year-old daughter named Michelle Rose. Charlie's wife Rosabelle was also reportedly pregnant, but it was fairly early on so she wasn't showing yet, according to him...roughly three months or so.

Fred and George were still bachelors, at least technically, but from what Harry and Ginny had heard from Molly, their "significant others," to use a Muggle term, were doing everything they could to change that ... and Molly privately confessed that it wouldn't surprise her if they (reportedly identical twin sisters) eventually succeeded. It would just take time to convince Fred and George that it was the right thing to do.

It would be a gentle push in the right direction for them to come to Harry and Ginny's wedding; after all, if their baby sister could get married, anyone could. Their girlfriends might even decide to get pregnant in order to get them to the altar sooner, although Molly was frankly hoping that wouldn't happen. She knew better than anyone how stubborn her twin sons could be, but that really wasn't the best way to get a man to marry you. It did work, of course, but it had to be done so the man didn't feel obligated to take the vows simply for the sake of the baby. It took a very clever woman to manage that, and not all could.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 6

Shortly before his departure, Harry writes Ginny a heartfelt, poignant letter pleading with her to forgive him for leaving her, never to forget him, and to pray for his safe return in order that they may have the chance to renew their love. And

Harry *does* return. It just takes ten years for him to do so.

NINE WEDDING

Sooner than anyone expected, the day had arrived. The last several months had been a veritable whirlwind of activity. Looking back, all concerned could scarcely remember specific incidents; mainly it was large blurs here and there. Through it all, Harry and Ginny were thankful to have had each other, Lily, and their friends to fall back on in order to keep everything in perspective and not lose sight of just what getting married meant to them all ... which was pretty much the same thing.

Being able to love and be loved by the one person you loved the most in all the world, to have children and grow old with them. And because of the fact that wizards and witches tended to live a long time, it wouldn't surprise any of them if they ended up each being married at least a century, if not more, especially considering how young they each were now. And considering the depth of their love, not to mention its eternal nature, even that wouldn't seem very long.

Over the last week, all six of Ginny's brothers had arrived with their wives and/or families, fortunately staying in town at the Leaky Cauldron, the wizarding world's equivalent of a hotel, complete with its own restaurant. The six brothers all helped to decorate the living room of the Burrow within an inch of its life with a mixture of blue satin ribbon, roses and honeysuckle, the scent of both flowers so strong that Molly had to tone it down with a Scent-Nullifying spell. You could still smell the flowers, of course; the scent just wasn't overpowering any more.

Even the makeshift altar was decorated with same; the head of the Ministry of Magic's Division of Marriage and Children would be coming to marry Harry and Ginny. He hadn't arrived yet, but was expected at any moment, since the wedding was due in less than an hour. Harry and Ron were dressing in one spot, Ron's old room, and the women and children who were members of the wedding party were in Arthur and Molly's bedroom.

Arthur had dressed beforehand and was entertaining the children in his charge, which now included Bill and Fleur's two, as best he could, but being children, they were impatient and their attention couldn't be kept on any one thing for more than a few moments. He was unsure how much longer he could keep them under control without magic; if worse came to worse, of course, he would temporarily "freeze" them and reverse the spell once everyone else was ready.

It was over the next half hour that everybody began to arrive, usually by twos, sometimes more, which was the case with the women, since Fleur, Hermione, Rosabelle and Penelope were all assisting the ladies in the wedding party. Ginny found she was able to endure Fleur's presence as long as she concentrated on her mother, Rosabelle and Hermione, who were the ones she got along best with in her retinue of sisters-in-law.

Harry and Ron arrived about twenty minutes before the wedding was due to start and took their places at the altar, helping Arthur to control the children; a moment later they heard the pop of Apparition and looked up to find that the middle-aged (for a wizard, anyway) wizard with the power to marry couples had arrived in his most formal navy blue robes covered with stars. Now all that was necessary was for the Wedding March to start and Arthur to walk Ginny down the aisle. He designated Bill and Charlie to look after the children, with Fred, George and their ladies assisting them, while he went to join Ginny.

Harry's heart began to pound as he heard the Wedding March begin; this was a moment he had never imagined would ever come, particularly during the worst possible times of his life during the last ten years. Even now it seemed scarcely imaginable that Ginny could ever have forgiven him, particularly after he had confessed to his totally physical relationships with women over the ten years they had been apart...much less consented to marry him and have another child with him ... but she had and she was.

Truly, he didn't deserve her and never had, which made him all the more determined to do all he possibly could to make sure that she never knew another day of sadness because of him. After they had parted, he had vowed never to love again and he hadn't ... and she was the main reason. No matter how many how temporary lovers he had had, however many women had known his body, Harry knew that only one had ever possessed his heart...the one he was now marrying.

He could just imagine how the others would react once they learned of his marriage, likely asking themselves just what it was that Ginny had that they didn't: a question that would most probably never be answered. At least not by Harry himself, at any rate. But enough of the past; he had to get back to the present...and the girl who was his

future.

Upon catching sight of his bride coming toward him, her long red-gold hair wreathed in flowers and the hem of her lacy blue Empire-waisted wedding dress brushing the floor as she slowly approached, a large mixed bouquet of roses and honeysuckle held together with blue satin ribbons carried in her delicately formed hands, only partially concealing her large belly, her lovely face holding a blush on her cheeks, her soft brown eyes filled with love and passion for him and her luscious lips painted a delicate pink, Harry felt his pulse literally go into the stratosphere. Gods, she looked incredible! How could any girl be so beautiful and still be real? Much less belong to him?

