

# Vendetta

*by jmlane57*

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## Chapter One - Draco Meets Dudley

*Chapter 1 of 18*

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Draco Lucius Malfoy Apparated to Privet Drive in Little Whinging, Surrey, where his nemesis, Harry James Potter, had lived (albeit unwillingly) for three months out of every year since 1991, when he had begun attending the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He had once overheard Harry telling his friends the abuse he took day in and day out, year in and year out, emotional and physical, from his mother's sister and her family, not to mention all they denied him, both emotionally and materially, simply because he was a member of the wizarding world.

Being denied material things wasn't so bad; he could buy them himself if necessary. It was the years of emotional and physical abuse that were getting to him. If this kept up much longer, he was likely to need psychiatric counseling to deal with all the post-traumatic stress he had endured because of it up to this point. His friends at Hogwarts, his schoolwork there which would likely lead to a career as an Auror, and adopted family the Weasleys were the only things that kept him anywhere near sane.

It sounded to Draco like the Dursleys were the kind of people he should get to know ... and all the better if he could manage to do so without their realising that he himself was a wizard, since he had also heard that they hated anything and everything associated with magic, wizards and witches, and whenever they could, preferred to deny Harry was any relation to them whatsoever...and tell whoever asked that he attended "St. Brutus's Academy for Incurably Criminal Boys" rather than Hogwarts.

Draco knew that Harry certainly had a good time making fun of it when with his friends, especially since it was a mere smokescreen to cover up his true wizarding background and nature. It wouldn't be easy to hide the fact that he was also a wizard; he would simply have to do the best he could. He even wore Muggle clothing, but carefully concealed his wand on his person so he could lay hands on it at a moment's notice without arousing suspicion until it was too late.

As he was coming up the walk toward number four, he saw a very heavy-set youth about his own age come out the door. Draco knew he would have to pretend to be lost in order to throw him off the track. "Excuse me," he called out.

"Yeah? What the bloody hell do you want?" Dudley Dursley almost spat. "I've got places to go and things to do."

"I'm new to the area and am looking for the Dursley residence. I understand it is on this street," Draco returned smoothly. Butter wouldn't have melted in his mouth, but even under the best of circumstances, which these certainly wouldn't be...especially not once Draco and Dudley paired up...nothing good could come of this.

Particularly not for Ginny Weasley, Harry Potter or any others closely associated with him. In any case, Dudley had neither the brains nor the perceptiveness to see through his inquisitor's deception. Even if he had, though, it was unlikely to have changed his decision to assist Draco in his quest.

"You found it. I'm Dudley Dursley, son of the house. Why are you looking for us?"

"Let's just say that we have ... mutual acquaintances. May I assume you've heard of ... Harry Potter?"

This time Dudley did spit, his pudgy face twisted into a sneer. "He's my cousin...at least technically. Why? How do you know him? You aren't a wizard, are you?" He eyed Draco suspiciously.

In spite of himself Draco was impressed. All the same, he mistook Dudley's craftiness for intelligence and acted accordingly. "No, by no means," Draco lied smoothly. "I've simply ... heard of him. I understand he's ... quite famous."

"Infamous should be the word," Dudley shot back. "He's nothing but a freeloading goody-goody and a smart-mouthed, arrogant bastard, imposing on my mum and dad's generosity for the last sixteen years. I've lost count how many times my dad's had to take a strap to him for mouthing off, either to my parents or to me. He has no business even being under our roof. Why and how he ever managed to end up on our doorstep, I'll never know."

"Rumour has it that his parents were killed when he was a baby and that your mother was the only living relative of his mother. Where would you expect him to go if your parents hadn't taken him in, however unwillingly?"

"Either an orphanage, another Muggle family ... or better yet, the streets. He's made a fool of me, belittled me in front of my friends for as long as I can remember."

Draco could certainly identify with that, but dared not admit his true nature or identity just yet. But from the sound of it, Dudley and his parents had no more love for Harry than he himself did...and for basically the same reasons. But how could they effectively get revenge on Potter once and for all? Although the scenario was certainly enjoyable, just hurting Potter physically didn't give sufficient satisfaction.

For that, it was necessary to hurt someone Harry was emotionally close to, like the Mudblood Granger or the red-headed wimp Weasley ... and most recently, the wimp's sister Ginny, who was now Potter's main squeeze as of this past May and the winner of the Quidditch Cup by Gryffindor House. Draco had heard that Ginny had run up to Harry and thrown herself into his arms, obviously excited about the victory; it was then that Potter had pulled her close and kissed her passionately in front of everyone in Gryffindor House. Once they finally parted, he had grabbed her hand and they headed out through the Gryffindor portrait hole, no doubt on their way to a *private* rendezvous.

He had never seen them personally, but had heard reports from others in Slytherin House that the couple were turning up more and more often in odd places, most of the time snogging each other senseless. Draco couldn't imagine anyone wanting to snog Potter...a skinny, mop-haired, green-eyed refugee from a concentration camp...at least as far as he was concerned, anyway ... but there was no accounting for taste, since he had also heard that Ginny had had a crush on him for years.

Whatever Potter's other shortcomings, though, even Draco had to admit he had good taste in women ... first Cho Chang, the beautiful Ravenclaw Seeker, then the slender, petite, brown-eyed, and equally beautiful redhead Ginny Weasley, who was equally at home on a Quidditch broom either as a Chaser or Seeker, depending on the circumstances of the game in question.

Had she and Potter "gone all the way" together yet? Considering how often he had heard of them snogging, it wouldn't surprise him if they had. After all, redheads were reported to be very hot-blooded, and Potter would have had to have been barking mad not to have claimed her for himself long ago. Draco knew *he* certainly would have in the same situation. Potter would also have had to have been literally as blind as the proverbial bat not to see what a dish she had become! Even now, just thinking of Ginny's lips, legs, breasts and backside was enough to make Draco's whanger stand at attention.

But what if Potter *hadn't* taken Ginny yet? What if she was still ... Merlin forbid ... a virgin? What if he and Dudley joined forces and went after her themselves? He would have to check both Ginny and Harry's schedules so he could pinpoint the best time to take her, a time when both Potter and his other friends were sure to be elsewhere, then contact Dudley to meet him and go from there. It might also be a good idea to make sure that neither the Mudblood Granger nor Weasley the wimp was in any position to interfere with their plans.

Unfortunately, he wasn't thinking that any others were likely (or able) to interfere. If he had, he and Dudley might have gotten away with it, perhaps even blamed their actions on someone else, if not Potter himself. (As it would turn out, Harry and company would take steps to see that they were both punished to the full extent of both wizarding and Muggle law. Neither were Draco nor Dudley aware that Harry had his own vault at Gringotts, the fortune left to him by his parents large enough to rival even that of the Malfoys...and that would work to his advantage, in more ways than one.)

At the moment, however, Draco was too busy plotting how to claim that luscious little redhead ... and once Dudley heard about Ginny, he would surely want to have his innings with her himself, the perfect revenge on his despised cousin. Of course, since Ginny was a talented witch herself, it was likely to be necessary to catch her by surprise so she would be unable to hex them...perhaps even render her unconscious, then tie her down or something and have their way with her.

"Were you aware that your cousin has a ... steady girlfriend?" Draco asked carefully.

"No, I wasn't," Dudley replied, unable to help wondering what kind of girl Harry's alleged girlfriend had to be, and in spite of himself was curious enough to ask for details concerning her. "What is she like?"

"Slender, petite and beautiful. Almost sixteen years old, waist-length red-gold hair, brown eyes, turned-up nose, full lips and well-endowed in all the right places."

At less than a week before his seventeenth birthday, Dudley hadn't even had one date, much less a steady girlfriend, mainly due to his weight, still roughly that of a young killer whale despite the diet he had been on for the better part of the last six months, but also because of his nasty disposition and his hoodlum gang...in fact, he and they were the terror of the Little Whinging neighborhood where they (and Harry) lived.

Just the same, he had had his own bouts with teenage hormones just as Harry had, and the description the intriguing stranger before him was giving of Harry's dishy girlfriend made them kick in big-time. He still couldn't imagine how the bloke before him could know so much about her, but that was immaterial, at least at the moment. She would not only be the answer to all his fantasies, but he would be able to flaunt what he had done in Harry's face and enjoy his reaction, believing that there was nothing he could do to avenge her.

Unluckily for him, Dudley had forgotten that his erstwhile cousin would soon turn seventeen and thus be considered of age in the wizarding world, able to use magic legally whenever he wanted...and once he had heard what Draco and Dudley had done to the love of his life, what he was likely to do would make the *Sectumsempra* curse look like a blessing.

Probably the only thing that would even begin to stop him from doing either that or one of the "unforgivable" curses would be his friends telling him that neither Draco nor Dudley was worth a life sentence in Azkaban. Even at that, Harry would likely retort that even cooling his heels in Azkaban would almost be worth it in order to have them out of his hair forever.

For the time being, however, Draco and Dudley went to the nearest pub and put their heads together, beginning to make their nefarious plans and map out their strategy.

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In order that Dudley not forget what their main objective was, Draco made a photo montage of Ginny for him to keep constantly before him, with emphasis on her more obvious charms...lips, legs, breasts and backside. He assured Dudley that Harry had much the same type of picture montage of her in his bedroom, albeit *very* personally autographed.

In fact, he'd even told him that she had signed on the back of Harry's copy the following suggestive lines:

*Harry ...*

*Hope you like the pictures, luv...and that you decide in favour of what we discussed the other night. I'd really love to be with you like that, and I hope you want to be with*

me the same way. After all, we've been together for a month; I really think it's time.

*Yours forever,*

Ginny

*P.S. I love you.*

Of course, neither had any way of knowing whether or not Harry really had a cheesecake picture montage of Ginny in his room, much less that they were autographed in the same manner...but it wouldn't surprise Draco if he did and they were. What was important was that Dudley thought so, that Ginny was constantly kept before him. If he wanted her, he would have to do what Draco wanted, whatever it happened to be ... and whatever his objections to doing so.

"Why do I have to listen to you?" Dudley grouched.

"Because I'm the one with the knowledge you need. I suggest you keep that in mind," Draco retorted threateningly. "Otherwise you'll never touch her or even see her. Get me?"

Dudley nodded sullenly but didn't argue.

Draco smiled charmingly, but at the same time, even Dudley saw evil in it. "As long as we understand each other. Now, I've found out that Ginny is supposed to be alone at 3 p.m. today. I cannot tell you where she'll be; you simply have to take my word for it. Also, when the time comes, I'll have to take you there, because you could not get there on your own. Be ready at the first street that intersects with yours at two-thirty, and make sure your parents can't see you. If they ask where you're going, just tell them you're going to meet some friends. Got that?"

"Yeah, yeah," Dudley grumbled, the only thing keeping him from chucking the whole mess being the thought of the gorgeous little redhead naked and spread out like a sumptuous banquet before him. Even if he had to let this Draco person go first, it would be worth waiting for to finally lose his virginity as his friends had lost theirs.

He only wished that Harry could be there when it happened, if only to be forced to watch, not to mention tied down at a strategic spot where he could see everything, yet be unable to do anything to stop them.

For that matter, he even considered suggesting it to Draco. It would be the perfect way to drive Harry crazy, especially if they stripped him too, then watched him to see how aroused he got at what they did. When he saw Draco again three hours later, he told him his idea, and even as impressed as Draco was at Dudley's fiendishness, had to veto it.

"But why?" Dudley demanded.

"Because to do that, we would need help...and the more people involved in this, the greater the likelihood that we'll be found out ... and I really don't think you want people finding out, especially not your parents...or law enforcement people. Understand me?"

Dudley nodded reluctantly, still miffed that Draco had vetoed his idea, attempting to convince him one more time. "I could get some of my friends to help. They don't like Harry any more than I do. A couple of them would take him by surprise, then we could..."

Draco emphatically shook his head. "Also, should you try to implicate me in this, I'll sue you for everything you've got, for defamation of character at the very least. My family has a lot of money, whereas yours doesn't. You couldn't possibly win against us."

Dudley gave him a suspicious look. "Just who are you, anyway?"

"Suffice it to say that if you do as I tell you, we'll get along just fine. Go against me and I'll destroy you...and what's more, enjoy doing it."

One look into Draco's cold blue eyes and Dudley knew he was serious. Despite his reservations about the whole matter, he knew he was in too deep to turn back now. Draco then directed him to take hold of his arm; Dudley gave him a threatening look.

"It's only for a few seconds. I'm taking you to where Ginny is. Now let's get a move on or we'll miss her...not to mention our chance to take her without witnesses."

Dudley glared at his companion but did as instructed; he soon felt himself being squeezed like a tube of toothpaste before the two found themselves on the Hogwarts grounds not far from the Quidditch pitch. A practice game was scheduled for 3:30 p.m. on this day, and Ginny, as the best of the three Chasers on the Gryffindor team, needed to be there.

Apparition tests were also being conducted on this particular day for all the sixth-years who turned seventeen on or by a given day who had signed up for Apparition lessons and/or practice. It was for this reason that the normal inability to Apparate onto or off the Hogwarts grounds had temporarily been suspended. Even though he had only recently turned seventeen...within the last two weeks, in fact...Draco had already managed to get an Apparition License via a combination of studying ahead and his father's money and influence. As far as he knew, neither Potter nor either of his friends had managed that yet.

"Where the eff are we? Where's Ginny? You said she'd be here."

"Patience. You'll see her soon."

Almost before the words were out of his mouth, the object of their search appeared. Ginny wore black slacks and a matching jumper underneath her red and gold Quidditch robes. Draco and Dudley hid behind the nearest wall; shortly after she passed them, Draco retrieved his wand, making sure that Dudley couldn't see it, then pointed it at her and thought, "Sleep, my beauty. Sleep!" As she collapsed to the ground, unconscious, Dudley gaped at him.

"What the bloody hell did you do to her?"

"Later. Now let's get her tied up." Draco then said, *'Incarcerous'*, softly, specifying ropes as a restraint. Soon Ginny was tied hand and foot; Draco then murmured *'Inanimatus Conjuratus'*, picturing a cloth blindfold, which appeared in his hand.

He stuffed it in his pocket; then they picked her up...or rather, Draco did...but even as they gazed upon her sleeping face as Draco carried her, her head resting on his shoulder, her long, red-gold hair, thick, dark eyelashes, the dusting of freckles across her tiny, slightly upturned nose and her full lips (not to mention her small but perfect breasts), Dudley felt his groin tighten almost unbearably. Seeing her close up, he could definitely understand why Harry had fallen in love with her. She was the loveliest girl he had ever seen. It would seem an eternity until he could possess her, but at least he was one step closer to doing so.

"Where are we going now?" Dudley asked.

"You'll see," Draco returned enigmatically; they then Apparated out of the Hogwarts courtyard, destination Malfoy Manor ... or more specifically, Draco's wing, which contained his bedroom, the quarters of his personal house-elf, and the room where...if all went according to plan...Ginny Weasley would be turned from an unsullied maiden into a licentious whore.

To make sure things would be even easier for him, he went over to his dresser and got a small bottle from it...a bottle which contained *Amortentia*, a strong love potion. The effects only lasted a few hours, but that should be enough for his purposes. He put some between her slack lips, then stroked her throat to make sure she swallowed it.

Draco was sure it would happen, mainly because he intended to add the finishing touch: planting an illusion in her mind that he (and Dudley) were Harry.

She would see *his* face, hear *his* voice, feel *his* hands, lips and body, not his or Dudley's. All that would be seen by her mind's eye, if nothing else, and because of her love for him, she would accept virtually anything he dished out. But to maintain the illusion, she would need to be blindfolded. Once they had stripped her and restrained her again, Draco noted the time: 4 p.m.

By now the others had surely missed her, and would be wondering where she was. If only for that reason, Draco couldn't help wishing he could have known what everyone was thinking right now...especially Harry.

## Chapter Two - Harry Learns What Happened

*Chapter 2 of 18*

In the midst of a Quidditch game, Harry learns of Ginny's abduction and suspects he knows who did it even as he takes off to find her, vowing vengeance every step of the way.

Harry was becoming concerned. Where was Ginny? She had never been late for Quidditch practice; in fact, she was usually there before he himself was. He asked if anyone had seen her; everyone shook their heads. Fortunately, enough qualified people had shown up that he could replace her, at least as Chaser. But he was unsure how much good he would do as Seeker if he was worrying about her, so he disqualified himself, simply acting as Captain and made one of the others act as Seeker.

As the game wore on, he was becoming more and more concerned. No, call it by its right name...he was worried. Worried sick. What could have happened to her? If it hadn't been for the game and the necessity of his presence, if only as Captain, he would have chucked it all and went looking for her. He could only hope he would see her again, whole and healthy...and when he did, that she would have a satisfactory explanation for missing their long-scheduled practice.

After a time he couldn't concentrate on the game; he was too busy picturing a thousand things happening to her, each worse than the last. He had never wished so much for a Quidditch game to be over in his life! Just then, Neville Longbottom came running onto the pitch, making a beeline for Harry upon spotting him sitting on the sidelines, seemingly immersed in his own thoughts and not watching the game at all, as he usually did if he didn't play.

"Harry! Harry!" he called out, skidding to a stop in front of the object of his search.

"What is it, Neville?" Harry was both grateful and annoyed for being jolted out of his thoughts of Ginny.

"Ginny's been kidnapped!"

"What? What are you talking about? When?" he demanded.

"She was on her way here; I was coming to watch the game and saw her approaching around a quarter past three...then saw two blokes Apparate in not far from where she was. I hid where they couldn't see me and watched them; it looked like one of them did something to render her unconscious, then tied her up with ropes. Finally he seemed to murmur something under his breath, then stuff something in his pocket. Lastly, he picked her up and the three of them Disapparated. That was when I thought I'd better come here and tell you."