Harry recalled when they had awakened the morning of the wedding; he had been most reluctant for them to part, knowing that in keeping with tradition, he would not be allowed to see her again until the wedding itself. It was for this reason he had made their customary morning love last as long as he possibly could, but even at that, the time for them to part came all too soon.

The wedding couldn't be over soon enough for him so they could be alone again and he would be able to love her once again. He had already informed Molly that Harry had already informed Molly that he and Ginny would not be in attendance at the reception. At least not after the first hour or so, at any rate. Best of all, once they were finally alone again, they would be husband and wife. That was the only thing that kept him going, the only thing that enabled him to endure the interminable wait between now and then.

Harry also couldn't help smiling at his beautiful little daughter in her lacy blue dress scattering rose petals before her mother, and small Billy, the image of his mother Hermione, blue-eyed and brown-haired, in his miniature tuxedo-like robes carrying the blue satin pillow that held the wedding rings which had belonged to his parents, secured to them with blue satin ribbons. How long would it be before *he* would be father of the bride, escorting Lily (*or another* daughter, even) down the aisle to be married?

Of course, considering Lily's lingering affection for Theodorus, it was just as likely that she would want both of them to walk her down the aisle. He was working today, as Harry suspected he had done on purpose, even though he had been invited to the wedding, so he didn't have to think about what was happening at this moment. Harry couldn't blame him; he would likely have felt the same way in Theodorus's position. He could only hope the man could find someone special who would truly love him, as everyone deserved ... and have his own children.

The next thing he knew, Ginny and Arthur had reached him, and with a trusting smile, the latter had handed his daughter over to her husband-to-be. A husband she truly loved this time! The couple then turned to face the Ministry wizard, arms linked and holding hands. Ron took charge of the children, placing Billy near him and Lily near Hermione, who had followed Ginny out and who now stood behind her and slightly to one side.

He scarcely heard the words that officially began the wedding ceremony; if it hadn't been for Ron nudging him at the proper time, Harry wouldn't have remembered to either say "I do" or put the wedding ring...his mother's wedding ring...on Ginny's finger to accompany her engagement ring at the proper time.

Ginny, on the other hand, seemed to have no trouble knowing just how to proceed when it came time to say "I do" and place his father's wedding ring on his hand. Harry surmised that it was because she had gone through all this before; he winced in spite of himself at the thought. Ginny seemed to pick it up despite the mental shields he had erected, a necessary talent when one was both a Legilimens *and* Occlumens.

What's the matter, love? she asked him mentally.

I just ... can't help thinking of how you went through all this before, he replied.

But unlike before, this is a true marriage, for we have love between us, she pointed out, sending a wealth of love in Harry's direction, which erased all doubts in his mind ... at least for the time being.

"By the power vested in me by the Ministry of Magic, I now pronounce Harry James Potter and Ginevra Molly Weasley husband and wife. Harry, you may

kiss your bride." Again, Ron nudged him and Harry was able to proceed with the traditional wedding kiss. And once he got Ginny in his arms, he had no intention of letting her go without snogging her within an inch of her life...and never mind how many people were watching. At *least* fifty, if not more ... just as many as there had been when their *first* kiss had occurred, come to think of it. But their next kiss would occur in the privacy of the bedroom, with no prying eyes. He would see to it.

It was over a minute later that they managed to come up for air, and once they did, they were enveloped in hugs and kisses from nearby friends and family, not to mention the children. This time Harry insisted on accompanying Ginny to change into the clothing for the reception and nothing anyone...even Molly...said stopped him. Nothing and no one was going to stop him from being with her now.

Once he got her alone, he zapped the door locked and swiftly divested them both of their wedding finery, lowering her to the nearby bed and passionately possessing her, not caring that anyone was waiting for them. Ginny had scarcely had the chance to catch her breath before Harry had almost literally knocked her for a loop with the depth of his passion, but just the same, loved every minute of their interlude, no more caring that the others were waiting than Harry did.

Ginny, my wife ... gods, I need you so much ...

Harry, my love ... being with you like this is Heaven ...

It was the better part of an hour before they finally came back to earth, before Harry finally allowed Ginny to dress again and renew her makeup, scooping up her bouquet, intending to throw it to all unmarried ladies from the stairs as was tradition. It frankly wouldn't surprise her if one of the girlfriends of Fred and George managed to do it and used it as leverage to get him to propose.

Ginny was sure that everyone knew what had happened between her and Harry once she got in view of them again, but told herself that she didn't care, even though the thought of what they had to all be thinking made her blush. Just the same, they were married and could make love whenever they wanted; to blazes with what anyone else thought.

And as Ginny had surmised, one of Fred and George's twin girlfriends caught the bouquet, giving her man a sly look, already plotting ways and means of getting him to the altar, up to and including getting pregnant if necessary.

But that was her affair; she had her own husband to concern herself with. Most of the wedding guests had already Apparated to the reception hall and more would show up, since it would be pretty much open to the public due to Harry's fame, if nothing else. Only Arthur and Molly approached them about their earlier actions; even Ron, Hermione and the children had gone on ahead to the reception hall.

"Why don't you and Arthur go on to the reception hall? We'll meet you there," Harry suggested.

"Not without having a word with you first, Harry," Molly declared, her tone brooking no argument. "Just what did you mean, taking off with Ginny like that and not coming back for an hour?"

"What do you *think* it means, Molly?" Harry threw back. "I'm a grown man; Ginny is my wife. I wanted to be alone with her. Haven't been all day. Something wrong with that?"

His tone made even Molly back off after her initial declaration. "No, dear, nothing's wrong with that. It's just a little ... unorthodox, that's all."

"Over the last ten years, I've become ... unorthodox, Molly, so you all will just have to learn to live with it. Meanwhile, let's get to the reception hall, shall we? I understand there are a lot of presents to sift through, not to mention a wedding cake and refreshments, most of them the result of your incomparable cooking."

With that, the four Apparated out of the Burrow, on their way to the reception hall.

TEN HONEYMOON

True to his word, Harry allowed himself and Ginny the token hour at the reception, long enough to be congratulated by all and sundry, not to mention sample the refreshments made by Molly, as well as share a piece of wedding cake with Ginny and a nuptial toast of the firewhiskey punch. Non-alcoholic drinks were provided for the teetotalers and children. He shot a look at the gift table and knew there were far too many to go through, even in one day, which he had no intention of hanging around for, so he relegated the recording and acknowledgment duties to Hermione.

He and Ginny would unwrap and ooh and ahh over the presents once they got back from their honeymoon ... and just where that was to be, not even Ginny knew, much less their friends or family. They put Lily with Arthur and Molly for the week, knowing how she would enjoy being around her maternal grandparents, not to mention her friends and cousins. He also told her to leave any luggage behind, for they wouldn't be needing it. All they would need were their brooms, and even on the way Harry wouldn't tell her where they were going, simply told her to follow his lead.

By her estimation they flew for about an hour; then he directed her to follow him down. They landed in a beautiful wooded area with various flowers and shade trees abundantly growing, seemingly unspoiled by any touch of civilization. After a short walk, they came to a beautiful waterfall approximately twenty feet high, which fell into a reflecting pool; grass grew up to five feet away from the water and a small beach occupied the rest of the space ... just enough to lie on if one chose to do so.

"Well? What do you think?" he asked her with a smile, still holding her hand.

"It's beautiful," Ginny smiled. "But may I ask just where this place is?"

"I don't know the name," Harry confessed. "All I had were the coordinates in some of my parents' belongings in my vault. I surmised that it was probably at least one of the places they themselves went on their honeymoon, so I thought it might be nice if we came here too."

"Lovely idea," Ginny opined. "So what do we do now?"

"You've been married and you have to ask? What does one *usually* do on a honeymoon?" He gave her a sly smile. "I wouldn't know; I can only guess."

"You guessed quite well, love," she assured him. "How about a dip in the pool?"

"In that case ..." Harry gave her a wink and disappeared behind a nearby tree; Ginny could only do the same behind another one. After undressing, they went to the water and tested it. It turned out to be the ideal temperature for human comfort, around eighty degrees. Just then, Ginny released her husband's hand and dove into the pool, moving almost too fast for him to have realized she'd moved.

"Come on, love, the water's fine," she called out upon surfacing, her wet hair slicked back and clinging to her head and neck, water droplets glistening on her skin in the warm sunshine. In spite of himself, Harry couldn't help wondering what it would be like to lick every one of them off, prompting a tightening of his groin at the thought but forcing said thought away for the time being as he gingerly eased himself into the water and joined her; it took only moments for his body to adapt to the water temperature.

Harry didn't swim nearly as well as she did, but slowly, carefully, made his way out to where Ginny was treading water. Her smile widened when he reached her, then she opened her arms to him and he went into them, carefully drawing her delightfully wet, slick body into his arms, hands gently resting on the small of her back before pressing her lower body close to his own as best he could even as he tentatively licked the droplets off her nose. Ginny was hardly given the chance to recover from the surprise of his doing that before she felt his lips exploring the wildly pulsing spot beneath her left ear.

"Harry ..." she murmured provocatively, shivering deliciously at his actions before reaching one hand up to lightly stroke the back of his neck. Her companion moaned softly in spite of himself as his hands found her gently rounded backside and his groin tightened further. She stroked the back of his neck again, then ran both hands down his bare back. He moaned louder this time and buried his face in her throat, then his lips moved to rest between her breasts and feel her pounding heart.

He gasped against her throat as he felt her hands caress his backside, but his desire was such that the sensation lasted only a split second before he returned to her wet, delectable body. "My love, my love. I want you so much."

He spread her legs before pulling her against him from behind, soon moving to hold her hips in his large but gentle hands. Once again, it didn't take long for her to be granted her wish; by then she was moaning and writhing in ecstasy, praying this incredible moment would never end.

But it did, all too soon. Still, what followed made up for it. Harry then lay prone, directing his wife to straddle him. In almost no time at all, she felt him once again moving deliciously within her, hands again gently holding her hips. "Oh ... oh ... *ohhh* ..." Ginny moaned softly even as she felt the telltale pain which signaled imminent release. "Harry, my love, I can't wait much longer ..."

"I know," he replied with a smile. "It's the same for me."

Almost before they knew it, a virtual tidal wave of ecstasy swept over the couple: ecstasy almost too intense to bear. Both cried out almost simultaneously before Ginny collapsed, momentarily spent, beside her equally enervated husband. After a time, he drew her close and cradled her head on his chest as Ginny rested her left hand over his still-pounding heart.