For a moment Harry's eyes closed in pain at the thought of Ginny's being gone; then he forced it aside and faced Neville squarely. "Did you see what they looked like?"

"One looked tall and thin...and blond; the other was heavy-set with lank brown hair. That was all I could see from the distance between them and me."

That was when Harry's pain was replaced with anger. Malfoy! He should have known *he* was behind Gin's disappearance. But who was his accomplice? Sounded a lot like his lowlife cousin Dudley ... but how could that be? How could they possibly have met? Could Draco have actually gone to Privet Drive and run into him somehow? It was the only explanation that made any sense.

But if Draco and Dudley *had* kidnapped Ginny, where could they have taken her? It was a cinch that Draco had to be the brains of the outfit; it seemed that all Dudley's limited brain power was confined to the mechanics of eating, bullying and moving his whale-like body around. All at once Harry knew what he had to do. He visibly pulled himself together and got to his feet.

"Nev, tell whoever comes down first where I've gone. I've got to go look for Ginny. There's no time to lose. Let me know how the game went when I get back." He added in his mind, *And I'll be back with Ginny...or else I'm not coming back!*

Harry grabbed his Firebolt, then mounted it and took off, moving so fast that he was only a red-gold streak, having only a vague hunch of where his beloved might have been taken, but deciding to follow up on said hunch nonetheless. He pushed the broom as fast as it would go, on the way developing a murderous anger at Malfoy, which only seemed to grow in intensity with every passing moment.

The damn bloody bastard! This had to be his idea...and Dudley would naturally be both nasty and stupid (not to mention horny) enough to go along with it, especially if Draco had promised him he could have a go at Ginny if he helped him kidnap her. If he managed to get his hands on them, he swore with every ounce of hatred in him that he would kill them...and what's more, enjoy doing it ... and be damned to the consequences! They deserved whatever they got for going after Ginny like this. *I'm coming, luv*, he told the image in his heart's eye. *I hope and pray you're all right. If you're not, I'll take it out of both Malfoy's and Dudley's stinking hides for both of us!*

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A half hour later Ron and Hermione sought out Neville to find out what had happened. They had been too far away to have heard what he said to Harry. All they could be sure of was that Harry had been worried sick about Ginny at first; then after Neville had told him whatever it was, his worry had been replaced with murderous anger. He had then mounted his broom and kicked off into the air, accelerating so fast that he seemed little more than a red-gold blur. He hadn't even taken off his Quidditch robes! Only something serious involving Ginny could have made Harry act like that, and they were determined to find out what.

Upon reaching him, they demanded an explanation for both Harry's actions and Ginny's disappearance; Neville repeated the story he had given Harry. It could only have been Malfoy behind it, from the description...but who had the other been? Harry had once described his whale-like, nasty, bullying cousin; they could have sworn it sounded like him...but how could Draco possibly have met him? All they could think of was Draco's having gone there disguised as a Muggle and offering him something he couldn't refuse ... perhaps even a go at Ginny, if only to get revenge on Harry.

They knew what kind of temper Harry had once it was aroused, and it was most easily aroused these days by any threat to Ginny, either emotional or physical; they had to stop him if they could before he did something that would land him in even more serious trouble than ever before. Upon reaching the adjoining locker rooms, they each ducked into them to retrieve their brooms, then took off literally like blue streaks just as Harry had, hoping every step of the way that they could catch up to him in time to prevent him from putting his head in a noose.

They could understand his being upset, not to mention his desire for revenge, but neither Draco nor Dudley was worth a lifetime stint in Azkaban ... much less serving time in a Muggle prison for murder. Their brooms weren't as fast as Harry's, naturally, but they pushed them for everything they had, going on Hermione's hunch that Harry had headed straight for Malfoy Manor, convinced that he must be holding Ginny captive there, at the same time hoping against hope that Ginny would both come out safe and sound and Harry keep his freedom. If he insisted on venging himself on the two perpetrators, of course, they would help him do it...but in a manner that would leave them alive, just thoroughly punished within an inch of their near-worthless lives.

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Meanwhile, at Malfoy Manor, Draco had sealed the door of the spare room, temporarily imprisoning himself, Dudley and Ginny in it. At the moment, Draco was having his fun with her while Dudley watched, becoming more and more aroused with every passing moment, wishing so much that it was himself that he could almost literally taste it.

If his worthless cousin hadn't already taken her, it would serve him right ... because once he and Draco were through with him, she would think he had and act accordingly because of Draco's administering both the love potion and planting the illusion in her mind that the one doing all the sexy things to her was Harry, the one she loved. By this time, even Dudley had surmised that Draco could not have done the things he'd done without being a wizard...but this one seemed at least tolerable, even considering his threat to destroy him if he went against him in any way.

He looked at his watch in between bouts of wanking off, noting that it was roughly six o'clock; Draco had been going at it for at least the last hour and a half, literally doing everything sexual he could think of, everything he had ever wanted to do to a girl, however kinky. But with his temper, Dudley hesitated to interrupt him. Just the same, if Draco didn't let him in on the fun soon, he would have to take a chance. He couldn't stand just watching for much longer ... he wanted to be *doing*. Just the same, if Harry ever learned of this, he would surely go ballistic and come after them with both barrels...to put it mildly!

Just when Dudley was sure he couldn't stand it any longer, Draco finally got off Ginny and beckoned to Dudley before gesturing to the still-trussed-up and naked girl. "She's yours, mate. Enjoy her." Dudley couldn't move fast enough; within moments he had replaced Draco and began to indulge his own fantasies.

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However, by this time Harry, by now seething with righteous, albeit murderous, anger, was nearing Malfoy Manor...and heading straight to where he knew Draco's room was, prepared to counter any charm or enchantment Malfoy might have placed on his area of the house to prevent intruders. Harry's determination was such that he would not allow *anything* to stop him, whatever he had to do.

As he neared the sliding glass doors which faced a large balcony, he saw the tall, thin figure that he recognised as Draco emerge from the room. "Well, so you finally got here, Potter. Well, it's too late. I've already had my way with your sweet little bed-bunny, and your cousin is in there right now, taking *his* pleasure with her."

Harry didn't think he could ever have thought such hateful, murderous thoughts as he was doing now. "You ... effing bloody bastard...this was your idea! Dudley wouldn't have had the brains to come up with it! I swear, you've reached a new low, even for you!"

"Guess what else, Potter. I've put an illusion in her mind that it's you doing these things to her, so if she blames anyone, it'll be you! It's a cinch that she'll never accept you sexually now, not after what we've done ... so if you've not had brains enough to take her by now, it's best that you accept the fact that you never will!"

"You know, I'd come here all ready to take you both apart, but now I realize that neither of you are worth either life in Azkaban or time in a Muggle prison. Just the same, don't think you're going to get away with this, Malfoy...not you nor my scumbag cousin!"

"Oh, really? We'll see about that. My father ..." Malfoy began.

"*Bugger* your father! I've got money and connections that neither of you has any inkling of...and you may be assured that I'll sue you for every Knut you've got! I'll also instigate proceedings for felonious sexual assault against Dudley ... and you'd better warn him that if I ever lay eyes upon his fat, ugly face again, I *will* kill him, my uncle and aunt be damned! I vow this with every ounce of blood in my body!"

"You're too soft to enjoy killing or inflicting pain, Potter," Draco scoffed.

"Then you better hope that I never get closer to enjoying killing or inflicting pain than I am right now!"

By this time, even Draco realised that Harry was serious about what he intended to do to avenge Ginny, so he knew he'd better take steps to minimise the damage to either his or his family's reputation if this became widely known. As for Dursley, he deserved whatever he got, either from Harry or the penal system for being stupid enough not to have seen through him at the start, allowing himself to be sucked into this criminal act.

It was at this point that Hermione and Ron neared the spot; as far as they could tell, Malfoy and Harry seemed to simply be talking, so the latter must have realised the futility of committing such a criminal act as murder, even if the potential recipient of same deserved it. Just the same, they had never heard such hatred and contempt in Harry's voice as they did now ... and they were truly thankful they were not Dudley Dursley, because they sensed that he would not be long for this world if Harry ever got him alone long enough.

"All right, Malfoy, hand over my sister *now*, you damnable bloody bastard!" Ron demanded angrily, pointing his wand threateningly at the white-blond Slytherin.

"Weasel King ... so you're here too, are you? What will you do if I don't?" Malfoy taunted.

"I'll do what Harry's too good to do!" Ron shot back.

By this time Harry had noticed his friends' presence. "No, Ron. He's not worth it. Neither of them are worth it. Besides, the damage has already been done. All we can do is repair it as best we can."

"What do you mean, 'the damage has already been done'?" Ron almost spat.

"They've ... already ... raped Ginny. And what's more, they've planted a suggestion in her mind that I ... did it, so if she blames anyone, it'll be me."

"Rubbish! You could never do anything like that," Hermione declared, her first contribution to the conversation.

"That's beside the point. Ginny is going to think I did ... and I frankly doubt that anything I say is going to change her mind on that score," Harry returned morosely. "And who could blame her, after what I've put her through?"

"You don't know what she's thinking right now, mate. No sense conclusion-jumping until she's out of here and we can get help for her," Ron tried to soothe his friend.

"Help for her body, maybe. What about her heart and mind? In that sense, will she ever be the same again, after what Draco and my ... cousin have done? Will there even be a point to punishing them if we end up not being able to help her?"

"Harry, don't talk like that. Of course we can help her!" Hermione shot back. "There's got to be a way! Which reminds me ..." She turned to Malfoy, holding her wand out threateningly. "Hand over my friend *now*, scumbag, or I hex you into the middle of the next century!"

Draco seemed to take no notice of Hermione's threatening tone, simply turned around and headed for the sliding glass door, as calm as a glass of milk. "If you'll give me a moment, I'll see if Dudley's through yet. If he is, you can have her back."

Draco went through the door; the three outside bobbed up and down in the air on their brooms as they waited. Inside, he noted that Dudley was lying half across Ginny, exhausted yet smiling. It took virtually every ounce of strength Draco possessed to move him off her, even with his wand, and when he did, Dudley grumbled sleepily and reached for Ginny, not wanting to leave her. Draco couldn't blame him, but there were people waiting for her, and if he didn't get a move on, they'd likely come in and fetch her bodily, going through both him *and* Dudley if necessary. He curtly instructed Dudley to dress and get ready to leave, for he was taking him back home.

Draco only knew about undressing girls, not dressing them, so after releasing her, he simply wrapped her in a blanket and carried her out, deciding to put one more dig into Harry by handing her to him. He blushed furiously upon realising she was naked under the blanket. He had had many erotic dreams about such in the course of their romance, and they had always left him painfully aroused, but he had never actually seen her that way, nor had he ever gone beyond some tentative caresses, usually consisting of tracing her body through her clothing during their snogging sessions, even as much as he wanted to.

And after this trauma, would she ever want him to touch her again? Especially if she thought he'd already had his way with her? Surely she would know better than to think he would ever assault her as she had been today, but how could he ever be sure, especially if she went through a phase where she was unwilling to even see him, much less talk to him about what had happened?

Just the same, he'd better enjoy holding her while he could; there could come a point where she wouldn't want him near her, much less touching her, after what had happened. Tears misted Harry's eyes as he buried his face in her fragrant hair.

*Gin, I'm so sorry this has happened to you ... so sorry that I was unable to prevent it ... but I swear to you on my life, I will see that both Draco and my cousin pay dearly for what they've done to you! I also intend to do everything in my power to make you realise that it was not I who did such horrendous things to you. I would sooner hurt myself than you, sweet Ginny ...*

"What's wrong, Harry?" Hermione asked when she noted his actions.

"Ginny ... she's ..." He was unable to speak further before once again burying his burning face in his beloved's hair, pressing her tightly to him and fighting back tears of both anger and despair.

"She ... has ... no clothes on?" she accurately guessed. She moved to glare at Draco. "Bring us her clothes *now*, you lowlife bastard, or I'll go fetch them myself and hex anyone who gets in my way, including you and your partner in crime!"

"One moment," he returned calmly, going back inside and returning shortly afterward, his arms full of Ginny's clothes, including her Quidditch robes. Hermione snatched them away from him and turned to leave, never at any time detecting even a trace of regret or remorse on Draco's part for what he and Dudley had done to Ginny and hating them all the more for it...particularly for what it was surely going to do to Harry in the process of Ginny's healing. And just wait until her parents (and other five brothers) found out what had happened!

"Come on, Harry, Ron. We have better things to do than to continue to waste our time here." Her voice was laced with more hatred and contempt than either of her companions had ever imagined her capable of. But they didn't argue with her, simply turned away and left Malfoy Manor and its hateful residents behind.

## Chapter Three - St. Mungo's

### *Chapter 3 of 18*

Harry and company take Ginny to St. Mungo's for treatment and he maintains a vigil at her bedside while Ron and Hermione speak with the Healer who treated her.

They got her to St. Mungo's straightaway and reported what had happened as best they could; the Healers examined her and were pleased to report that there was nothing worse than some cuts and bruises, not to mention minor vaginal and anal tearing ... nothing they couldn't repair. The physical injuries weren't the problem; it would be the mental and emotional ones they would have to deal with...and not only Ginny's.

They gave her a mild sleeping potion upon treating her wounds, some of which required minor surgery. Upon finishing, Hermione and Ron discussed the matter with the Healer in charge while Harry sat a vigil beside Ginny's bed, holding her hand, just watching her sleep, sometimes putting her hand on his cheek after kissing it tenderly, eyes closed in pain and brimming with tears. He seemed to be taking this worse than she was, at least at the moment.

When was he going to realise not even he couldn't prevent everything bad from happening to those he loved best? He would simply have to learn to trust that they could handle whatever was thrown at them. (They frankly couldn't be involved with him and *not* be able to.) He was unlikely to believe it, of course; just the same, all they could do was their best to convince him of the fact.

After about an hour of discussion, Ron and Hermione returned to Ginny's bed to find Harry still there and in the same position as he had been when they left. "Harry?" Ron put a tentative hand on his friend's shoulder. "Mate, you've done all you can do. Let's go get some sleep. We can come back and see Gin in the morning."

"I couldn't sleep now, Ron. You two go on ahead," came the almost mumbled and pain-filled reply.

"Harry, Ron's right. There's no point in your staying here. Ginny is being cared for. We can do no more for her, and you need some sleep. You won't help her by making yourself sick or beating yourself up for not being able to make it before she was ... assaulted." She put her arms around his shoulders and gave them a comforting squeeze.

Harry once again closed his eyes in pain. Leave it to Hermione to cut to the heart of the matter. He reached up to pat her hands with one of his own. "I ... appreciate your concern, my friends, but I can't leave her. Especially not now. If I'm not here for her at any other time, I'm determined to do everything in my power to see her through this, even if I have to pay for her medical care myself and look after her once she's released."

Hermione sighed, knowing that Harry wasn't about to budge, whatever they might say. "Suit yourself...but we'll be back tomorrow."

"Fine," he returned absently. "See you then. I'll be here. Oh and Ron, when you come back, would you be so kind as to bring me my bag of gold, a few changes of clothes and my toilet articles?" With that, Harry resumed his vigil, seeming to forget his friends were there. A short time later, Hermione whispered to Ron and they Disapparated out of the room.

It was the middle of the night, Harry still keeping his vigil, that Ginny moaned in her sleep and tugged at his hand, then her eyes fluttered open. "Harry? Is that you?"

"Yes, Gin. I'm here," he crooned back to her. "How do you feel?"

"Tired ... and sore," she confessed. "But that's to be expected, after what ... we did."

Obviously the suggestion Draco had planted was still working on her. "Well, I won't work you that hard again," he assured her, speaking as soothingly as he could, deciding it was best to humour her, at least for the time being, in an attempt to minimize the trauma of her double sexual assault. "I ... didn't mean to hurt you. Just ... forgot myself."

"I ... forgive you, my love," she replied. "I know how hard it must have been for you to wait on me."

This was almost more than Harry could take, Ginny blaming herself...even unconsciously...for her own assault. "It wasn't your fault, Gin. I don't blame you ... not for anything. I just want you to get better ... and to assure you that I'll be here if you need me."

"Thank you, Harry. I ... think I'll ... sleep now. Good night."

Harry truly hoped she had meant what she said about forgiving him for her assault, even if he hadn't been responsible, and wasn't saying what she thought he wanted to hear or simply talking in her sleep. He wanted more than anything to lie down beside her and hold her, but wondered if he dared...or even had the right any more, after the ordeal she had been through.

Just the same, he had surmised that simply holding her hand wasn't going to be enough. Finally he realised that the only way he was going to be able to sleep was if he did something like that, however it might look to anyone passing by. He finally decided he didn't care and carefully manoeuvred himself onto the bed with her, resting his cheek on her back and entwining his arms around her.

He buried his face in her hair and breathed in the honeysuckle fragrance, smiling despite his sadness and anger at himself for being unable to prevent it from happening. But one thing was for sure, he was going to do everything he could to see that both Malfoy and Dudley were punished for what they had done, both in the wizarding and Muggle world.

Once she was up to it, he would take her to the Muggle doctor his aunt and uncle went to and have him examine her. His report would be one weapon Harry would use in his efforts to see that his cousin was punished for assaulting the girl he loved so brutally. He was thinking he might even have the doctor testify on his and Ginny's behalf should the matter come to trial.

He would also speak to the Wizengamot at the Ministry at the earliest possible time, see if they could help him in regards to seeing to Draco's punishment. It probably wouldn't be easy, and even if he managed to pull it off and they were willing to help him pursue the matter, it would take time and lots of it ... and most likely engender considerable publicity, both positive and negative, in the process.