"Beloved, that was incredible. Almost too wonderful to be real. I wish we never had to leave this place."

"That's probably just how my parents felt after spending the day here," Harry remarked.

"I can just imagine what our friends must be thinking, the way we just took off from the reception and didn't tell them where we were going. For that matter, you didn't even tell *me*," Ginny laughed just before lifting her head to kiss him deeply before replacing her head on his chest.

"Didn't want to spoil the surprise," he claimed, gently tightening his arms around her. "As for our friends, we don't ask about *their* private lives. They should 'butt out,' as Muggles say, of ours."

"They mean well," she reminded him.

"I know, but there are times that I'd prefer they not ask."

"Tell me about it," Ginny concurred, thinking of the questions Hermione was likely to ask. "Oh, well. I suppose we should be thankful that they don't do a lot worse things."

"Are you going to tell them anything about this?" Harry couldn't help asking as he reached to stroke her hair, then kiss it and rest his cheek on it. By this time it was about dry, and he could smell the water in it, loving the clean, fresh smell as he momentarily buried his face in it.

"Of course not! I'm not a kiss-and-tell type," she insisted, miffed at the thought that he would ever believe she would give anyone the intimate details of their honeymoon.

"But you know they're bound to ask at some point," Harry pointed out.

"I know. I'll just tell them that if they want to know about what we did, then they'll have to tell us about what ~~we~~ they did," she laughed, knowing that Hermione might be willing to do so, but that Ron would be horrified at the very idea.

"That would certainly shut them up, for sure," Harry agreed, joining her in laughter before moving to kiss her nearest ear, then nuzzle her neck. "Which reminds me...would you like to get back into the water?" His voice had taken on a crooning quality which never failed to make Ginny melt, at least emotionally speaking.

"Can't we stay here? I kind of like the idea of doing it again here on the sand," she returned with an equally provocative note in her voice. "Sounds very decadent, but at the same time, very exciting."

The way Harry was beginning to feel again, he was frankly willing to do it just about anywhere as long as Ginny was willing as well. "The lady commands, I obey." He moved behind her, and she soon felt warm lips exploring the wildly pulsing spots in her throat and neck, then felt him gently pressing himself against her as his lips moved to the nape of her neck; then his teeth gently bit and sucked, causing a hickey.

"Harry, what are you doing?" Ginny demanded.

"Trying to give you a hickey in a non-embarrassing spot," he explained, his kissing and touching becoming more intimate; she gasped upon feeling his hands reach to cradle her breasts.

"Harry ..."

"Yes?" he crooned, once again pressing against her from behind; her eyes widened upon feeling his arousal grow even as he held her. "Is something wrong? Do you want me to stop? I thought you would find my actions pleasurable."

"No, nothing's wrong. And I *do* find your actions pleasurable. Very much so. Please ... go on."

He was silent even as he continued to caress her, hands moving ever more intimately, eventually moving down her belly to stroke her between her legs. She gasped, squirmed and moaned as she felt herself on the brink, her legs feeling as if she'd been zapped with a Jelly-Legs Jinx. He didn't reply, but not too long afterward, she felt a veritable tidal wave of feeling wash over her, the most indescribable pleasure she had ever experienced. Upon coming down from the pinnacle, she sagged limply in his arms, her head resting on his shoulder as the warm silk of his lips kissed their way across her right shoulder, then the left.

This was the point where she turned over to face him, deciding to return the favour, one hand moving to caress him intimately, then taking him into her hand, her supple fingers inflaming him almost to fever pitch.

"Ginny, please ... stop." He could barely speak.

"Is something wrong?" She looked up, voice laced with question and concern.

"I...want to be inside you."

"Is that all?" She smiled and sighed in relief.

"That's all?"

"That's all."

"No problem, then."

After she spread her unresisting legs and he moved between them, his pelvis and her own seemed as one. She locked her arms and legs around him as best she could as he moved energetically, unable to get enough of his lips and body. By the time they finished, both were too enervated to do more than lie close to one another and attempt to come back to normal.

After an interval of silence, Harry looked down to notice that his wife had apparently fallen asleep. He allowed himself a smile as he cuddled her warm, fragrant body close to him while preparing to sleep himself. Unable to help it, he sent her a mental message of gratitude and love.

Thank you, love. You were incredible.

*You're very welcome. Now go to sleep. We're both exhausted and need to get some rest*Her tone precluded any argument, so he simply conceded her point. Within moments, both were deeply asleep.

* * * * *

This was basically what happened during at least the majority of the honeymoon. The rest of the time, they either just held each other and talked, or ate and drank the food and drink Harry conjured up to sustain themselves. Not as good as what Molly made, but then not very much was...at least not in their memory. It was the day before they were due to return that he suggested they go back to civilization ... at least to a degree.

They were going to be talked about enough without giving the others more ammunition by showing up in the same clothes they had left in. As it was, they decided to wash them in the pond and laid them out in the sun to dry them after rinsing, using some soap Harry conjured up reminiscent of the stuff out of some of the taps in the Prefects' bathroom at Hogwarts.

They went to Hogsmeade and did some clothes-shopping, each getting a new outfit that they changed into before leaving the store. They also decided to go to Madam Puddifoot's to get a decent meal; conjured-up food rarely had the flavour or texture real food did. The best you could say for conjured-up food was that it kept you alive.

Shortly after leaving the tea shop, Harry suggested they return home. As enjoyable (not to mention passionate) as their time alone had been, Ginny missed her friends and family, especially Lily, and could hardly wait to see them again. It didn't take long to get home, the pair deciding to go to the Burrow first to check in with Molly and Arthur.

They naturally asked what had gone on during the honeymoon; the newlyweds exchanged knowing smiles and simply gave the highlights, concentrating mostly on the last day, when they had stayed in Hogsmeade ... only mentioning the beautiful wooded area of the beginning of the honeymoon briefly and in passing.

They stayed there until the afternoon, then checked in with Ron and Hermione and picked up Lily in the process, since she had been transferred there. As they had surmised, they were grilled on what they'd done during the honeymoon and Harry was the one who came out with the statement, "We'll tell you what we did if you'll tell us what you did." As predicted, Ron went scarlet, provoking laughter from his wife, sister and closest friend. "Seriously, you don't have to. We were just teasing you."

It was around six that evening before the young family returned home; it didn't take Lily long to settle in, but it was a different story with her parents, although they did their best not to show it. The honeymoon had provoked beautiful memories, which would not be quickly or easily forgotten by either one of them, and it would take both time and concerted effort on both their parts to get back to a normal daily routine. Once they did, however, all that would be necessary would be to prepare as best they could for the birth of the new baby, due in the latter part of June, just after the official start of summer.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 6

Shortly before his departure, Harry writes Ginny a heartfelt, poignant letter pleading with her to forgive him for leaving her, never to forget him, and to pray for his safe return in order that they may have the chance to renew their love. And Harry *does* return. It just takes ten years for him to do so.

Before that, however, they took Lily to the Ministry of Magic to be tested for Legilimency. It was fairly rare that a child so young developed the talent, but she showed a definite aptitude for it. Even Harry had had to learn his Legilimency and Occlumency, but Lily had seemed to come by it naturally.

He knew how well Ginny seemed to read him, but that didn't always indicate Legilimency, nor had he been aware of any aptitude for same from his parents; it was a cinch that Sirius had never mentioned either James or Lily being able to do anything like that. Nor was he aware of anything like that having ever cropped up in the Weasley family, although there were times he would have sworn that Molly possessed it, the way she seemed to know things without being told so many times.

And he knew as well as anyone that Legilimency was sometimes a royal pain, particularly when one had to constantly maintain mental shields against the unshielded thoughts of others around them. If he hadn't been able to learn Occlumency, he would have literally been up the proverbial creek without a paddle. Just the same, it wasn't that it was unheard of, simply rare for a child to develop it at so young an age, especially when there wasn't a genetic predisposition to it in the child's family background.

It took several hours to do the necessary tests, and neither Harry nor Ginny were able to accompany their child; it was claimed that their presence would have thrown off the test results and made them unreliable. He was just as upset as Ginny at this, but occupied himself doing all he could to calm her and make her forget, at least temporarily, what their child was being made to endure all by herself.

It was well into the afternoon before they were called in to talk with the head of the panel of witches and wizards who had tested Lily to discuss the test results. Harry's heart gave a painful lurch as he saw that the wizard in question closely resembled Dumbledore, half-moon glasses, kindly demeanour, long white beard and all. "Mr. and Mrs. Potter, I regret that it's taken so long for us to complete the tests for your daughter, but what we found was so ... rare and incredible that we had to double-check our findings."

"What did you find?" Harry all but snapped before Ginny had the chance to do so.

"Young Lily is the strongest Legilimens I have ever tested. She could even read me through *my* Occlumency shields, and they are very strong," the older wizard informed them. "That has never happened before, especially not with a child this young. You're certain that neither you nor your wife have this ... aptitude yourself?"

"I am both a Legilimens and Occlumens, but I ... acquired the talents in my work as an Auror," Harry revealed. "As far as I know, in neither my nor my wife's family has there been an occurrence of natural Legilimency."

"How far back have you traced your family trees?" the elderly wizard inquired.

"We've not," Harry to admit. "Then you believe the ability might have ... skipped several generations or something?"

"It's a possibility, so I advise you to go to the Office of Witchcraft and Wizarding Genealogy in London at your earliest opportunity and check it out."

"We'll certainly consider it, sir. Have you a copy of the test results?"

"Of course." The older wizard opened a drawer in his desk and pushed several sheets of parchment across it so Harry could reach it. However, Ginny snatched it up first and began perusing it before he could do so. Not that he could blame her; it was only natural for her to be curious about the test results, especially since their conversation up to that point had been so void of detail.

"Where is our daughter now?" Ginny demanded.

"Lying down. Some of the tests were ... quite grueling and they tired her. Come with me. You can stay with her until she awakens." Ginny was on her feet almost before the words were out of their companion's mouth, and Harry could do nothing but follow her and the elderly wizard to another room similar to a dormitory where their black-haired, green-eyed baby lay in a small bed, sound asleep. Other beds were occupied, but they all contained people far older than Lily, the youngest of them in their late teens. "It might also be a good idea to see that she has a good meal after she leaves here," the older wizard suggested, then smiled and left, leaving Harry and Ginny alone with their daughter.