Not to mention Lucius Malfoy doing everything he could to paint Harry in a bad light and his son in a good one, however much money he had to spend. He would also likely do everything possible to make Ginny seem promiscuous, probably even claim that she had seduced the two young men in question rather than forcible sexual assault (i.e. rape) having occurred.

Harry truly wished he'd had something like a Muggle tape recorder to tape Draco's original confession; neither his memory or his word would be enough, and he doubted he would be able to get him to do it again. He could only hope that the doctors' report from both the wizarding and Muggle world would convince the jury of the truth of the situation.

Meanwhile, all that mattered was the fact that Ginny was alive, in his arms, and snuggled close to him. Knowing that, Harry was finally able to fall asleep, not knowing that an hour later, the Healer Ron and Hermione had talked to went by on her rounds and smiled indulgently as she saw Harry with his arms around Ginny, holding her protectively as he slept, his glasses having slid most of the way down his nose. She carefully manoeuvred them off and put them on the bedside table so he could easily find them in the morning.

Young people these days ... all the same, she was unable to help being impressed at the young man's devotion to the young woman. For both their sakes, she hoped that devotion would remain, for both would need it in order to survive the next few months following her assault, which were usually the toughest to endure, for both the victim and those closest to her.

As it turned out, though, Ginny was able to go home after only two days in the hospital, although she was given a week's supply of painkilling potion. After that, due to her youth and sturdy constitution, she shouldn't need any more. And when she did, Harry went with her...although he stayed in Fred and George's old room, which fortunately was close by Ginny's so he could keep a close watch on her. He had even insisted on flying her home on his Firebolt but in front of him this time, suggesting she hold on to him that way so he could concentrate on flying, loving every moment of the feel of her solid, perfumed warmth against him.

He also contacted the Muggle doctor and managed to obtain an appointment to take her in for an examination, specifically requesting a follow-up report after telling him what had happened to her. Later in the week he contacted the Wizengamot and got an appointment to speak with them about what had happened, what would be necessary to press charges against Draco, not only for kidnapping Ginny but actively participating in her rape, along with an accomplice, who had also raped her.

He intended to have such a rock-solid body of evidence in his favour that not even Lucius Malfoy or his in-serious-denial relatives could refute. That would take some doing, of course, but for Ginny, he was willing to make the effort.

He also thought it would be best to see if St. Mungo's had taken any DNA samples from Ginny's body, and if they had, he would need them as evidence too. The best of all possible scenarios would be if he could manage to get samples of both assailants' bodily fluid, and if necessary, be prepared to submit a sample of his own, if only for the sake of comparison ... as well as obtain reports from both the St. Mungo's Healers and the Muggle doctor as to the differences between same. Not to mention have them testify that they had found no evidence Harry had ever been in sexual contact with her. (Not that he didn't still want to. In fact, he did, but could control himself if necessary, although it wasn't easy, especially not since he was spending so much time with her.)

With luck, he might even be able to officially deny that he had been in any way responsible for the rape, both publicly and privately, whatever hypnotic suggestion Draco had made to the contrary. He would also suggest that Draco be made to submit to a test with Veritaserum, intending to make sure it was legal to do so before making a formal request ... and give Dudley sodium pentothal, which would force him to tell the truth of his own involvement in the crime, also making sure that was legal in order to offset any countersuits either way.

It might even prompt an investigation into the possibility that he had been involved in other sex crimes in the Little Whinging neighborhood ... maybe even get a search warrant to check Dudley's room for torn knickers, condoms and such, and with luck, even actually get his criminal bully cousin behind bars, where he belonged...and there to stay, no matter what appeals his parents tried to make, however hard they tried to trash Harry and everything he had come up with, evidence-wise.

Best of all, however, would be to see Draco actually get convicted despite his father's best efforts, and have him cool his heels in Azkaban, see how he liked it. It frankly wouldn't surprise Harry if Lucius had been instrumental in getting Sirius framed too, but since the latter had been cleared of all wrongdoing shortly after his death, it wasn't so urgent a thing as pressing the rape charges. He also suggested that Neville come in and testify before the Wizengamot as to what he had seen the day of Ginny's disappearance. Perhaps even Ron and Hermione if they were willing, if only as character witnesses for both him and Ginny. If not them, then perhaps at least one of the senior Weasleys.

In the midst of all this, of course, he spent time with Ginny, seeing to her every need and taking it upon himself to tell her family what had happened to her and his intention

to see that Draco and Dudley were punished to the fullest extent of the law...both in the wizarding and Muggle world. The senior Weasleys were understandably furious, with Molly frankly ready to kill both perpetrators, which Harry fully understood and empathised with, but advised her not to pursue it.

He would be content if they could both be convicted of the crime in question and serve time in prison for it, and so would she have to be. She was still reluctant to back down, but refrained from any further talk on that score for Ginny's sake ... at least in her daughter's hearing.

Harry also advised the Weasley family to inform Ginny's other five brothers what had happened and get their thoughts and feelings on the matter. He would sit in on the discussions if necessary, but believed it best that Ron and Hermione gave them the details, since other than himself and the perpetrators, they were the only ones who knew the full details of the crime.

He hadn't mentioned anything about the cost of Ginny's medical care, both inpatient and out, and had no intention of doing so, fully willing and able to cover the costs himself. They were going to go through enough without having to worry about medical expenses. And if Gin should need any psychological counseling as a result, he would pay the costs for that, too. He had no intention of making her testify unless absolutely necessary.

It was truly fortunate that he had been able to take care of Voldemort once and for all over the summer between his sixth and seventh years, so he wouldn't have to be away from Ginny any more than absolutely necessary. Even at that, Harry still intended to pursue his original vocational choice as an Auror, and for that, it would be necessary for him to return to Hogwarts for his seventh and final year, since much of the seventh-year curriculum and classes covered things he would need to know in his chosen future career.

It was now about a month before they would need to return to school. As much as Harry wanted to go, there was just as much of him that didn't, since it meant leaving Ginny. He even seriously considered taking home study courses, which she would be doing since she wouldn't be emotionally up to the regular classes because of her ordeal. Of course, if the worst-case scenario came to pass and his request for home study courses was denied, he could only promise her that he would owl her often to keep her up-to-date on what was going on in his classes and at the school.

Ron and Hermione would also likely be returning to the school if Harry did, however reluctantly, mainly because they wanted to be there to give Harry moral support, both in class and out. They also promised to keep in touch with Ginny, if not Molly, but all knew that even under the best of circumstances, Ron was, by his own admission, not the best of correspondents, to put it mildly. It was more likely that Hermione would be the one to do so, with Ron most likely to add a postscript or something to her letter. Even Harry hadn't gotten but maybe a handful of letters from Ron the entire time they had known each other, over six years.

So far, Harry had been pleased to note little change in Ginny's attitude toward him, but couldn't be sure how long it would last. Just the same, he was hesitant to try anything more intimate than holding her hand or kissing the top of her head in farewell, even as much as he hungered to kiss her lips again, hold her and feel her close to him once again. It had been weeks, and if he had to leave, it would be months, but he wasn't about to rush her.

However, if he did have to leave her, he would make it a point to hold her and kiss her goodbye, in public if necessary, just as their first kiss had been ... and declare his feelings for her in gentle, undemanding ways over the ensuing months. The one thing that would keep him going would be hearing from her, particularly if she declared she still loved him and always would, no matter what he had supposedly done.

## Chapter Four - Ginny Returns Home/Diagon Alley

### Chapter 4 of 18

Ginny returns home after two days in St. Mungo's, then the four friends go to Diagon Alley to get their school supplies for the upcoming term...among other things.

It was only a week later that Harry heard back that his request for home study had been accepted. He was so happy at the prospect of not having to leave Ginny that he felt like celebrating, intending to share his study time with her and helping her when possible, either with potions, charms or whatever. However, since Ron and Hermione's requests had been tendered somewhat later, they hadn't heard anything one way or the other yet as to whether or not theirs had been granted. Now that they knew Harry would definitely be taking home study courses, they didn't want to return to school unless absolutely necessary.

Just the same, they still had to go get the necessary textbooks and such for the seventh-year classes; Harry had already planned to take Ginny to Diagon Alley and pay for their school supplies himself. Maybe they could even go to Madam Puddifoot's for a butterbeer while there; he'd have to wait and see on that one, especially if Ron and Hermione happened to be with them.

Maybe he could even buy her a little trinket that would make her think of him whenever she saw it and they didn't happen to be together, like a "mood" necklace or something. He would have preferred to give her a promise ring, but that came under the heading of rushing her, so he regretfully put that on hold for the time being.

As it turned out, Ron and Hermione were turned down and got the regular letters which told them to report to Platform 9¾ at 10 a.m. on September 1 to board the Hogwarts Express for their seventh year. As may be expected, neither of them were pleased, for their own reasons ... but obviously the Powers That Be didn't consider their reasons for wanting home study sufficient to grant them the same privileges they had Harry and Ginny. It would seem strange going without them, but it couldn't be helped. Just the same, once they calmed down, they told them what had happened and admonished both to make sure they kept them up-to-date on how they were doing.

Even at that, they all went together to Diagon Alley to buy the necessary books, Ron and Hermione armed with blank cheques from their parents to cover the cost. Harry was armed with his usual bag of gold, although he had made a substantial withdrawal (substantial for him, at any rate ... around one hundred Galleons) from his Gringotts account the previous day to cover the costs of the textbooks and other school materials for himself and Ginny.

It usually cost at least forty Galleons for textbooks and such, although Harry fully expected it to be more this time, at least for him, since this was his final year and the extra books he got covered the subjects he would need to know in order to realise his career goal of being an Auror, such as *Occlumency and Legilimency*, not to mention *Advanced Transfiguration* and an updated book on *Advanced Potion-Making*, as well as the *Standard Book of Spells, Grade 7*.

With Ginny, on the other hand, the extra books she needed involved the various subjects she would need to know to realise her own career goal of being a Healer...*Advanced Potion-Making* being only one of them. Other books she needed were *Magical Healing Techniques*, which also covered various spells commonly used to aid in healing wounds, both emotional and physical, and *Healing Draughts and Their Effects*, to name just two. She also needed the *Standard Book of Spells, Grade 6* and *Confronting the Faceless*, the sixth-year DADA textbook.

But even with the cost of books and materials, including sales tax, for both himself and Ginny, Harry had calculated that there would be roughly eighteen to twenty Galleons left over...enough so he could buy her something, be it a mug of butterbeer or a piece of jewelry, if not something else which reflected his feelings for her.



Just the same, both Ron and Hermione had been warned not to be too extravagant in buying non-essentials, so when it was agreed that they all go to Madam Puddifoot's in Hogsmeade for a snack and butterbeer, Harry ended up picking up the tab for everyone. He had frankly hoped that he would have the chance to be alone with Ginny, but now would simply have to make the best of it.

Lady Luck smiled on him, at least to a degree, so that he was near enough to be able to reach out and hold Ginny's hand unobtrusively under the table while his other hand held onto his mug of butterbeer. Even at that, he could have sworn he saw his two friends exchange secretive looks and snigger as they looked in his and Ginny's direction, especially when they believed they had caught them smiling at each other or something.

He would ordinarily have demanded to know just what they thought they were doing, acting like that, but at this point was too enraptured by his nearness to Ginny, his ability to hold her hand and smell her perfume, see her smile and watch her drink her butterbeer, particularly when she tilted her head back to give him a provocative view of her creamy throat, which (next to her lips) he had always loved to kiss, to give it more than passing notice.

He knew it was silly to envy an inanimate object like the mug, but it at least touched her lips, which was more than he was able to do at the moment. If they had been alone, he might have at least attempted to kiss her hand or something. As it was, he had to content himself with what he was already doing.

Upon leaving the tea shop, which also offered other beverages (such as butterbeer), all looked at each other and asked, "What did you want to do now?"

"I don't have money enough to do anything else," Ron grouched; the rest had to smile at his irritation. "I guess I'll just have to go back to the Burrow and pack my trunk or something."

"What about you, Hermione?" Harry asked. "Gotten *your* trunk packed yet?"

"Oh, yes," she assured him. "Just need to put my books in and make sure Crookshanks is ready."

"Got any money left?" Ginny put in, seeming as hopeful as Harry (although he could have imagined it) that they would actually be left alone.

"Some, but not a lot. I think I'd better hang onto it," she decided.

"Then you're both leaving?" Harry fought not to sound overly hopeful.

"Harry, you're *not* being very subtle," she threw back. "Yes, I think we're both leaving. Why? Where were *you* thinking of going?"

"I wanted to show Ginny something," he all but mumbled.

"Such as the most popular location for snogging?" Hermione retorted with a wicked grin.

"Now who's not being subtle?" he shot back, blushing in spite of himself. "No, it's something I saw the other day in a shop window after getting my money and was thinking of buying for her...but didn't want to do it without her approval." He gave Ginny a hopeful look; she smiled and nodded. "Which reminds me...do you think you could take our books back and put them in our rooms? They're too heavy to be lugged around for long."

"I suppose so." Hermione reached for Ginny's bag and Ron for Harry's. "Have a good time, you two ... but not *too* good, because I'll be checking both of you over when you get back!" With that, she and Ron Disapparated out of Hogsmeade.

Once they were finally gone, Harry scarcely able to believe his luck at actually being left alone with Ginny, he forced himself to simply hold out his arm, which she took. "Shall we go, my lady?"

"Harry, you really *did* see something in a shop window that you wanted to show me, didn't you?"

"Of course. Why?" He gave her a strange look, hoping that this wasn't the beginning of the post-trauma distrust phase which the Healer had warned about.

"Just making sure," she returned with a smile. "Let's go."

A moment later they began walking hand-in-hand. Ginny was uncharacteristically quiet as they walked, although she kept tight hold of his hand and occasionally smiled reassuringly at him. "You don't mind me holding your hand, do you?"

"Of course not! What a thing to say!" she admonished affectionately as they stopped momentarily. "I never mind you touching me, Harry."

*I certainly hope not, he couldn't help thinking. I don't think I could stand not being able to touch you, at least occasionally.*

"Glad to hear it," he returned. "I hope you never do."

A short time later, after they had resumed walking, they reached the shop in question ... a stationery shop, although that was not all it sold. Once they reached the large window, he pointed out what he wanted her to see: a device that would change pictures whenever it was moved a given way...like the first position would simply be one of a person smiling or whatever, the next would be of them with a companion, perhaps kissing or having an arm around them, the next still another romantic position such as having one's head on either the companion's shoulder or in their lap ... then back to the original picture.

"Well, what did you think? When I saw it, I couldn't help but think of us."

Again, Ginny seemed uncharacteristically quiet for a while, then she squeezed his hand and smiled. "It's lovely. Did you have a picture you wanted to put into it and give to me or something?"

"I was thinking along those lines," her companion admitted. "Would you mind?"

"I never mind you giving me presents," she assured him. "Although you really don't need to."

"I want to," he declared.

"It's not too expensive, is it?"

"It wouldn't matter to me if it was," Harry assured her. "I have plenty of money." With that, he turned in the direction of the door and she followed him inside without a word.

She only let go of his hand briefly to examine something on the other side of the aisle; he took the opportunity to slip the clerk a request for a brief inscription on the frame, such as "To Ginny ... I'll Always Love You ... Harry." It only took a moment to make the inscription; then the article was placed in a bag and handed to Harry.

"Let's go," he called to her; she stepped over to him and they linked hands again.

Upon leaving, they simply walked down the street again, content in each other's company. After a time, Harry brushed her ear with his lips and whispered a question he had been longing to ask ever since she'd been released from the hospital.

She smiled up at him and said, "As soon as we can find a private spot."

Harry's relief was almost palpable; despite her trauma, Ginny still wanted him to kiss her. Of course, he naturally wanted more, but one step at a time. If he could get her used to their kissing again, maybe they could even work up to shagging ... No, that was getting ahead of himself. If he could get her used to their snogging again, the rest would come in time.

He finally spotted a secluded walkway next to Gringotts and steered them onto it; once they came to a high, thick hedge, he pulled her behind it. "Here's the private spot."

She looked up at him, her lovely brown eyes soft and her lips almost irresistible. Harry's pulse rate went into the stratosphere, and he had to stuff the bag into his pocket to keep from simply dropping it on the ground. How could anything look so delicious and still be real? "Ginny ... may I hold you?"

"Yes, Harry ... please hold me," she acquiesced softly. "I've missed it."

He had to force himself to gently pull her close; it would never do to frighten her while the trauma of her assault was still so recent. *She's missed it? That's almost too good to be true!* Nonetheless, he didn't question it. "So have I." A moment later he bent his head and their lips touched. Gently, tentatively, at first, then his embrace gently tightened. It wasn't long before he felt breathless, certain that his heart was now literally skipping beats, it was going so fast. All the same, her lips were so warm, so sweet; he just couldn't get enough of them. "Gin, I love you ... I love you ..."

She reached up to stroke the back of his neck; he shivered and moaned softly against her lips. "The feeling is ... very mutual, Harry."

A moment later he tore himself away. Ginny looked astonished and hurt. "Is something wrong? Don't you want to kiss me any more?"

"Too much. That's the problem. It's still too soon, too much to ask, after your ... assault."

"You don't think I want you to kiss me because of that? That's rubbish, Potter...pure, unadulterated rubbish! All this time I've been thinking it was ~~you~~ who didn't want to. For Merlin's sake, I know you didn't mean to do it. What's it going to take to make you realize that I've forgiven you? Now let's get back to snogging." She gave him a sly wink.

"You're sure?" Harry could scarcely believe he was really hearing what he was hearing.

"More than I've ever been of anything in my life. Now come here, Mister. We've got a long time to make up for." She held out her arms to him; the look in her eyes and on her face made him forget all his noble intentions. He was frankly unable to move fast enough, and once they came together again, the snogging began in earnest ... and all track of time was lost. All that mattered was the touching, the kissing, and the loving...and most importantly, the forgiving.