They sat on each side of the small bed, each holding one small hand and watching her sleep, scarcely able to fathom what they had just been told, but the findings of the wizards and witches governing the Panel of Leglimency, Occlumency and Other Mental Talents were rarely wrong. At one point Ginny couldn't help asking her husband if he thought it possible that *all* their children might develop this talent, thinking of their unborn child and what it might mean for him or her.

"Anything's possible," Harry returned. "Of course, it's also possible that Lily is the *only* one who will develop this talent. We'll just have to wait and see."

Lily awakened two hours later, smiling upon seeing her parents' concerned faces. "Do you feel all right, darling?" Ginny asked.

"I'm fine, Mummy. Just a little tired and ... hungry," Lily confessed. "I'd really like something to eat."

"We'll get you something to eat as soon as we get home," Ginny promised.

"It might be a good idea if we fed her before that," Harry suggested. "Let's go to the Leaky Cauldron. It's not too far from here."

"If you say so," Ginny remarked, unable to argue where the welfare of her child was concerned. "Where are Lily's things?"

"Probably in that small closet." Harry pointed to the closet against the wall on the side of the bed nearest her.

They left the room and the building a short time later, heading straight over to the Leaky Cauldron, able to walk over rather than Apparate because of the restaurant/hotel's proximity to their present location. They were surprised at the amount of food Lily ended up eating, even though Molly had told her that many times children could eat as much as any adult but rarely show it because they were usually so active that they burned off the calories contained in said food, and Ginny told her husband as much, which seemed to ease his mind.

Within the next hour and a half they had Apparated home and Ginny noted that Lily seemed to be sleepy again, so she put her to bed again. As she and Harry left their daughter's room and turned out the light, she couldn't help but express concern. "Why is she still so tired, Harry?"

"The wizard we spoke to said many of the tests were grueling and tired her out," he reminded her.

"But she slept while she was there," Ginny countered.

"It may not have been enough," Harry opined. "Remember how long she was gone, and we have no way of knowing exactly how long each test took. Just the same, we'd better study the results of the tests more thoroughly at the earliest opportunity."

"I suppose so," Ginny agreed. It wasn't until the door of Lily's bedroom had closed behind them and they were heading for their own that Harry whispered suggestively in his wife's ear. "We don't know how long she'll sleep," was the reply.

"As I offered before, I can always zap her so she'll sleep longer." His voice was laced with barely-suppressed passion.

Ginny sighed and shook her head in affectionate exasperation. "Why must I always be so godawful weak where you're concerned, Harry?" she grouched.

"No idea," he returned innocently. "Maybe it's my 'stupid nobility.'"

"And maybe it's simply because you're a sex maniac," she threw back. "But then, so am I, so let's go for it."

"Your wish is my command," her husband laughed wickedly as he scooped her off her feet and into his arms, carrying her off to their bedroom for a tenderly passionate interlude which would occupy them most pleasantly (and thoroughly) until Lily awakened.

* * * * *

One late night four months later, Ginny was awakened by pain and pressure in her lower abdomen and knew what they signified. Even at that, she hated to have to wake Harry...he had just managed to fall asleep...or Ron and Hermione to come over and stay with Lily. But that was one thing about babies; like time, they waited for no one. When they came, they came; there was no way around it. One nice thing, though ... this time Harry would be with her as she gave birth. Not simply her parents, Ron and Hermione. Oh, they'd be there too, she was sure, but what mattered was that they wouldn't be the *only* ones there.

She waited as long as she dared, roughly half an hour; by that time she knew there was no way around it...she would have to wake Harry. While she was waiting, she had already called for a cab since she doubted he would be in any shape to drive her there. She waddled to the door to answer it, motioning to the cabbie to hold the meter while she got her husband.

She moved as fast as she could, making sure her small suitcase was packed and the room was already reserved. She couldn't help smiling at the recollection when she had called to reserve it...the mere mention of the Potter name seemed to be magic these days. Well, enough extraneous thinking; she had to get moving ... and more importantly, get Harry moving. She had also called Ron and Hermione; the latter had answered, albeit sleepily, but once Ginny explained what was happening, promised to come right over to look after Lily, even promising to owl the senior Weasleys and tell them where she and Harry would be.

She gently shook her husband's shoulder; he groaned and reluctantly opened his eyes upon turning over to face her. "What is it, Gin? I just got to sleep."

"I know, love, and I hated to wake you...but the baby's coming."

He was stunned speechless for a minute upon fully awakening and began to act like most expectant fathers do, running around like a chicken with its head off, babbling endless questions, asking if anything needed to be done, was she all right, things like that. She assured him everything had been taken care of; they just needed to get to the hospital ... the cab was even waiting. Once she managed to calm him down (no easy task!) and assured him that all he needed to do was get dressed, they were on their way to the hospital.

Just before they left, Hermione Apparated in, in nightdress and dressing-gown, promising she and Ron would come later and bring Lily to see her new brother or sister. The only things Ginny was able to do for herself were throw a cloak on over her own nightdress and slide her bedroom slippers on, glad to see that Harry had had the presence of mind to grab her suitcase before they were out the door and in the cab. Luckily St. Mungo's was only a short drive away, especially considering the way the pains were beginning to come roughly three minutes apart and seemingly harder with every passing moment.

Harry held her as best he could, trying to soothe her and crooning to her that the pain would soon be over, that everything would be all right because he would be with her this time. The next thing they knew they had arrived at the hospital; a mediwizard and witch met them, assisting the couple inside and up to the maternity floor, the mediwizard levitating a stretcher with Ginny laid out upon it. Harry's hair was even messier than usual, and he had almost literally thrown on his clothing, including bedroom slippers; he was also still yawning deeply, but at the same time holding tightly to Ginny's hand all the way.

Once on the maternity floor, however, it didn't take long for Ginny to be prepped and rushed into the delivery room. Many fathers didn't care to be in the delivery room, but considering the fact that Harry had not been there the first time, he was determined to be present this time. They warned him what to expect, but it didn't faze him; finally they prepared him and he soon rejoined his wife.

She had been given a painkilling potion and placed in stirrups; it had made her somewhat drowsy but she was still able to acknowledge his presence, trying to warn him of how long it was likely to take and what was likely to happen in the course of the next several hours. He dismissed it with a wave of his hand. "It's the least I can do, if only to make up for not being with you the first time around."

"Don't ... beat yourself up over that, love. You ... had no way of knowing," she tried to soothe him.

He raised her hand to his cheek, unable to kiss it as he would have liked because of the mask over the lower part of his face. "Just the same, I should have given you some way to contact me in case of emergency."

"You ... can't change anything now," she pointed out just before another pain hit her.

"I know, but I still intend to make sure it never happens again," he declared. The only things they exchanged after that were smiles and hand-squeezings because Ginny was too occupied with her labour; if she wasn't pushing, she was biting her lips and trying not to scream ... but sometimes couldn't help doing so, despite the painkilling potion and episiotomy. Harry soon realized that Ginny had been trying to warn him and appreciated it, but had no intention of leaving after his negligence the first time, however difficult the happenings in the delivery room might be to endure. After a while he lost all track of time, thoroughly occupied with helping to bring Ginny and their new child (not to mention himself) through the birth successfully.

* * * * *

They had arrived at the hospital shortly after two a.m.; by the time the baby arrived it was eight p.m. of the following day, June 19th. Harry had never felt so exhausted in his life, but at the same time, never been happier. He was the father of a son! Pretty good-sized one, too, if what the Healer said was true ... nine pounds, three ounces and twenty-two inches long. The boy even had his unruly black hair and nose, but Ginny's brown eyes.

She was deeply asleep in the bed in her reserved room, and he was sitting beside her, again holding her hand, albeit gingerly, waiting for a mediwitch to bring the baby because he was still barely able to flex his fingers after the hours he had spent encouraging her through the worst of her labour. He had had no idea her grip could be so strong; maybe it was something unique to women about to give birth.

At any rate, he hoped he would not have to endure it again right away, frankly unsure if his hand would ever completely recover from the ordeal. It would probably be several more days before he would be able to hold a wand again. On the other hand, whatever pain and discomfort he had experienced (and was experiencing) was nothing compared to what Ginny had gone through in having the baby; because of this, Harry was frankly glad that women were the ones to have the babies.

He looked up when the door opened; a smiling mediwitch carried a small blue bundle into the room and offered it to him. "Here's your son, Mr. Potter."

Harry carefully extricated his hand from Ginny's and took the baby from her, having to ask her how to hold him properly because he had never done it before. She smiled again, somewhat indulgently, then left the room. The baby's tiny face was perfectly formed, as were his hands, one of which had gotten a death grip on his father's thumb

upon its coming within reach. Harry could hardly believe how large his son's eyes were in proportion to his face, extricating his thumb only with difficulty so he could trace the boy's features.

This was the sight he had missed when Lily was born; how he wished he could have seen her at this age. Come to think of it, he had best ask Gin if she had pictures of Lily when she was a baby so he could have at least some idea of what she looked like then ... not to mention others detailing her growth and development over the ensuing years. He was sure she did, but had not had the chance to ask her yet, so much had happened since his return and their both resuming their romance and deciding to get married. As soon as possible after she awakened, he would ask her. For the time being, he would simply enjoy having this rare chance to bond with his son.

About half an hour later, the door opened again; a smiling Ron and Hermione came in, Lily in tow. A perfect chance to show off the new baby. It was Lily who approached first, Hermione and Ron in her wake. "Daddy? Is this the new baby?"

"Yes, love. You have a new brother. But we must keep our voices down since Mummy is still asleep. She had a hard time and needs her rest."

Harry noted Hermione's approach out of the corner of his eye; she stood behind her niece by marriage, one hand on her shoulder. "Oh, Harry, he's beautiful. Looks like you except for the eyes ... Ginny's eyes."

This sounded too much like the statement Harry had heard so often himself for comfort ... specifically, the one saying how much he resembled his father except for the eyes...his mother's eyes. "Thanks ... this time. Just the same, I never want to hear it again. Nor do I want my son to have to go through what I did, hearing it so bloody often. Hope you understand."

"Which reminds me ... what did you name him?" Hermione asked, feeling Ron settle his hand on her shoulder as he came up behind her.

"Ginny and I were going to discuss that once she woke up," Harry told them.

"Surely you've discussed names before now, though," she insisted.

"Yes, we did, but never made a final decision ... at least not for a boy," Harry replied, shifting the baby slightly in his arms even as he heard the unmistakable signs that meant Ginny was waking up.

"I would think you'd want to name him for Sirius," she countered.

"Oh, that's definitely in the running, just as Arthur's name is and my dad's, but as I said, we've not made a final decision and I didn't want to say anything for sure name-wise until we had."