\* \* \* \* \*

As it turned out, the appointment with the Muggle doctor was scheduled for the following afternoon at two p.m. Since Ginny was pretty much healed, at least physically, she naturally questioned Harry as to the necessity of having a medical. He had never been good at deception, but gave it his best shot. "We ... just want to make sure you're healing properly. Please, Gin ... if only to humour me?"

She sighed. "If it'll make you feel better."

Again, Harry decided to take her to the doctor's himself on his Firebolt; this time she sat behind him, her arms around his waist, and rested her cheek on his back. Again, he loved feeling her warmth and smelling her perfume as they flew. Within half an hour (with fifteen minutes to spare), they had arrived and checked in with the nurse/receptionist. Within another fifteen minutes she called them inside, having Harry wait in the doctor's office while Ginny was being examined, assuring him he would have a female assistant present at all times while checking her over.

The examination took roughly half an hour; then the doctor joined Harry in his office. "Where's Ginny ... my girlfriend?"

"In the waiting room. I was told you wanted to discuss the examination results privately with me because of her recent trauma."

"That's right. I believe it would harm her greatly if we discussed this too freely in front of her this recently after her ... trauma."

"Your concern is most admirable, young man. Now what exactly was it that you expected me to find?"

"Evidence of ... sexual assault, for one thing."

"Oh yes, I definitely found that. A brutal one, at that."

"Would you be willing to put all that you say in writing, if asked, or testify to it in court?"

"Most certainly ... but why do you ask?"

"Let's just say that I want to punish the one, or ones, who did it. Which reminds me, would you say that her ... injuries, although healed, indicate that there was more than one attacker?"

"Definitely more than one attacker," the doctor declared. "Again, why do you ask?"

"She was led to believe there was just one ... specifically, me, since I'm her steady boyfriend."

"Prior to her ... trauma, she was not sexually involved with either of the perpetrators, correct?"

"Damn bloody right she wasn't," Harry shot back. "One of them she'd never even met before! ... Sorry about the language."

"It's understandable," the doctor dismissed with a smile. "Are you saying that you have not been ... sexually involved with her?"

"Correct," Harry confirmed. *Not that I wouldn't like to be,* he finished in his mind. *And considering what's happened, who knows how long it will be before I can, thanks to what Malfoy and Dudley have done?*

"How long have you been ... steady dates?"

"Roughly two months total," Harry revealed. "Before her ... trauma, we'd been together a total of five weeks."

"May I assume you intend to continue dating her, that your feelings for her have not changed because of what happened to her?"

"Of course," Harry assured him. "What happened to her wasn't her fault. She was kidnapped."

The doctor was stunned into silence for a moment before speaking again. "Kidnapped, you say?"

"Yes, indeed. One of my ... adversaries and a relative of mine with whom I've never gotten along teamed up to try to get revenge on me by ... going after my girlfriend."

"Do I know this relative?" the doctor asked.

"I think so," Harry confirmed. "His name's Dudley Dursley."

"Dursley ... his parents are Vernon and Petunia Dursley, correct?"

"Correct. Petunia is my mother's sister."

"So Dudley is your ... cousin, then?"

Harry nodded reluctantly. "Why would your cousin do this to you?"

"I've given up trying to figure him...or them...out, frankly. There are times I'm convinced that they're totally and thoroughly evil. Not to mention in total denial where Dudley is concerned."

"Why do you say that?"

"Years of physical and emotional abuse of me while spoiling Dudley literally rotten. They seem to believe him incapable of doing wrong...but we're not here to discuss my problems, Doctor. Ginny ... my girlfriend ... is my main concern."

"But he...and they...obviously *are* capable of wrongdoing, if what's happened to your girlfriend ... and you ... is any indication."

"Of course he is, and they are ... but all I want is to see *him* punished for what he's done to Ginny, whatever I have to do. Which reminds me. I'll be expecting your report on my girlfriend and her injuries to be available whenever I call for it."

"When will you be needing it?"

"I couldn't say exactly when. How would it be if I ... came in one day, say, in the next couple of weeks or so...and requested it?"

"I think that could be arranged," the doctor agreed. "What name shall I put it under?"

"My girlfriend's name is Ginny Weasley," Harry told him. "I'd better go now. She's probably wondering what's taking so long."

"Might be a good idea. Don't need to have her asking too many questions you can't satisfactorily answer," the doctor concurred.

"Thank you for your time, Doctor. Ginny and I very much appreciate it."

"Glad to help ... Harry Potter, isn't it? I hope everything works out for you and your girlfriend, that you can manage to see that your cousin is punished for what he did to her."

Harry nodded. "Thank you again, Doctor. We'll need all the help we can get." With that, he stood up and turned for the door, walking through and closing it behind him as he headed back to the waiting room.

Ginny looked up from leafing through a magazine. "Well! I was beginning to wonder if you were ever coming back. May I assume you discussed the doctor's findings with him?"

Harry nodded again. "He says you're healing nicely and should be just fine."

Ginny looked at him suspiciously. "Can't I know what you discussed? After all, you were talking about me."

"We agreed that it was too soon after your ... trauma to do so, that it might prove harmful to you if we told you."

"Harry, you know I don't like things being kept from me...especially when they concern me," she warned, quietly but ominously.

He put one hand under her chin so their eyes met. "Do you trust me, Gin?"

"More than anyone," she assured him.

"Then trust me in this. It's in your best interests that you not know these things just now. Rest assured, *will* tell you ... at the proper time."

"And when will that be?" she retorted.

"Just as soon as possible," he promised. "In the meantime, let's just concentrate on our upcoming lessons." He leaned down, putting his hands on her shoulders, and kissed her deeply, with tender passion, for an interminable moment, then released her. "Let's get back to the Burrow now."

Ginny sighed, then smiled. "You know I can never refuse you when you kiss me like that." They then turned for the door which led outside. Once there, Harry removed the Invisibility Charm he had placed on his Firebolt; then they mounted it and were soon airborne.

Harry didn't like keeping things from Ginny, but as he'd told her, it was in her best interests that she not know certain things until the proper time. It was also good that he had obtained the doctor's promise that he would have a report on Ginny and her injuries ready for him when he needed it ... not to mention his statement that he would be willing to testify to confirm his report if called upon to do so.

The next step would be to go before the Wizengamot and talk it over with them, but that wasn't for another three days. He would have to owl Neville and ask him to meet him there to possibly make a formal statement. While there he would ask regarding the legality of using Veritaserum to "persuade" Draco to tell the truth about his actions the day Ginny was abducted ... and when the time came, do the same regarding the legality of using sodium pentothal to make Dudley tell the truth about *his* actions that day. Meanwhile, all they could do was wait not only for the day of that appointment, but for the resulting reports on the DNA samples, including his own, from both St. Mungo's and the Muggle hospital...and knuckle down to their upcoming lessons.

## Chapter Five - Wizengamot

*Chapter 5 of 18*

Harry and Neville meet at the Wizengamot to testify as to what happened the day of Ginny's abduction.

When Harry arrived for the Wizengamot appointment three days later, Neville was already waiting for him. Upon their acknowledging each other, he said flat-out, "I assume you know why I asked you here."

Neville nodded. "I think so. Because of what I saw the day Ginny was kidnapped."

"Right. And I want you to tell the Wizengamot exactly what you saw that day, just as you told it to me."

As they made their way to the room where the august group was waiting for them, Harry couldn't help thinking of the last time he'd been here, when he'd nearly been kicked out of Hogwarts for using magic to save himself and Dudley from dementors. He had been chained to a chair, and it had taken Dumbledore and Mrs. Figg, the neighbor on Privet Drive who had turned out to be a Squib, a non-magic person born of wizarding parents, to get him off the hook.

This time, however, he was here for a far different...and better...reason ... to see to the punishment of Draco Malfoy for what he had done to Ginny...and by association, his lowlife cousin, Dudley. If Harry had his way, literally nothing and no one would have the power to save either him or Draco from serious jail time ... especially if the authorities managed to find incriminating evidence of additional sex crimes hidden in Dudley's room. Harry frankly wouldn't put it past his aunt and uncle to know such things about Dudley and cover them up, which prompted him to make a mental note to observe their behaviour once the rape case was made public...and Harry intended to see that it was.

Harry fully expected to need bodyguards, at least for a time, especially if he managed to get Draco convicted and Lucius vowed revenge. Because the elder Malfoy was a Death Eater, Harry would have to be on his toes on that score ... or if he managed to get Dudley arrested and convicted, Vernon and Petunia might vow revenge on him and maybe even try to kill him themselves. He wasn't too worried about them, though...not as long as he could see them coming. He knew enough defensive spells by now that they wouldn't be able to touch him ... at least not physically. But if he could get enough people to believe in him, he'd be well on the way to accomplishing his goal of getting revenge for himself as well as Ginny.

And he was close enough to his seventeenth birthday that it didn't matter if he was kicked out of number four, Privet Drive anyway. In fact, he had already cleared out his belongings from there; they were all in Fred and George's old room now. He knew the Weasleys would take him in at a moment's notice (already had, in fact), and guards could be placed on the Burrow as had been on number four, Privet Drive, another thing he would have to speak to the Ministry about ... and Harry would be well rid of his evil relatives once and for all. And best of all, he would be near Ginny.

It was at this point that Harry and Neville arrived at the lower-level room where the Wizengamot awaited them. Once they arrived and stated their business, chairs were provided for them, with no chains this time, thankfully ... although Harry frankly hoped to be able to see Draco chained to a chair one day soon and grilled as he had once been.

They took Neville first, since he had only come to make his formal statement as to what he had seen the day of Ginny's abduction.

"Mr. Neville Francis Longbottom, we are given to understand that you were a witness to Miss Ginevra Weasley's abduction on the afternoon of June 18, 1997. Please tell us exactly what you saw, from start to finish. It will be recorded."

"Yes, sir," Neville returned quietly. With that, he began. It took roughly fifteen minutes for him to re-tell his story; then the panel of wizards and witches thanked him and said he was free to leave upon finishing. Just before he did, though, he put a reassuring hand on Harry's shoulder, which prompted him to look up to receive a reassuring smile and a whispered, "Good luck. I hope my statement helps you."

Harry returned the smile and a whispered, "I'm sure it will. And for the record, both Ginny and I appreciate it." Once Neville had gone and the panel was conversing among themselves, discussing Neville's statement before taking Harry's, Harry had a moment to think about having finally learned his fellow Gryffindor's middle name. It really shouldn't have surprised him, since Harry knew that Neville's father was named Frank (the informal version of either "Francis" or "Franklin") Longbottom, a noted Auror who had been tortured by the Cruciatus Curse when Neville was a very young child, just over a year old.

Because his parents had been driven insane and were now permanent residents of St. Mungo's, Neville had been raised by his paternal grandmother, Mrs. Augusta Longbottom. From what Harry had surmised, it seemed to be a common practice in the wizarding world to give sons their fathers' Christian names for middle names. That must have been at least one reason why he had "James" as his middle name.

The voice of the head of the Wizengamot, a kindly-looking wizard which reminded him somewhat of Dumbledore, rang out softly but firmly, bringing Harry's head up with a jerk. "Mr. Potter, we are prepared to take your statement now."

"Thank you, sir," Harry returned respectfully.

"Your friend, young Mr. Longbottom, said he saw a tall blond male point something at Miss Weasley and render her unconscious."

"Yes. I believe the person in question was Draco Malfoy."

"Are you quite sure of that? The Malfoys are a very well-known, and well-heeled, pure-blood wizarding family."

"They tend to follow the Dark Arts, too. If you'll recall, Draco's father, Lucius, is ... or rather, was, a Death Eater. They were also both Sorted into Slytherin House. In addition, Draco is the only person I know of that description."

"There could be many people who answer that description, Mr. Potter. Have you considered that?"

"I have, sir ... and ask you to consider this: How many people of that description are wizards?"

The older wizard seemed taken aback at Harry's quick response, albeit impressed. "You have a point there, young man."

*Damn bloody right I do* Harry thought, but said, "I also believe he took Ginny ... my girlfriend ... to the Malfoy home and held her prisoner there. During that time, he sexually assaulted her."

"Have you proof of that?"

"I'm taking steps to obtain that proof now. It will be several days before the tests come back," Harry told the panel quietly but with conviction. "If you like, I can bring you the Healers' reports when I receive them."

"That would be appreciated," came the reply. "Have you any other statements to make?"

"I do, sir. I also have reason to believe that Draco Malfoy had a Muggle accomplice who also sexually assaulted Ginny."

"Have you any idea how and where he met his alleged accomplice?"

"A very good idea, sir. The accomplice was my ... cousin Dudley Dursley. I believe Draco traveled to Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey, where my ... relatives live, met him somehow, told him about Ginny and me...and that was when they decided to join forces against me by going after her."

"You are a half-blood, are you not?"

"Yes, sir. My father was a pure-blood wizard, but my mother was a Muggle-born witch. Dudley's mother is her sister, and she cannot abide anything having to do with magic or the wizarding world."

"It must have been ... very difficult for you, having to be with them all these years, knowing how they felt about you and your parents."

"To put it mildly! But it doesn't matter what they've done to me so much as what they have done...or rather, what Dudley has done...to Ginny. My main concern is obtaining justice for her in any and every way I can."

"We'll do all we can to assist you, Mr. Potter. Is that all you have to say?"

"Two last questions, if I may."

"Go ahead."

"When you ... interrogate crime suspects, do you ever use Veritaserum in order to ensure that you get the truth?" Harry held his breath, hoping for the answer he wanted but could not count on.

He could scarcely believe his ears when he heard, "Routinely. It saves a lot of time and money, not to mention manpower."

"Does that mean you would use it on Draco should he be ... arrested?"

"Definitely," came the reply. "Although we cannot make a final decision as to whether or not to do so before all the evidence you mention is in our hands."

"I understand, sir. I will do everything I can to see that you receive that evidence at the earliest possible time."

"Very well. If I may say so, Miss Weasley is a very fortunate young woman to have a boyfriend who cares so much about her well-being."

"She is one of the few people I know who deserves my ... high regard, sir...and I intend to do everything I possibly can to...retain hers. May I go now?"

"Of course. We will be in touch with you should we have further questions ... and feel free to return, if not owl us, should you have further questions."

"Thank you, sir." With that, Harry stood up and left the room, closing the heavy metal door behind him as quietly as possible because he noted that the panel now seemed to be discussing his admittedly incredible (but nonetheless true) statements. He had now set the ball rolling; if the results of the tests on the DNA samples taken from Ginny's body showed what he thought they would, Draco would be up to his slimy neck in trouble ... and not long after that, his scumbag cousin.

Fortunately Harry had a far more pleasant thing to look forward to...Ginny had agreed to go on a study date with him the following day, and she and Molly would make a picnic lunch for them to take along. He had already chosen the spot where they would set up the picnic, fairly close to the Burrow but still far enough away so that they would have privacy.

He could only hope to have the strength to control himself so that Ginny would begin to feel safe around him again. It would be very difficult, but she was worth the effort. Of course, it would also be nice to be able to snog for a while, too ... maybe even more than once ... but he had to make sure not to overdo it, if only to ensure that his overtures didn't frighten her.

The main thing he needed now was to get a good night's sleep, although he thought he might *feign* sleepiness at some point, if only to see if Ginny would be willing to cradle his head in her lap...or allow him to rest his head on her breast, then stroke his hair as it rested there. Whatever happened, however, he would cherish because it meant being alone with her ... and if he played his cards right, she would belong to him not only for a few hours, but a lifetime. For the time being, though, he had to play it by ear, take it slow...or least as slow as he possibly could.

## Chapter Six - Study Date/Romance

### Chapter 6 of 18

Harry and Ginny have a picnic and study date a short distance from the Burrow, but far enough away for privacy--and in the process, take some time out for a bit of romance.

They woke early, Harry especially wanting the day to last as long as possible. Since it was a warm day, almost summer-like, it was decided that bathing suits would be worn beneath their regular clothes so they could swim if they liked. Harry had never seen Ginny in a bathing suit and could hardly wait. Her regular clothes were exciting enough, though...at least to him...although she probably wouldn't have considered them such.

A lacy little coverup top and snug jeans, along with her favourite white sandals, completed her picnic/study date ensemble. She had her hair put up with a large barrette, but Harry was hoping he would be able to get her to take it down because he much preferred seeing it that way. It would also be easier for him to kiss, stroke or run his fingers through it, should matters get that far ... and if he could manage it, they would.

He wore a red and gold t-shirt with black jeans, although he forwent his regular shoes this time for black sandals. When the time came, he took charge of the picnic basket/cooler which contained their lunch, since it was heavy; she took charge of their textbooks and other study materials, using a "Feather-Light" spell to make them all but weightless.

Again, he decided to take her to the picnic spot on his broom, using the same spell on the picnic basket/cooler as she did with the books and study materials so it didn't weigh the broom down. It was about a fifteen-minute flight, and each had to use at least one hand to hang onto the stuff. Fairly tricky to manoeuvre, but they managed. Just the same, both were glad when they arrived.

Upon arrival they realized they had forgotten a blanket, so Harry used the *Inanimatus Conjuratus* spell, picturing a large red-gold blanket in the Gryffindor colours to spread out and sit on. Once that was done, they situated themselves and began studying...that is, once all the stuff was distributed, both academic and culinary.

Ginny had also brought a battery-operated boom box with some of their favourite musical tapes, shrunk down and lightened in her jeans pocket. Not long after their arrival, she had enlarged and returned the weight of the articles to normal, setting up the music to play continuously in order to have a pleasant soundtrack to the day. They ate at least some of the food while they studied, deciding to save the rest for after the swim, because one usually got hungry again after a swim.

There were some things he was able to help her with, such as the DADA book and the sixth-year standard text of spells. They worked together on the one book they

shared, *Advanced Potions*. It wasn't precisely the same as the Half-Blood Prince's version, but this book was an updated edition, and to Harry's surprise, it contained a lot of the same stuff that had been in the Prince's version.

It seemed to grow warmer as the day wore on, and it was Ginny who eventually suggested they have a swim in the nearby large pond by which they were studying. Harry fought to control the sudden pounding of his heart at the thought of finally seeing Ginny in a bathing suit...and most importantly, with no one around (except her, maybe) to comment on any reactions he might make.

They decided to duck behind trees to change into the bathing suits; Harry made sure to finish first, so he could watch and wait for her to reappear, then savour the moment when he first saw her. He wore some swim trunks and a tank top, which matched his eyes, waiting on the blanket for her to return. It was several minutes later (he estimated around ten or so) that he heard her voice from behind him.

"Harry? I'm ready."

He turned around...and was instantly enchanted ... not to mention aroused! Her suit was something he didn't think Molly would have allowed her out of the house in had she known she even owned such a thing. Probably the only reason Ginny had gotten away with it was because she'd been wearing her regular clothes over it. Gods, she was lovely ... It was a two-piece denim strapless string bikini! His heart and libido both soared into the stratosphere, and he wasn't sure for how long (or even *if*) he would be able to control himself. She looked literally good enough to eat; his hands fairly itched to touch and caress the bare skin exposed by the brief suit, just as his lips ached to kiss it.

Harry's knees suddenly felt as though he had been zapped by a Jelly-Legs Jinx, and he wasn't sure if he was going to be able to stand up, let alone walk to her ... but fortunately he was near a tree, using it to support himself temporarily while he stood up. He didn't move until he was at least fairly sure he wouldn't take one step and fall flat on his face ... then took a step and almost literally froze in his tracks. For a long time he just stood there gazing at her, stunned speechless by her beauty. She had even taken her hair down!

Ginny was the one who finally spoke. "Harry, are you coming or not?"

"Oh ... yeah ... sorry." It was surely nothing short of a miracle that he had managed to keep his feet as he made himself move to join her.

After swimming for a while, then just playing in the water like children, they decided to get out...but stopped about five feet short of the shoreline. The water was up to her thighs, but Harry, being several inches taller, it was around his knees. By this time he could resist the need to touch and hold her no longer. What he was feeling was anything but childish, and he was hoping she wanted it as much as he did, although she had given no indication one way or the other up to this point. Maybe she was waiting for him to make the first move. Well, no need to worry; he fully intended to ... and right now!

Just the same, Harry was hesitant about sliding his arms around Ginny's waist, although she merely smiled and didn't say or do anything to discourage him even as he entwined his fingers to rest on the small of her back. Only then did Ginny slide her arms around her companion's slender waist, loving the feel of his warm, bare skin beneath her hands.

Finally she rested her cheek on his chest where dark hair was beginning to grow, mostly on his upper chest with a thin line extending to his navel. She could see this because he had removed his tank top before their swim. Ginny blushed upon thinking of how much she wanted to kiss her way down that line, but instead she just held him, listening to his heart beating rapidly beneath her ear: a beat which increased markedly as she lightly stroked over it.

Harry closed his eyes and prayed for strength; her fingers almost literally inflamed him beyond control. "Gin ..."

"Yes?"

"May I ... kiss you?"

"You have to ask?" She reached up to stroke the back of his neck, then down his back to his waist. He moaned softly and tightened his embrace even as he bent to find her lips ... tentatively at first, then the kiss deepened when one of her hands reached to hold the back of his head. It was a long time before they came up for air, and even then, only reluctantly. Harry was unable to help thinking how sweet she both smelled and tasted; his desire to experience every aspect of her was all but insatiable.

Not too much later, resuming the kiss, he scooped her up in his arms and carried her out of the water and toward the blanket, a volatile mixture of love and desire making for a sweet pain in his body a pain that must be eased soon, or else he would go mad. He knelt down and gently placed her on her back on the blanket, then joined her there, unwilling to have his hands and lips not touching her for more than a few seconds, if that.

Once he was holding her again, his lips found their way to her creamy throat and kissed it, lingering on the pulse point beneath her left ear. Of course, his hands were busy too, make no mistake.

"Come here," she finally directed, lying on her back. Her next words were what hooked him once and for all: "Make love to me, Harry. I want to belong to you completely."

Even as he prepared to obey her, he drank in the sight of her, craving it as an alcoholic would crave liquor. She was every bit as intoxicating and addictive as the aforementioned drink, and he knew he would need a continuous Ginny-fix every day for the rest of his life to satisfy his addiction.

Harry had frankly never dreamed he would be in this situation so soon, fully expecting it to take months at the very least before she would be willing to share intimacies, especially with him, especially considering how Draco had attempted to implicate Harry in her rape. He was thankful beyond words that it hadn't taken. He marveled once again at the depth of her love and faith in him that had made it possible.

"Your wish is my command, sweet lady." Even as their intricately entwined bodies began to move together in the rhythms of love, the lovers shared their own wordless Heaven, unable to believe it possible to feel as they did and still be on Earth. After a while they lost all track of time, aware only of each other's nearness and the touch and kiss of the other.

Harry had never experienced such heavenly rapture, sorely tempted to throw all semblance of self-control to the winds and be damned to the consequences, certain that Ginny felt the same way. They had waited almost a literal eternity for this moment! If only this unbelievable happiness, this most incredible sweetness he felt right now would never end. Love was here and now, his only desire to remain close to Ginny, in her arms, feeling her delicious body move beneath him and her lips cling to his as she whispered of her love and passion for him.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter Seven - Aftermath/Ginny Asks About Cho

After the lovers awaken, they return to the Burrow ... and after loving again, Ginny asks Harry about his relationship with Cho Chang.

The lovers awakened four hours later to find it nearly dark. The temperature had dropped twenty degrees, but it was still in the mid-sixties, if Harry's estimate was correct. Both lay intricately entwined on the blanket, pleasantly exhausted from their passionate interlude. Ginny's arms held her beloved close, one arm around his slender waist, the other holding his silky but unruly dark head over her heart; his arms were locked around her waist even as his cheek rested on her breasts.

Ginny smiled, savouring the nearness of her beloved's body even as he breathed in the combination of her perfume and womanly scent. Love once again threatened to overwhelm her as she gazed at the man sleeping in her arms, his eyelashes so long, dark and thick that they rested on his cheeks. His breath was warm and sweet on her skin, his arms strong but gentle around her. She lay beside him, mentally reliving every incredible moment of their interlude, imprinting it on her mind to ensure that its reality would replace her former fantasies. They had had such a wonderful few hours together ... When Harry finally stirred, Ginny tightened her embrace, wanting to feel him close to her for as long as possible. She had waited so long for this moment ...

"Gin." She heard his soft, sweet voice close to her ear.

"My love," she whispered as her lips once again found his, tasting deeply of their warmth and sweetness. "Are you tired?"

"Nothing that some more sleep...and more of you...couldn't cure," he smiled upon enthusiastically returning the kiss. "How about you?"

"The same," she agreed. "But then we had a most ... spirited interlude, wouldn't you say?"

"That's the understatement of the year, if not the century," he laughed, ruffling her hair affectionately. "I didn't think it possible, but you've totally worn me out!"

"Did you want to stay here?"

"I certainly wouldn't mind," he agreed, "but how would we ever explain it to your folks? We'll probably have some tall explaining to do as it is."

"No doubt, especially if Mum has the chance to get her hooks into us. In which case, we'd better get dressed, repack everything, then head back. Just the same, it'll be dark soon. Will you be able to find the house?"

"Oh, I think so...especially if you left a light on in your room."

"Come to think of it, I did," she laughed.

"Then we'll head there," he decided, reluctantly releasing her and rolling over to get up and retrieve his clothing from behind the tree nearest him while he could still see to find it, not wanting to use his wand unless absolutely necessary, preferring to think of how he and Ginny could make their own personal magic explode between them without any need for wands whatsoever.

She did the same, and by the time she came out, he had the basket/cooler repacked, not to mention the blanket and boom box reshunk and lightened, including the tapes, their books and other study materials. This time he held the basket/cooler in front of him so she could have her arms around him while they flew home. Neither had any idea how they'd managed it, but got into the room and set up as if they'd been studying the past couple of hours before Molly came up to check on them.

"When did you two get back?" Molly inquired, eying them intently when she noted their Christmas morning smiles in each other's direction, even in the midst of their (supposedly) studying. Just what exactly had transpired at the pond today? If it was anything like she suspected, they hadn't been back for long, simply did everything to make it *look* like they had been. To Molly it looked suspiciously like they had literally shagged each other silly, but she didn't voice her suspicions at this point, since if she knew her daughter, it was likely to come out eventually, even without her help.

"A couple of hours, I think, Mum," Ginny replied. "I didn't check my watch, though, and neither did Harry."

"Well, don't stay up too late, darling. Remember, young people need their sleep."

"Don't worry, Mum, we won't forget," Ginny assured her. "And we'll be sure to tell you about it in the morning."

"I'll hold you to that," the older woman replied, well able to imagine that a good part of the day was likely to be ... creatively edited, to put it mildly. Even so, better that than the strained relationship the couple had had for the first week or so after Harry and company's return from defeating Voldemort and company. Now that that insufferably noble quest of his that had made him break up with Ginny (if only temporarily) had finally been accomplished, maybe they could actually settle down and have a normal life together. Or at least as normal as a life with Harry Potter could ever be.

Once the door had closed, however, and a Locking Charm was placed on it, all academic study ceased and physical/emotional study resumed. It wasn't until after the last interlude of the night that the at least momentarily sated lovers spoke again at any length. "Do you think she's guessed what happened?" Ginny couldn't help asking even as she again cuddled close to her lover.

"It wouldn't surprise me," Harry laughed, burying his face in her fragrant hair for a moment. "Molly doesn't strike me as the kind who's easily fooled."

"Just the same, she's very good at *pretending* to be," Ginny laughed back, squeezing him hard for a moment. "Which reminds me ... there's something I've been curious about for some time."

"Like what?" Harry prompted.

"Cho Chang," came her two-word reply. "Just what happened between you two?"

Once Harry got over his initial surprise at her asking so long after the fact, he smiled somewhat bitterly. "Are you sure you want to know?"

"If it's part of your life, yes," she confirmed. "And I want to hear it all...from start to finish, so don't leave anything out."

Harry sighed and cuddled her close, as if seeking strength to speak. "If you say so. Here goes." With that, he began.

When he related the part where his and Cho's eyes had first met and they had smiled at each other over the treats trolley on the Hogwarts Express, then she had turned and walked away after getting the Pumpkin Pasties she wanted, he looked up to see Ginny giving him a knowing smile. "Now I know why you turned down the treats on the trolley. The one you wanted had just walked away." She gave him a sly wink.

"You know me too well," he returned dryly. "Now if I may finish?"

"Go ahead," she prompted. "But if I may say something?"

He nodded.

"Wasn't it shortly after the first task that McGonagall told us about the Yule Ball?"

"I think so. Why?"

"Because I'm assuming that Cho was the one you most wanted to go with you, but you didn't get a chance to ask her in time because of her habit of going everywhere with her friends in packs."

"I've never understood that. How do girls expect blokes to ask them out when they're surrounded by a whole pack of friends and they're all listening in?"

"Did you ever think to just ask your target to go off with you for a little while so you can be alone to ask?"

"No, I have to admit I didn't think of that," Harry reluctantly admitted.

"Too bad. If you had, Cedric might not have had a chance to get his hooks into her." By Harry's reaction, Ginny could tell that that was still a sensitive issue, particularly since Cedric had died shortly after the Ball at Voldemort's hands...or rather, on his orders, in the old cemetery the Triwizard-Cup-cum-Portkey had taken them to.

"Consider this, Gin. If I had, we might not be together now."

"Then it's a good thing you didn't," she countered with a wicked grin. "Well, to get back to the subject. What happened next?"

"I happened to run into her on the outside stairs; it was really cold and she'd warned me about ice on them...then I realised I'd actually gotten her alone and used the time to ask her to the Ball. Unfortunately she'd turned me down, said she'd already accepted a date with someone else, and it only mollified me a little when she apologised for having to refuse me. I didn't find out it was Cedric who asked her until the night of the Ball."

"I can also imagine how you must have felt whenever you saw them walking together in the school halls hand-in-hand, or come upon them snogging."

"It was about the same way I felt when Ron and I came upon you and Dean snogging," he threw back.

"I hope you realise that that was not my idea. Frankly, I think Dean had guessed how you were beginning to feel about me and did that just to get your dander up."

"Well, he succeeded," Harry returned bitterly, recalling how his hand had itched for the feel of his wand so he could hex that bloody bastard. Unfortunately, he hadn't had it at the time; he'd actually left it in the dormitory because he'd had a free period and didn't see the need to carry it without having a class. How could he have known that Dean would pull something like that? On the other hand, considering who he was involved with at the time, Harry should have expected it at some point, not been so surprised and furious when he and Ron had come upon them. "So you can imagine how pleased I was when you ditched him not long after that."

"Again, we're getting off the subject," Ginny reminded him. "Tell me the rest of the Harry and Cho story."

"Not much more to tell. The next time I saw her was shortly after Cedric's death, and I came upon her crying over him. My attempt to comfort her turned into a kiss. The only one I ever shared with her, by the way, despite what you may have heard to the contrary. It hadn't registered at the time, but she was standing under a sprig of mistletoe. In retrospect, I can't help wondering if she'd staged that crying spell to ambush me."

"It's entirely possible," Ginny agreed. "Girls have been known to do that."

"You've never done that," he pointed out.

"I'm not most girls," she countered. "What happened next?"

"Fast-forward to February 1996 and the first Hogsmeade weekend of that year. She'd heard about it and asked me if I intended to go. I said I was considering it, and she basically said she'd like to go with me if I didn't mind."

"How could she possibly think you'd mind? I can't help thinking that she did that on purpose, simply angling for a date to Hogsmeade with whomever was willing to take her. You just happened to be the first one to take the bait."

"It started out all right, though...then we got to Madam Puddifoot's. It had been decorated for Valentine's Day, with cupids dropping confetti on customers, and virtually everyone else in the shop was snogging while we simply sat there feeling embarrassed. It didn't help matters that Hermione had cornered me earlier and asked me to meet her for something."

"When I told Cho about it, she went ballistic and stormed out before I could explain that it wasn't what she thought. Hermione told me later that she'd been jealous, but it was ridiculous. You know that Hermione is just a friend of mine. It's hard to explain that when the person doesn't give you a chance, so our relationship just went steadily downhill after that. It got so we could scarcely look each other in the face without blushing. The next thing I knew, she was going with one of your exes, Michael Corner. By that time I frankly didn't care, and I think you can guess why."

"Well, I think part of the reason is because that was the year you lost Sirius, and the rest was because Umbridge was terrorising you every chance she got. It got so people could hardly make a move without violating one of her bloody Educational Decrees."

"That's for sure. I don't know how I'd have stood it without our setting up the D.A. that year and occupying myself with figuring lessons for our meetings, especially after she'd commandeered my Firebolt and banned me from playing Quidditch."

"One last question, if I may. Now that you've snogged both of us, which one would you say is the better kisser?"

Harry gave her a funny look. "What difference would that make now?"

"I want to know," Ginny returned stubbornly.

"Suit yourself. In retrospect, I'd have to say you come out ahead. Mainly because I have more of a basis for comparison with you than I do with Cho. Not that the kiss with her wasn't enjoyable; it's the simple combination of quality *and* quantity which gives you the edge."

"Well, thank you, sir. I'm glad you think so. Which reminds me. Have you heard anything from Ron or Hermione?"

"Just talked to Hermione yesterday. They're doing okay, but like I figured, Ron simply told her to mention that he wanted to know how things were going with us."

"What do you intend to tell him?"

"That I'll tell him about us if he tells us about him and Hermione."

Ginny laughed. "That should teach him to poke his nose where it doesn't belong."

"One can but hope," Harry returned. "I think we'd better get some sleep now. It's almost four o'clock."

"You sure you don't want to make love one more time?" Ginny asked with a provocative smile.

"As tempting as the prospect is, I'd rather we postpone it until morning," her lover opined. "On that note ..." His voice trailed off and he lifted her face for a lingering good-



night kiss. "Good night, luv."

"Good night." With that, the lovebirds soon fell into a deep sleep, which wasn't broken until morning.

## Chapter Eight - Personal and Legal Developments

*Chapter 8 of 18*

Harry gets some information regarding the rape case from both the Wizengamot and Muggle authorities, then discusses--albeit reluctantly--his relationship with Ginny with Ron and Hermione.

Harry was pleased upon awakening to find that Hedwig had returned with the results of the Healers' reports from both St. Mungo's and the Muggle hospital. After giving her the opportunity to take a drink and some of her favorite owl treats, he sat down in the overstuffed chair in the room to peruse them, carefully easing himself out of bed so as not to disturb Ginny, dressing quietly and folding one leg beneath him as he sat down, Hedwig perching on the back of it. Even at that, he kept one ear cocked for sounds of Ginny awakening so he could hide them if necessary.

Upon finishing, he couldn't help noting the basic similarity between both reports: They agreed that there had been two distinct DNA samples found in Ginny's body, neither of which belonged to Harry, which would shoot down Draco's attempt to convince people that he had been responsible for her assault once and for all. Not long afterward, he transferred the reports to another large envelope, addressed them to the Wizengamot at the Ministry, then told Hedwig to take them there after sticking a note of explanation in last thing. She was gone only a short time before he heard the sound of Ginny awakening and quickly dropped his clothing, intending to once again join her in bed for their promised morning love.