Just then the door opened again and Arthur and Molly came in, heading straight for Harry and the baby...or at least Arthur did. Molly went to see how Ginny was, especially now that she was waking up. Harry was glad they had arrived and would be happy to relinquish the baby to one of their visitors; it was just a matter of choosing which one.

He finally decided to hand the baby to Arthur and got up to move over to Ginny, wanting to be the first person she saw when she woke up; Molly was on the other side of her bed, and he whispered to her that Ginny had had a rough time giving birth. He sat down on the edge of her bed and took her hand again; her eyes fluttered open and she smiled tenderly at him.

"Harry ..."

"Welcome back, love. How are you feeling?"

"Tired ... and sore," she confessed. "But just the same, never happier. All the ones I love best are here in this room."

"Ginny, my darling," came her mother's voice; Ginny turned her head to face her. "Are you all right? Harry said you had a difficult time."

"Oh ... I'm sure no more difficult than you ever did, Mum," Ginny dismissed with a weary smile. "And it was worth it." Not long afterward Lily approached her mother's bed.

"Hi, Mummy."

"Sweetheart," Ginny acknowledged. "Have you seen your brother yet?"

"Yes. He looks like Daddy except for the eyes. He has your eyes."

"Where is he? I'd like to see him."

"I think ... Grandpa Arthur has him," she replied, ready to go get him, but even as she turned around, Arthur stepped up with the baby in his arms and handed his grandson over to his mother.

Ginny maneuvered the baby in her arms and began to examine him minutely, smiling as she noted the mop of unruly black hair, stroking his nose and mouth even as she noted her tiny son's brown eyes. Only then did she look up at her husband. "Well, what are we going to name him?"

"I was waiting for you to wake up before we decided that," Harry replied. "Hermione suggested we name him for Sirius, but I told her we had other options, such as your dad's and mine's names."

"Tough choice," Ginny opined. "How about naming him for all three...Sirius James Arthur? That way no one's left out."

Harry had to think for a moment, then looked around at everyone present. "Well, everyone, does that meet with your approval? It does mine."

Everyone nodded and smiled, although Harry had a secret disappointment that it had not been possible to give his son his Christian name for a middle name, due to the wizarding tradition for first-born sons to have their father's Christian name for a middle name. The best thing possible now was to give it to another son...provided he and Gin had another. Just the same, he really didn't have any objections to the name ultimately chosen, which honoured both his beloved godfather and the boy's two grandfathers. How Harry wished his parents and Sirius could have seen his children; they would be so happy and proud! It just wasn't fair they'd had to die so young ... not fair at all!

Ginny noticed Harry had fallen silent and looked sad; she held the baby with one arm while reaching to touch her husband's hand with the free one. "What's the matter, love?"

"Just wishing my mum, dad and Sirius could see our children, that's all," Harry all but mumbled, keeping his head bowed, not wanting her to see the tears misting his eyes.

"Oh, I'm sure they do, and that they dote on them," Ginny declared firmly, releasing his hand and drawing small Lily close with her free arm.

"How can you be so sure?" Harry asked incredulously.

"I don't know ... I just am," she replied with a smile. "So don't feel so bad, beloved. We have too much to be happy about."

And she was right. Although none saw them, three ghostly figures momentarily materialized in the corner of the room...two men and a woman. They could not be heard by anyone in the room, of course, although they wished they could have been. But it was enough just having been granted the opportunity to see the children of their son and godson.

"James, did you see little Sirius? He looks like Harry except for the eyes," Lily opined.

"And Lily is a female version of Harry. Do you think Ginny named her for you on purpose?" James wondered.

"From what I understand, Ginny likes the lily flower, so it's just as likely that Lily was named for the flower as for you, Lily," Sirius put in.

"I suppose so," Lily had to concede. "Just the same, I like the idea of having a namesake."

"Well, technically Sirius and I have one too," James put in. "Remember what Harry and Ginny named their son."

"And notice how proud Arthur looks," Lily pointed out. "He's got one too." After a few moments' silence, she spoke again. "I wish we could be there with them, James, Sirius. They look so happy."

"They have every reason to ... besides, you know very well that we don't have much more time. Maybe we can come to one of our children in a dream and let them know how we feel, since we can't do it any other way," James suggested.

"Probably the best thing to do," Sirius agreed. "In the meantime, we'd better go." With one last lingering look at the heartwarming domestic scene before them, the three ghostly figures vanished.

* * * * *

Three days later little Sirius and Ginny came home; this time Harry left Lily with Ron and Hermione to go get them, promising his daughter that she could see her mother and new brother when she came back. For the time being, though, she was to simply have fun with Dora and her cousins until he returned to pick her up.

He had been admonished to see to it that Ginny wasn't to overexert herself for at least the first week home after having the baby, although it was permitted for her to be ambulatory. Encouraged, in fact, since it helped accelerate the healing process, although she was sent home with a week's supply of the hospital's painkilling potion. After that she shouldn't need any. Or at least not any she couldn't make herself.

It hadn't been easy to endure being in the delivery room with Ginny, but all the same, Harry was glad that he had been present this time around ... and had every intention of being here for not only any subsequent children they might have but for the rest of their natural lives. For the moment, however, he was content with two...and was sure that Gin would be too, at least for a while. Now all that was necessary for them to do was get back to a normal routine at the earliest possible time ... or at least as normal as was possible for them.