"Harry?"

"Here, luv. Just had to use the loo. Now, if I recall, I did promise you that we'd make love this morning. Are you still game?"

"You need to ask? Get back into bed, Mister, or else you risk being ravished right on the floor!"

"Better lock the door first, though, so your Mum doesn't bust in on us when we least expect it," Harry remarked, using one of the nonverbal door-locking spells he knew; then he turned back to his waiting lover. They soon lost themselves in each other's arms again, rekindling their own personal magic ... the kind that didn't require wands.

\* \* \* \* \*

As expected, Ron didn't inquire further into the details of Harry and Ginny's love life. He was still curious, of course, but at this point was sure that not even Hermione's affectionate but relentless probing would elicit any relevant information from them if they chose not to divulge it...and they had to admit that in the same situation, they probably wouldn't be any more likely to confess than the newly reunited lovers.

On the legal front, a solid case was slowly but surely building up against Ginny's attackers...both of them...but even at that, Harry knew he had to be constantly on the alert for any and all possible courses of action that the Malfoys or Dursleys might decide to take once they discovered who was behind the push for a public rape trial, not to mention the swift and severe punishment of both perpetrators.

By this time, of course, Harry and Ginny had most definitely become lovers, but he wasn't about to admit that, especially not to his two worst enemies. If he couldn't protect her from the initial attack, this time he was determined to protect her (as best he could, anyway) from any of the resulting fallout.

He had even suggested that the authorities discreetly investigate the backgrounds of both alleged perpetrators (i.e. Draco and Dudley) for further evidence of behaviour reminiscent of a sexual predator. It wouldn't surprise Harry one bit if Ginny had been only the latest in a long line of girls who had been victimised by them ... and if he could manage it, she would be the last!

\* \* \* \* \*

Ron and Hermione learned the rest when Harry gave them the latest developments in the rape case. He tried to time it so Molly and Ginny would be out of the house and busy elsewhere, away from the Burrow, in order that he be able to speak freely without having to worry overmuch about Ginny getting wind of it before the proper time.

Naturally they had all been invited to accompany the Weasley ladies, but all said they wanted to bring each other up-to-date on the latest news (regarding the rape case, although that part was not mentioned out loud). Ginny had given them all a sceptical look before giving in.

"Suit yourselves. There's something I want to get for Harry anyway. After all, his seventeenth birthday is next week and will mark his officially coming of age, so I'm recruiting Mum to help me get him something really special in order to make it as memorable as possible." She gave him a sly wink, then squeezed his shoulders and kissed him on top of the head before Disapparating out with Molly.

After they had gone, Harry gave them the latest news he had received, what the results of the tests on the DNA samples showed. Neither seemed any more surprised than Harry himself had been, and were pleased that steps were being taken to investigate the backgrounds of both perpetrators as to possible other acts, which could be deemed those of a sexual predator. They also agreed that it was the most logical course of action to have the official authorities investigate instead of Harry himself, since the opinion and findings of an official body of law would carry more weight than that of an individual, however intimately connected with the case.

Harry also considered this a good time for Ron and Hermione to go before the Wizengamot themselves and give their own formal statements as to Harry and Ginny's personal habits and character while they had the chance to do so. They agreed readily, both to help him and Ginny as friends and potential family members by marriage when the time came. Of course, there was no way of knowing how long their statements would take, so they thought it best to do it when there was at least a four-hour-long block of time free in their schedule. (That was also the maximum time that the Wizengamot was willing to grant them for formal statements.)

\* \* \* \* \*

While waiting to hear back as to what time their appointment was, Ron and Hermione (or more accurately, the latter) decided to ask point-blank just why Harry was so happy...almost walking on air, in fact. They had never seen him as happy as he was now, not even during the height of the original romance between him and Ginny.

Mainly because that a new aspect had been added, one which no one thought (least of all Harry himself) would ever happen because of the trauma Ginny had experienced as a result of her double assault ... but also because of the extent of her love and faith in him, the vast majority of post-traumatic stress she would have ordinarily endured, if only subconsciously, was greatly lessened.

"I'm in love, that's all," he simply said, daring them to push harder.

"It's more than that, Harry," Hermione returned sceptically. "I remember how you were during your original romance with Ginny and something was missing, one very important aspect."

"And what aspect was that, may I ask?"

"The physical aspect."

Both Ron and Harry's eyes widened, particularly the latter's. "I think there was a *considerable* physical aspect, Hermione," he declared. "Unless you don't consider our snogging each other silly ten times a day being physical."

"Don't play dumb, Harry! You know what I mean ... the aspect I'm talking about is the one you presently have between the two of you...the aspect you didn't have in your original romance. Yes, you snogged each other silly several times a day, as often as you could get away with it, but no matter how far you went then, it was never ... all the way, which is what I'm referring to."

"Then why can't you just say 'the *sexual* aspect' and be done with it?" Harry shot back. "Yes, Ginny and I are lovers. We have been for the last month ... and yes, we're using the Contraceptive Charm. But most importantly, yes, I intend to officially ask her to marry me as soon as all this rape trial business is behind us. Are you satisfied now?"

There was a long silence before either of the pushy pair could bring themselves to reply to his understandable anger and hurt. Of all people, he was sure they would understand how much his renewed relationship with Ginny meant to him, especially considering the anguish and soul-searching Harry had endured, certain that he would never be able to have Ginny as he had so hungered to do after her dual rape trauma. Understand and not push for intimate details.

Details such as the depth of happiness he had experienced upon the realization that Draco and Dudley had *not* managed to destroy them after all ... a depth of happiness so great it was almost euphoria. Details such as the knowledge as to what a truly private matter the sharing of the emotion was between those possessed of a love that had been destined to blossom between them from the moment they had been born; or even before.

Of course, a part of him supposed it was at least partly his fault that his friends had felt they'd had to go as far as they did to get the information they wanted, because he had been so less than forthcoming up to this point ... but it was precisely because he was such a private person to begin with, always had been, in fact, despite the accusations otherwise, that he had chosen to keep the details of his private life with Ginny just between the two of them.

Even at that, he was apprehensive (and understandably so) at giving Ginny the full details surrounding her attack, even though he had promised her he would do so "at the proper time." Whatever initial trauma he had spared her by concealing the complete details of her assault from her might be compounded once she learned the entire truth. Would all his efforts to protect her be for nothing?

But she had already gone through so much he was simply trying to spare her any more. Was that so wrong? Why couldn't people just leave them alone and let them live their lives? Or was that an impossible dream? And was the simple fact that Harry was who and what he was the precise reason it was impossible?

Finally Hermione hung her head. "I'm sorry, Harry. We didn't mean to push so hard. We should have known you'd have a good reason for concealing the full details of your intimate relationship with Ginny, because you've never truly been able to have the privacy you deserve because of who and what you are. We should have understood that you were simply trying to protect something precious to you and left it at that, simply been happy that the two of you had reunited.

"Instead, we pushed and prodded and pried, in a lot of ways just as bad as Rita Skeeter. Just the same, it was because ~~w~~*o* care so much for the both of you that it was so important for us to know. And now that we do, we will keep it to ourselves as friends should. Whatever our other faults, though, we care very much for your happiness and want more than anything for you to keep it, because after all you've had to endure in your life, no one deserves true love more than you."

Again, there was a long, tense silence ... then Harry moved to his friends and took them both in a group hug, sharing such a depth of love and camaraderie that no further words were unnecessary. Forgiveness was automatic and unconditional between those who shared a friendship the calibre of the one between Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, simply by virtue of all they had shared together, both good and bad; the simple fact of having gone through it together being precisely what had made their trials bearable.

And if they could manage it, they would not only be friends but relatives by marriage when all of this rape trial business was over...or more precisely, Harry would be Ron and Hermione's brother-in-law. That is, once he had married Ginny. And provided *they themselves* managed to get married! If Ron didn't get up the gumption to propose to Hermione soon, Harry and Ginny had already agreed to take matters into their own hands to bring them together, as both knew they had wanted to be for the longest time.

In fact, Harry wouldn't be surprised if Ron hadn't even been able to properly snog the object of his love yet. He knew from experience how difficult it was to put your fear of rejection aside and let your feelings be known to the object of your love, but if you could, the result could be extremely rewarding...in more ways than one. He and Ginny had even managed to survive an heroic breakup, even though it had broken both their hearts to do so.

Her courage and unselfishness at letting him go, even while experiencing almost unbearable heartbreak because it was what was necessary, was what had sustained him all through the time of loneliness and war, knowing that a lot of necessary things can often be very painful. But that was all behind them now. He had no reason to ever leave her again; the only thing that could separate them now was death, and he had no intention of letting that happen until absolutely necessary...and even then, he would fight it with everything he had.

Truly the Muggle saying, "If you love someone, set them free. If they come back, they're yours. If they don't, they never were," applied just as much to witches and wizards in love as it did to Muggles. It had been agonising, but they'd done it, and their love had become all the stronger and deeper for the experience.

Now, of course, they were experiencing a different kind of agony because of what had happened to Ginny ... but as another Muggle saying went, "Sorrow shared is halved, happiness shared is doubled." So true, so true! They had proved time and again that they could stand anything as long as they went through it together...and precisely because they had each other, they could stand this as well, however difficult it turned out to be.

## Chapter Nine - Ron and Hermione's Testimony

*Chapter 9 of 18*

Ron and Hermione testify as to everyone's character, particularly Harry and Ginny's, before the Wizengamot. Later that day, Ginny experiences a nightmare and they maintain a vigil at her bedside until she awakens, agreeing that it's time to tell her just what happened to her, whatever the consequences.

It was three days later that the three friends went to the Wizengamot, although only Ron and Hermione would be giving any statements ... at least officially. To Ron's relief, they called on Hermione first, possibly due to the fact of alphabetic succession, since her name came before his.

"You are a friend of Harry Potter's, are you not?" the same wizard who had interrogated both Neville and Harry asked Hermione.

"Yes. I've known him for six years."

"Have you ever known him to verbally or physically abuse anyone?"

"Only if he was provoked beyond endurance ... and he's had to endure a lot in his life. Just the same, Harry is basically a gentle, caring person."

"Do you believe he would ever sexually assault a woman?"

"Never," Hermione declared. "I know him as well as anyone, and he would sooner hurt himself than someone he cares for."

"The two of you have never been romantically involved, have you?"

"No. He's more like a brother to me than anything else, although there have been rumours otherwise ... mainly by Rita Skeeter. However, there is no truth to them whatsoever, mainly because I already have a boyfriend, the young man sitting next to me."

That's when the wizard questioning Hermione turned to Ron and began questioning him.

"Your name is Ronald Weasley, correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are a close friend of Harry Potter, is that right?"

"Yes, sir. In fact, he is my best friend."

"Would you say that he is the type to physically or emotionally abuse anyone?"

"Never," Ron declared. "He's been on the receiving end of more than his share, but generally doesn't yell at or fight with anyone unless provoked beyond endurance."

"Do you believe that he would ever sexually assault a woman?"

"Never! Harry's not the type," Ron assured his interrogator.

"Are you aware of the nature of the case under discussion?"

"Of course. It's my sister, Ginny, his girlfriend, who was assaulted."

"Have either of you met the alleged attackers?"

"Yes ... or more precisely, at least one of them. Draco Malfoy is in our year, but in Slytherin House, who has always held animosity for anyone in Gryffindor House. Especially Harry. The other 'alleged' attacker is Harry's cousin, whom we have not met, but he has described him to us. Neither has ever liked Harry but then neither of them are ... nice people, to put it mildly, so that's not surprising." This time Hermione was the one to answer.

"Do you believe either of them capable of what Harry has accused them of?"

"Definitely," was Hermione's firm declaration.

"Are you sure you're not simply saying that because Harry is your friend?"

"No. We're saying it because it's true. You can't spend time with someone on almost a daily basis for six years and not come to know them. We know Harry, and he would never hurt Ginny. Not like that. He loves her."

"What about Ginny? It has been said that she has had many boyfriends before Harry. How do we know that the alleged attackers were not two of them?"

"That's ridiculous," Hermione threw back. "She ... dislikes Draco intensely. As for Harry's cousin, she's never even met him. And even with the boys she's been involved with, there was never anything more physical than occasional snogging."

"Do you agree with that statement, young Mr. Weasley?"

"I do," Ron confirmed. "I know my sister. She's *not* promiscuous, not in any way, shape or form. And since she and Harry have ... reunited, she has not dated anyone else."

"It is said that she has had a crush on him since she was a child."

"That's true, but they did not date until she was fifteen," Ron recalled. "That's when I believe her feelings for him deepened into love. And no, don't even think it. Not even with Harry has she ever gone beyond snogging."

That was the only thing Ron had said that wasn't precisely true, but Harry, listening to the whole thing, knew that Ron and Hermione knew that he and Ginny had gone beyond snogging some time ago. All the same, they were acting responsibly, using the Contraceptive Charm and all that, intending to continue to do so until and unless they decided to marry and start a family. That could not be done until both were out of school, which wouldn't be for at least another year, if not two.

"Do you think Ginny would be willing to come in and give us a statement?"

"Oh, technically she probably could, but..." Ron broke off.

"But what?"

"We and her Healers believe it best that she not do so for at least six months after the incident. It has only been about two. That is why we, the three of us, the ones her age closest to her, feel obliged to speak on her behalf. We hope you understand."

"Oh, we do, but I hope you also understand that in a rape trial, a conviction is more likely if the victim is willing to testify against the attackers."

Harry was frankly afraid they would say that, which prompted him to make a very difficult decision. He would have to sit down with Ginny and tell her the details of what had transpired the day of her attack. It might set things back to square one, of course, including his relationship with her, but that was a chance he'd have to take. If it was necessary for her to testify against Draco and Dudley, she would have to know. He just hoped it wouldn't scar her for life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once they got back home and settled back in, Hedwig arrived carrying another large, official-looking envelope. The three friends (Ginny was still asleep) gathered in what was now Harry's room, and Ron and Hermione waited while Harry opened the large envelope and examined the contents, a combination of photos and text. For a long time he didn't say a word, although they watched his face. Sometimes it was a mask of fury, sometimes a smug smile crossed his lips.

"Harry, what *is* that stuff?" Ron finally broke the silence.

"I asked the Muggle authorities in my old neighbourhood to investigate Dudley."

"And?"

"This is their report," came the reply. "It turns out that Ginny's attack was only the latest in a string of attacks over the last year. Several girls in our age group were brutally attacked, two of them even hospitalized and one nearly killed ... and in virtually every instance, they identified Dudley as their attacker."

"I can imagine how your ... aunt and uncle reacted," came Hermione's dry remark.

"Oh, naturally they denied everything ... but it also turns out that the authorities obtained a search warrant and went through his room. They found many torn pairs of knickers and a large box of condoms...and that was just for starters. I'm afraid my *dear* cousin is embarking on a career as a serial rapist!"

"What about Draco? Has the Ministry found anything on him yet?"

"That's a little tougher, unfortunately, what with the Malfoy money, but I've got just as much and I'll do whatever is necessary to see that slimeball put into Azkaban for life, even if it's the last thing I ever do. Just the same, there are people in the Ministry who aren't afraid of them and willing to do whatever it takes to see them punished for the evil they've done. I feel sure they'll find something and get it to me ... then I can formally charge them."

"Since Draco's old man is a Death Eater, it just *maybe* the last thing you ever do...if you don't get him first," Ron pointed out.

"I'm not too worried. If I can defeat Voldemort, one Death Eater shouldn't be too much of a problem," Harry returned confidently. He would have said more, but suddenly heard Ginny call out. They rushed to her side; she was still in bed asleep, but having a nightmare...and it sounded like it had something to do with her assault just over two months ago.

She was screaming, thrashing around and fighting, all in her sleep, her subconscious memories of her ordeal having finally manifested themselves, even while Harry and company were trying to calm her. In the midst of everything, Molly and Arthur entered and saw what was going on; finally Molly met Harry's anguished eyes and knew what he was trying to tell her. She left the room to brew up a strong Calming Draught to soothe Ginny; within moments she was back and gave it to Harry, who gave it to Ginny.

Fortunately it was fast-acting, so she soon calmed down and Harry placed her back down on her pillow, tucking her blankets around her, then brushed her tumbled hair back away from her face and gently kissed her forehead, moving to hold her hand.

"What happened?" Molly asked. "She's been doing so well."

"I can only surmise that subconscious memories of her ordeal surfaced and manifested themselves as a nightmare. You'd better make sure to have plenty of Calming Draught on hand while I arrange for her to have some counseling," Harry told Molly. "And don't worry, I'll see that she goes, whatever I have to do."

"Do you think we dare tell her the truth now, after what's happened? It may only make matters worse," Hermione remarked worriedly.

Harry frankly agreed with her but knew he would have to keep his promise to Ginny and tell her the whole truth about what had happened to her, whatever the consequences. "We'll have to. Looks like it's the only way she's going to be able to properly deal with what's happened to her. We've been avoiding the issue for too long."

While Ginny was asleep, Harry wrote a quick note to the St. Mungo's psychiatric ward and asked to arrange rape counseling for Ginny at their earliest convenience, using Hedwig to take it to them so that he would be able to sit with her. When Ginny awakened, Harry had decided to tell her everything, asking his two friends to help him do it, to which they gladly agreed. In the meantime, all decided to sit with Ginny and wait for her to wake up, Hermione holding her one hand while Harry held the other.

## Chapter Ten - Ginny Learns What Happened/Harry Proposes

*Chapter 10 of 18*

Ginny learns what happened to her on the day of her abduction and assault; Ron and Hermione help Harry tell her.  
After they leave, the lovers share some quality time and Harry ends up proposing to her.

It was two hours later that Ginny finally, fully awakened, her brother, friend and main squeeze still sitting a vigil with her. She smiled at them all upon realizing they were still there, happy and grateful for their devotion to her. "Welcome back, luv. How do you feel?" Harry smiled at her, squeezing her hand before raising it to his lips for a brief kiss.

"Still tired, but calmer than I was. I seem to have had a nightmare."

"You did...and we know why. It's your subconscious memories of your ordeal that have manifested themselves and we have avoided dealing with up to this point. However, it is necessary that we do so now so that you'll be able to achieve closure and put the incident behind you. You remember that I promised to tell you at the proper time?"

She nodded.

"Well, I think that time has come. But before we start, I must urge you to do your best to keep in mind that we did it because we love you, in order to keep you from dwelling on what had happened to you, not trying to keep anything from you. Just the same, I feel it best that the ones closest to you, the ones who rescued you, should be the ones to tell you. I have also been the one to cover your medical bills, so please don't tell your mum or dad about that because they'd feel obligated to repay me, and I don't want repayment. I just want you to get well, both physically and emotionally. That's what matters most to me."

For a long moment Ginny was silent, just allowing Harry and Hermione to hold her hands, then said, "All right, I'm waiting to hear the details."

"Well ... here goes." Harry and his friends exchanged glances in order to ensure that they would each have the other's support when they needed it. "Do you remember June 18th, the day we had Quidditch practice, the last one of the year before summer break?"

"Yes. I remember heading there ... then nothing before waking up in St. Mungo's with the three of you sitting with me."

"It's now July 24th. But to get back to the subject, Neville saw who had kidnapped you. He said your ... abductors Apparated in, waited for you to show up, then knocked you out with a nonverbal spell, tied you up and Disapparated out. Ordinarily, that would be impossible, as you know, but the inability had been lifted temporarily so that those who recently turned seventeen could practice Apparition."

"Okay, I understand that much. Where was I taken?"

"Malfoy Manor," Harry made himself say.

Ginny went white. "You mean ..."

"Yes. Draco kidnapped you. But he wasn't alone."

"Who was with him?"

"It turns out that he had checked into my ... background and discovered where my relatives lived, learning of their animosity against me and going there with the intention of meeting them with the hope of ... inducing them to join forces with him against me."

"Did ... he succeed?"

"To a degree. He ... met my cousin Dudley. I once told you about him."

"That porky, obnoxious git?" she questioned with a mixture of hatred and contempt. *He* was Draco's accomplice?"

"I'm afraid so. And they didn't just kidnap you. They ..." Harry's voice trailed off, and he found he needed Hermione's touch and encouraging smile in order to have the strength to continue. " ... raped you." Harry bowed his head, both in pain and unwillingness to meet Ginny's eyes.

"Dear gods. No wonder I was so sore. But if they were the ones who did it, why was I made to think that it was ... you who had done it?"

"They were trying to use you against me ... trying to implicate me in your assault. They also used a love potion, so you would be less likely to fight them. I think they figured it would be easier to take you if you thought it was ... me doing it. But fortunately it didn't take. If it had, we would not be together now."

"Have you any idea why they did it, other than getting revenge on you?"

"I can only surmise that Draco told Dudley about you ... and our involvement. He is having his own bouts with hormones, so he decided to use you to satisfy himself, just as Draco did. I think he wanted a chance to use someone I ... loved, if only to have something to ... throw in my face." Again, Harry needed help in order to be able to continue. This time it was Ron who helped him, with both a reassuring smile and squeeze of the shoulder.

"I didn't realise you had been abducted until Neville ran onto the pitch and told me about half an hour after the fact. Once I knew, however, I took off after you."

"You ... weren't playing?"

"No. I saw no sense in trying if I was worrying about you. I put someone else in my place."

"I can imagine what happened when you finally confronted Draco."

"I had expected him to brag about it, even seem pleased with himself ... which he did. But that wasn't the worst part. The worst part was when he brought you back out and handed you to me after he and Dudley had ... used you. He hadn't bothered to dress you, simply wrapped you in a blanket."

Ginny knew how hard that must have hit Harry and in the most vulnerable spot he had ... his heart. "I'm ... so sorry, luv. I can imagine how that must have hurt."

"It's not your fault, Gin. I fully expected him to pull something like that. I ... just wish that Ron and Hermione hadn't had to see it too. They had arrived shortly after I did." Harry kept his head bowed, still unable to meet his beloved's eyes. "We then took you to St. Mungo's and made sure you were looked after. You know the rest."

That was when she looked at her brother and his own main squeeze, who did their best to smile reassuringly at her, making a mental note to find out what she could from them at the earliest opportunity. Meanwhile, she had to do all she could to make Harry feel better. Telling her the things he had could not have been easy for him, to put it mildly, considering how he felt about her ... not to mention the perpetrators of the crime against her.

He finally managed to lift his eyes, still apprehensive about what he would see in hers. To his happiness and relief, he saw only love and compassion there, not to mention her holding out her arms to him. "Thank you, Gin ... thank you for not hating me for being unable to prevent your assault. And for not being able to tell you about it until now."

He rested his head on her shoulder, and she stroked his hair as he held her tightly; she even felt his body shaking with soft sobs of anguish and self-hatred.

"Hate you? I have nothing to hate you for. It is Draco and your lowlife cousin who deserve my hate. Just the thought of their ... laying hands upon me, much less anything else, is nauseating."

"Which makes it ... all the more a miracle that you would ever allow me to touch you again," he all but mumbled into her shoulder.

"Why shouldn't I? Who has ... more right? Besides, it was the perfect way to obliterate the bad memories and ... replace them with happy ones." That was all she could say without delving into private matters in front of Ron and Hermione, having promised Harry to keep such things just between the two of them.

It was then that Ginny locked gazes with her brother and his girlfriend, which was their cue to leave. In order to be able to settle matters between them regarding what had happened to her and how it had affected them both once and for all, they needed to be alone. They gave her reassuring smiles and left. Once the door had closed behind them, Harry lifted his head and gazed deeply into her eyes with a mixture of love and gratitude. She smiled sympathetically upon seeing that his eyes were wet.

She gently removed his glasses and brushed his tears away after he reluctantly released her. "Don't cry, my love. None of this was your fault."

"It wasn't yours, either," he reminded her. "Just the same, I was ... so sure they'd destroy everything we had, and that I'd ... lose you forever. That is something I could never forgive them for, not for as long as I live."

"Well, that didn't happen, luckily for you. Besides, you should know that you're not going to get rid of me that easily." He again went into her arms, tears again filling his eyes, but this time they were tears of happiness and relief.

"I ... never want to be rid of you. Not for as long as I live."

"Glad to hear it. Now let's kiss and make up and move on." Harry lifted his head, met her eyes and gladly complied with her request. The kiss was long and sweet, and they separated only reluctantly.

"One last thing." His tone made her ears perk up, knowing whatever he intended to say was very important. "I ... have taken steps to make sure that Draco and my cousin will be punished for what they've done to you. Just the same, I was told that conviction is more likely if the victim is willing to testify against her attackers. Do you think you could do that if called upon to do so?"

"If you are there with me," she assured him.

"I'll be there, I assure you, if only to see that Draco and Dudley get what they deserve. And guess what I found out about Dudley from the authorities in my ... former neighbourhood?"

"What did you find out?"

"That your attack was only the latest in a string of attacks over the last year. The authorities even obtained a search warrant and went through his room. They found several pairs of torn knickers and a ... large box of condoms. It would seem that my *dear* cousin is embarking on a career as a serial rapist."

"I can imagine how your ... aunt and uncle reacted to this."

"Oh, I'm sure they think I'm behind it...and this time they're right. I'm ... also sure that they're still trying to deny everything, probably accusing the authorities, if not me, of planting evidence or something. I assure you, though, it was there to begin with. Neither of us had anything to do with it."

"I'm sure you didn't," Ginny assured him with a smile, raising his hand to her cheek and holding it there, then kissing it as their eyes met and locked. "And no matter what happens during the trial, I want you to know that nothing anyone says or does, then or ever, will stop me from loving you, Harry."

"Just as nothing will ever stop me from loving you, Gin. Nothing but ... perhaps ... death. Maybe not even then, if I can think of a way around it."

"It's kind of hard to 'get around' death, Harry," Ginny reminded him.

"Where there's a will, there's a way," he insisted. "And I have the will, so there must be a way. After all, I'm a wizard."

"Not even a wizard can cheat death, luv ... but in the meantime, let's put it out of our minds. We still have far too much living to do before that point is reached. And I found something for your birthday that I can guarantee you're going to love." She put a finger on his lips to stop him from speaking further. "Don't ask. I can't tell you. It would spoil the surprise."

He smiled and kissed her finger. "I wasn't going to ask that."

"No? Then what were you going to ask?"

"After all this ... rape trial business is over with, would you do me the honour of consenting to be my wife? That way I would have something to throw in Draco and Dudley's faces."

"Harry, are you proposing to me? We're still pretty young, you know...and besides, we're still in school."

"I'm in my final year, and you only have one year to go after that. Besides, I wasn't expecting it right away. As soon as you graduate will be fine."

"We're going to continue the status quo until then, I assume."

"You assume correctly. Just one last question ..."

"Yes?"

"May I give you a promise ring, to remind you of our promise to each other to marry at the proper time? Just I intend to give you an ... engagement ring as a graduation present. We can discuss the particulars after our official engagement."

"I would be honoured," she smiled. "When can we do it?"

"As soon as you feel up to it," he promised. "Maybe sometime in the next few days. But we won't tell anyone until say, next week ... maybe at some point during my birthday party."

"That would be a perfect time. Until then, it'll be our secret." After their kiss to seal the promise of a future marriage, Ginny was unable to help trying her potential new name on for size. *Ginny Potter. I like the sound of that! Or maybe even Ginevra Weasley-Potter ...*

Harry's sharp eyes couldn't help but notice the enigmatic smile on her face. "What are you thinking about?"

"Just trying the name on for size. Haven't decided yet just how I want to be addressed when the time comes, though."

"Plenty of time for that," he pointed out. "Between now and your graduation, I'm sure you'll figure something."

"If I don't, I'm sure you'll be willing to help me. Which reminds me ... what time is it?"

"About midnight, I think. Why?"

"Don't you think you should go to your room and get some sleep?"

"I don't sleep well without you any more," he confessed.

"You aren't still having bad dreams, are you? I mean, not since you vanquished Voldemort and the Death Eaters."

"Not those kind of bad dreams, thank Merlin. Other kinds, though."

"Such as?"

"The kind that ... involve your leaving me."

"Never happen," she assured him.

"Just the same, I'd need you with me to reassure me of that," he pointed out. "And with you here, in this room, separated from me ..." His voice trailed off.

"You basically live here as it is, luv. Tell you what ... how about we alternate nights in each other's rooms?"

"It's fine with me, but how do we explain it to your folks, not to mention your brothers?"

"Once we're an official couple again, they shouldn't be able to say anything one way or the other," she assured him.

"Not that that will necessarily stop them," he countered. "So I can stay here with you tonight, then you're with me in my room tomorrow and so on?" Her smile was her answer, which prompted him to stand up and quickly undress, then join her in bed. At this point, however, all either of them wanted to do was sleep ... but rest assured, that would soon change!

## Chapter Eleven - Gift-Giving/Harry's Birthday

### *Chapter 11 of 18*

Harry takes Ginny to Hogsmeade and buys her a promise ring, among other things...then three days later, his birthday rolls around and he is convinced that she has a very special gift in mind for him--and not necessarily the kind you buy.

Three days later the couple slipped off to Hogsmeade and went to the one jewelry store there, a latter-day version of Zales Jewelers, but this one specialised in magical jewelry. In this case, however, they simply needed one that would virtually guarantee a happy marriage even before it occurred...at least according to legend. Not that they really needed it, but neither did it pay to take chances, not after what they'd already been through.

Finally one was found that was virtually the same colour as Harry's eyes and surrounded by a dozen small diamonds, set in 24k yellow gold. It naturally fit Ginny's finger perfectly, but then all the rings in this place were magically treated so that would happen with whomever tried the ring on. Ginny fell in love with it at first sight. It was the most beautiful ring she'd ever seen...and most importantly, it reminded her of a certain pair of green eyes that she loved very much ... not to mention the rest of him!

It didn't take much for Harry to guess which ring Ginny wanted, so he didn't bother to ask, just quietly asked the clerk how much it was and went from there. He was told three hundred pounds, which translated to just over two thousand dollars (or three hundred five Galleons).

Once they managed to leave the store, he asked her if she wanted to stop and have something to eat. It was close enough to suppertime, though, that she shook her head with a smile and said it was best that they headed home. Harry didn't argue, particularly since he'd managed to ready the special picture frame he'd bought her earlier and planned to give it to her later that evening just before they retired.

They Apparated into her room just in time for supper, appearing to have been in there a while, supposedly studying, and changed clothes to their everyday preferences before heading down to join everyone else at table. It didn't take long for Ginny's ring to be noticed (Hermione, being roughly as sharp-eyed as the proverbial hawk, spotted it almost immediately). Nor was she afraid to comment on it, which started everyone else asking questions. It got so bad that Harry was ready to threaten everyone with a silencing spell before they finally subsided.

"When did you get that, Ginny? It's beautiful," Hermione opined from beside her friend.

"We went to Hogsmeade earlier today and Harry got it for me. It's a promise ring." All knew what that meant, so they didn't question either of them further...at least not publicly, which meant in front of anyone else in the house. "I fell in love with it right away. Doesn't the green gem remind you of Harry's eyes? It certainly did me."

Naturally everyone smiled and agreed with that, at least to Ginny's face, and the rest of the meal passed without incident. Once they got back to the room, Harry thought he'd better give her the special frame while he still had the nerve. After the door closed behind them, he quickly snatched it from the bedside table and hid it behind him until he reached her.

"There's something else I want to give you, Gin. Hold out your hands and close your eyes."

She gave him a skeptical look but didn't argue; he carefully placed the framed picture in her hands and put his own behind his back, patiently waiting for her to notice the latest gift and give him her opinion.

"Okay, open them now."

She opened her eyes to see a beautifully carved picture frame which looked like wood but was actually a type of metal. Ginny especially liked the inscription at the top of the frame: *To Ginny I'll Always Love You Harry.* She had no idea when he'd had it done, but what mattered was that it had been done.

These types of frames could be made to order, with a limit of three poses: the first simply showing a smiling Harry (which was rare enough to be unique in itself, although he had been doing it far more often since he and Ginny had officially been reunited), another pose showing them with their arms around each other...or more accurately, both of them smiling with his arms around her from behind and his cheek resting on her hair. The other showed them holding each other and kissing.

"Do you like it? It was hard to choose just the right poses, but I thought you'd like these best."

"It's beautiful. I love it. Thank you, luv. I especially like it when I move it to the left and it shows us snogging." She gave him a sly smile. "I think I'll pose it that way on the nightstand, at least for now. Just so you don't forget who you belong to any more than I do."

"I don't think there's too much danger of that, especially when you consider this," he commented, reaching for her hand with the ring and kissing it.

"I would hope not, but it doesn't pay to take chances," Ginny returned matter-of-factly. "Which reminds me...do you think it gave my clueless prat of a brother any ideas regarding Hermione? Specifically, making him consider proposing to her? Even if she has to wait until you lot graduate, it's still not as long as *I'm* going to have to wait." He gave her a hurt look. "Nothing against you, luv. I just don't like the idea of having to wait until I get out of school, that's all."

"Who can be sure what will provoke Ron into action? We'll just have to wait and see. If it doesn't work, I may have to spike his drink with Felix Felicis or something. As for you ... if you want to be able to get married without having to ask permission, waiting until your graduation is the best thing to do, since you won't be of age until next August ... and by then I'll be eighteen, the age of consent in the Muggle world."

"That reminds me ... I've put an Invisibility Charm on your birthday present so you won't be able to see it until I want you to see it."

"I wish you could give me a hint," Harry mock-groused.

"Sorry. No hints. Besides, it's only three more days until your birthday. Surely you can wait three more days," Ginny mock-scolded him. "Now maybe you have some idea of how I'm going to feel waiting for my graduation. By the way, have you heard anything new on the legal front?"

"I was told the Ministry finally found some stuff on Draco, and that they'd send it to me, but I haven't got it yet. Wouldn't it be something if it came in the midst of my party?"

"I hope not. I don't want anything to detract from the party. The day after would be all right, though."

"Why not? A party's supposed to be a happy time, and anything that adds to the positive feelings of the participants can hardly detract from it. Especially something that ensures that Draco will get put away for life, just as I intend Dudley to be."

"You have a point," she had to admit.

"Damn bloody right I do," he declared. "What do you want to do now? We could study some more, watch a video ... or even go to bed and shag each other silly. Personally, I vote for the latter."

"I declare, my love, you are absolutely insatiable!" Ginny scolded him.

"Can I help it if you're so delicious I just can't get enough of you?" Harry countered with a sly wink.

"All right ... on one condition," she returned.

"Name it."

"Let me make love to you first. There's something I've always wanted to try and it requires the woman to take the initiative."

He looked kind of surprised at first, then smiled. "Is this part of my birthday present?"

"You could say that," she half-promised. "Now is it a deal or not?"

"How can I possibly say no? After all, I don't want to miss out on any part of my birthday."

"Then let's get to it, Mister. But make sure the door's locked first."

"Oh, it is. It's been locked since we've been in here."

"Great. Now come to bed, and I'll give you the most memorable shagging of your life."

And one may be assured that it was! In fact it was something that Harry wasn't sure he would ever recover from ... but at the same time, something he wouldn't mind repeating on occasion, if not on a regular basis. It was frankly too exhausting, albeit extremely pleasurable, for the man to endure very often. Also, if this was only part of his birthday present, only Merlin knew what she had planned for him that night!

\* \* \* \* \*

The next three days passed a lot faster than Harry thought they would. Usually the last few days before one's birthday seemed to go by in slow motion...and he was often nearly ready to climb the wall before the day finally arrived. But not since he had gotten emotionally attached to the Weasley family ... in more ways than one!

Just the same, there were some things he'd learned to expect once it had: at least one, if not two or three, people would try to keep him out of the kitchen so he didn't catch how his birthday cake was to look. Not to mention one or two of those same people would do their best to keep him busy so others could sneak their presents past him without his seeing them. Why they didn't just put Invisibility Charms on them like Ginny had, Harry could never figure out.

At the moment, though, virtually everyone was busy preparing for his birthday, and he was finding it progressively more difficult not to sneak down to the kitchen door and stick some of Fred and George's Extendable Ears beneath it so he could find out at least some of what was going on. But Ginny had obviously been recruited to keep him busy so he didn't do that ... and so far, she had been doing an excellent job. It seemed that every time he began to even consider doing it, Ginny would croon, "I wouldn't try it if I were you, luv. How about this instead?" and she would snog him at such length and so thoroughly that he would almost literally forget his own name.

Once he came back to earth this latest time, she had been called away for a time and warned him to stay put until she got back or else she would literally tie him down and tickle the daylights out of him ... and that was just for starters. He had never been able to figure out how she could so easily have found his most ticklish areas, some of which were ... rather private, to put it mildly. He could only attribute it to the mysterious thing called "women's intuition" and decided he'd better be careful, since Ginny was not one to make idle threats.

He had not heard any undue noise from downstairs, but that didn't necessarily mean there wasn't anything going on. Molly and company could just as easily have set up Silencing Charms or something so incriminating sounds didn't drift upstairs to him.

He managed to stay on the bed for a while, but then finally couldn't any longer, so he went to the door to see if he could hear anything. He was even tempted to open the door a crack...and just as his hand started for it, the door opened and Ginny came back in.

"I told you to stay on the bed, luv. Now I'll have to punish you."

"Come on, Gin. They've got to be ready by now," Harry groused. "It's my birthday, after all. You've got to forgive me at least *little* curiosity."

"Perhaps. Just the same, they're *not* quite done yet. Mum said probably another hour or so. Now are you going to get back on that bed willingly or do I use a Binding Spell?"

"All right, all right ... bloody little dictator," he muttered under his breath even as he moved back toward the bed and Ginny followed him.

"What was that?" Ginny demanded. "You better tell me, or else I tickle you in your most sensitive spot!" By this time they had both reached the bed, and she got an ominous look in her eye as she sat beside him, one hand just itching to do what she was threatening.

"You're being a dictator," he finally reluctantly replied. "Why won't you tell me anything, or even give me a hint?"

"It's a surprise party, Harry. The ones giving it *aren't supposed* to tell the birthday boy anything about what they're doing. It would spoil the surprise."

"Come on," Harry entreated. "You know you can trust me!"

"Well ..." Ginny seemed to waver for a moment. "I suppose I *could* tell you *one* thing. But you've got to promise me not to let on to Mum that I told you, or else we'll *both* be in trouble up to our ears!"

"Anything," he promised. "Now what is it?"

"Your birthday cake. We found a recent picture of you on your broom in your Quidditch robes in the *Daily Prophet*, and Mum found a way to put it on the cake in multi-coloured frosting. It really looks nice. Almost too nice to eat."

"Well, thanks for telling me that much anyway. Just the same, it's not easy having to play a waiting game like this."



"I know," she replied, smiling understandingly. "What do you propose we do to pass the time?"

"Oh, there are a number of things we could do. The problem with a number of them, however, including snogging, is that once we get started, we might not be able to stop immediately."

"You have a point, and there isn't much time left before I'm supposed to bring you down for the party ..." Her voice trailed off. "Wait a minute. I know! ... Close your eyes and hold out your hands."

Harry sighed with affectionate exasperation, but did as she asked. With a quick pointing of her wand at the invisible present on her nightstand, she removed the Invisibility Charm from it, then picked it up and transferred it to Harry's waiting hands. Once it was settled there in a manner so that he could see it, she said, "All right, open your eyes."

When he did, he couldn't believe his eyes. He had literally never seen Ginny like she was in this picture ... posed provocatively in a brief, strapless and lacy white teddy with attached garter belt, sheer white hose and slippers with feathery trim. Her lovely red-gold hair was held up by a white ribbon and one hand, her soft brown eyes shadowed in deep blue and accented with some dark mascara; she had a come-hither smile on her luscious red lips.

"Dear gods ..."

"Happy birthday, Harry," Ginny crooned with a wicked smile when he looked up to meet her eyes. "You like it?"

"Like it? It's incredible! But how did you ever manage to do it?"

He especially liked the written caption:

*Happy birthday, my darling! I hope you like this picture ... but just the same, make sure to keep it hidden. It's for your eyes alone.*

*I love you,*

*Ginny*

"Ask Hermione the first chance you get," she returned enigmatically. "But make sure to do it without certain other people around, such as Mum or Ron. In fact, Hermione's already thinking of doing something similar for him for Christmas and doesn't want him to find out!"

Harry could definitely see why, but refrained from voicing that opinion. "So this is what you've been hiding from me."

"Yes. Wasn't it worth waiting for?"

"Definitely," he assured her. "Come here, you. Let me thank you properly."

He set the picture aside, carefully facing it away from the door, and drew her close for a warm, lingering kiss. Just as it began to deepen dangerously, a sharp knock came on the door, accompanied by Ron's voice.

"Stop that, you two, before I throw a bloody bucket of water on you! Mum said to come down. It's time for the party!"

Both of them had to fight off blushes at having been caught, but broke apart quickly and stood up to head for the door. Ron half-turned away before looking over his shoulder to make sure Harry and Ginny were following. They did just that, though, holding hands all the way. Just the same, it was strangely quiet as they got downstairs. Harry had to ask, "Where is everybody?"

"Through here," Ron returned enigmatically, heading for the kitchen door. He stepped through, followed by the birthday boy and his girl ... then lights flashed on and a chorus of voices called out, "Surprise!"

All were momentarily blinded; then Harry found himself enveloped in Molly's tight embrace and kissed soundly on the cheek. Once he was able to breathe again, she was replaced by an equally enthusiastic Hermione, who did the same. The younger males present, including Ron, surprisingly enough, simply gave him either an affectionate slap on the shoulder or a simple hug accompanied by a "Happy birthday, mate!"

However, it was the oldest male present, Arthur Weasley, that voiced the question they all wanted the answer to: "How does it feel to finally be of age, Harry?"

To that, Harry had but a one-word answer: "Great!"

Then Arthur affectionately hugged the young man he loved like a son. "Happy birthday, Harry."

After that the party began in earnest; from virtually every direction Harry was plied with gifts once he sat down on the sofa next to Ginny; Fred and George's was one they guaranteed he could use to please Ginny, although they made him promise not to open it in public or tell her what it was until he planned to use it. Knowing their quirky and sometimes bawdy senses of humour, Harry didn't think he wanted to even imagine what it might be. Just the same, he was sure it wasn't anything unpleasant, since they liked him at least as much as Ron did...more, sometimes.

During the Triwizard Tournament, for instance. They had hoisted him onto their shoulders after he had managed to slay the Hungarian Horntail and retrieve the golden egg during the first task, declaring that they had always known he could do it, that he would survive, that he would neither die nor even be badly hurt. Even at that, Harry knew he could not have made it without help...neither there nor during the search for the remaining Horcruxes, much less the final battle with Voldemort.

The other gifts were as follows: a jumper the colour of his eyes from Molly, not to mention a week's worth of his favourite homemade cakes and pies; from Ron, an updated book on famous British Quidditch teams, including the ones from Hogwarts in their time; Hermione, a knitted scarf and cap set two shades darker to go with the jumper from Molly; and lastly, a bottle of *English Leather*, Arthur's favorite Muggle men's aftershave.

Harry had recently begun needing to shave, and upon learning the fact from Ron, Arthur had decided to get this for him. It smelled nice, too, so Harry was sure Ginny would like it. All in all, one of the nicest birthdays he had ever had. But if he'd had to pick his favourite gift, it would be the cheesecake picture of Ginny in the brief, lacy teddy ... gods, it was making him hot just thinking about her looking like that!

Fortunately at this point they were called to eat, and Harry was able to bury his burning face in several cold mugs of butterbeer to wash down the sumptuous birthday meal (Molly had truly outdone herself; Harry had never seen so much great-looking...and surely great-tasting...food in his life), not to mention several large slices of cake...he made sure that a picture of the intact cake was taken before it was cut...and even one Firewhisky to top off the evening and officially mark his coming of age. All the other young people, except for Ginny, who wasn't yet old enough for Firewhisky, also had a glass, making sure to toast Harry and wish him the best of luck and every happiness in his *next* seventeen years.

By the time dinner was over, everyone was tight as the proverbial tick, but had loved every minute of the meal, not to mention the party. It was fairly late (at least for Fred and George) when they finally left, making sure to ask Harry as a parting shot to let them know what Ginny thought of their gift to him once he had used it. One had given her a sly smile, the other a sly wink, which provoked her into blushing; the nineteen-year-old twins then hugged their brother-in-law-to-be and Disapparated after doing the same to their parents, thanking them for a fun party and a great meal.

Harry had been too occupied with the party to have remembered the information on Draco he needed and had been expecting in order to formally charge him with Ginny's rape; it was only at this point that it came back to mind. There had been no owl post as far as he knew, so he could only assume it would likely come sometime the

following day at the earliest.

What mattered most at the moment, though, was telling those closest to him of his plans for himself and Ginny to officially mark his coming of age in another way. The couple gave each other lingering looks as they once again seated themselves on the sofa, and Harry called the others over. "Ginny and I have something to tell you."

At least some had some idea of what was coming, but others didn't. Either way, it was hoped the news would prove pleasant to learn (or confirm) for all concerned. Ron, Hermione, Molly and Arthur grabbed chairs from the table to face the aforementioned couple.

"All right, we're waiting. What's your news, mate?" Ron prompted.

"Well, this may or may not come as a surprise, but either way, I wanted to make it official now that I'm of age...I have asked Ginny to marry me." There was dead silence for a while, especially from the senior Weasleys, and Harry could guess what it signified. "Don't worry, Arthur, Molly. Not right away. However, we *were* thinking of doing it shortly after she graduates from Hogwarts next year, possibly announce our official engagement either then or for her seventeenth birthday. I also intend to give her an engagement ring for her graduation present. Until then, however, you may be assured that this little bauble"...he lifted her hand to show the emerald ring..."is about as tangible an indication of my sincerity regarding her as I can give."

This was surely the last thing some of them were expecting, especially after the painful yet heroic breakup the couple had experienced shortly after Dumbledore's death. However, anyone who truly knew them knew that it wouldn't...couldn't...last, because they still loved each other. Would always love each other. And this moment had proven it once and for all.

Once again Ron looked thoroughly gobsmacked, reminiscent of when Harry had pulled Ginny into his arms and kissed her passionately in front of everyone in Gryffindor House. That in itself had been a milestone, marking the beginning of what would prove to be a lifelong romance...that is, if *they* had anything to say about it!

If this didn't provoke his friend into action regarding Hermione, Harry would be left with nothing else to do but spike his drink with Felix Felicis. He had even caught her looking hopefully in Ron's direction, half-expecting a proposal right then and there ... but unfortunately, it wouldn't be that easy or that rapidly forthcoming. It might even take all of them working together to accomplish it, but what mattered was that it *would* eventually be accomplished.

For the moment, however, it was sufficient that Harry had managed to tell his potential in-laws of his own serious intentions regarding their only daughter and assure them of his deep and lasting love for her in the only way he knew how. Once it sunk in, however, Molly was the first to go and congratulate them upon the couple's standing up.

"That's wonderful, Harry. I always knew you could never stay away from Ginny for long, despite your breakup with her ... and this proves it."

"I never stopped loving her, Molly, Arthur...not for a moment, you may be assured of that. The supposed 'breakup' was meant to protect her, although I am very sorry for the pain it caused her. However it seemed, I never meant it to be permanent, just until I could take care of Voldemort. And now that he's out of the way, I can allow myself to share my life with her.

"And once we are married, you may also be assured that we will remain so. Both of us have waited far too long to be happy ... and I will spend the rest of my life making it up to her for the pain I have caused her, albeit with the best of intentions ... loving and cherishing her with every beat of my heart, every fiber of my being, until I take my last breath."

Harry was glad to see that Ron was the next to step up and offer his blessing and congratulations after giving each of the couple warm hugs. "Welcome to the family, mate. You just make sure to follow through on your promises, though, or else you'll have six ticked-off elder brothers on your arse in two shakes of a lamb's tail."

Before Harry could answer that, Hermione stepped up and did the same. "I always knew you two were meant to be, Harry, just as Ginny did. It just took some time *for you* to realise it...and now that you have, I couldn't be happier. The best of everything to you both, now and always."

By this time, Harry was unable to help noting that Ginny was yawning deeply (or at least pretending to) in order that they would be excused from the gathering and left alone to pursue their own agenda for the remainder of the evening. There were still officially two hours left of his birthday, and once they were alone, Harry was sure that Ginny had yet another present to give him ... but not of the material variety.

## Chapter Twelve - The Morning After/Counseling/More Legal Developments

### *Chapter 12 of 18*

Harry awakens pleasantly exhausted from a passionate night with Ginny, but she's not through with him yet. He eventually convinces her to undergo rape counseling even in the midst of receiving more info on the rape case...among other things.

Harry awakened with a groan, totally exhausted but, at the same time, thoroughly sated for one of the few times he could remember in his life. Almost as soon as he and Ginny had gotten behind the door of his room, it had begun ... and from that point on, he had lost all track of time. It had not just lasted two hours, though; it had gone on far longer ... and it had only *started* on the bed.

He had thought he was highly sexed, but Ginny left him in the dust *Ginny* ... Gods, how could any woman have so much passion wrapped up in one compact yet very beautiful package? The old saying of redheads being hot-blooded definitely had truth to it, he could testify to that ... would *gladly* testify to that! A very exhausting way to begin one's seventeenth year, but at the same time, he had never experienced such incredible ecstasy at her every touch, her every kiss and caress. He would definitely not mind repeating the experience ... once he got his strength back, that is!

He turned his head upon hearing the door, smiling upon seeing Ginny step in, clad in just a blue terrycloth robe covered with Golden Snitches, her hair tousled from both sleep and passion, carrying two steaming mugs. "Good morning, Sunshine," she crooned upon noting that Harry was finally awake, smiling at the sight of her gorgeously messy-haired, emerald-eyed lover. Even just looking at him made her want him again. Dear gods, how could any man be so sexy? There should be a law against looking so good, especially looking so good *without clothes* ... "Fancy some hot chocolate?"

"Love some," he returned with a weary but tender smile in her direction as he took one of the mugs and took a long, deep swig, the caffeine in same soon beginning to revive him.

She sat down next to him and took a swig from her own, then another. "I was beginning to wonder when you were going to wake up. Can it actually be that I actually wore you out again?"

Harry couldn't bring himself to answer for a long time, simply occupying himself with the hot chocolate. "Let's just say that it was a ... unique way to begin one's seventeenth year."

"To say the least!" she laughed. "Then may I assume you enjoyed it?"

"Immensely," Harry assured her, feeling desire rise again in his body, knowing that had it not been for his youth, he would never have been able to go again this soon.

She stood up and set the empty mug aside, preparing to drop her robe while he was occupied with his own. "Are you game for a rematch?"

"After the workout you gave me last night, I shouldn't be this soon, but strangely enough, I am. Why?"

"Just wondering." The tone of her voice made him turn his head, and that's when she dropped her robe. While he stared at her mesmerised, she removed the mug from his suddenly nerveless fingers, set it aside, threw the bedcovers aside and once again positioned herself in his lap, one leg on each side of him. With the first touch of her lips on his, Harry was once again totally and thoroughly lost. Gods, she was incredible ... if she could wear him out like this in just one night, how could he realistically expect to survive marriage to her? Just the same, what a way to go!

\* \* \* \* \*

Once Harry woke up again, it was to Ginny telling him that Hedwig had arrived with yet another official-looking package. Strangely enough, he actually felt refreshed, as if he had had eight hours of uninterrupted, dreamless sleep ... and if this package contained what he thought it did, he would feel even better. This time, however, Ginny kept her robe on and simply sat on the side of the bed, waiting silently as he discreetly covered himself and sat up in bed to examine the contents of the package.

The more he found, the wider his smile got. Gods, there was enough here to put Draco away for life, even without Ginny's testimony ... but having it would simply be icing on the cake! Ginny looked up and had to ask why he was so happy. Once Harry explained, her smile was just as wide. This meant that no other girl would ever suffer as she had, not ever again ... at least not at Draco's (or Dudley's) hands.

"It seems that our friend Draco has been a very bad boy for a very long time ... and once this is in the hands of the Wizengamot, nothing even Lucius Malfoy says or does, no matter how many palms he tries to grease with his bribery and hush money, is going to save his sweet baby boy from life in Azkaban and a lifelong label of sexual predator."

"Just the same, they're not going to take this lying down," Ginny pointed out.

"Let them do their worst. I'm ready for them ... both Draco *and* Dudley!" Harry called for another large envelope, addressed it to the Wizengamot and sent Hedwig off again. Now it was only a matter of time before both of them would be out of his (and Ginny's) hair for good ... only a matter of time before he would gladly take Veritaserum or sodium pentothal and give them his own testimony, a first-hand account of his own nightmarish experiences at both Draco's and Dudley's hands.

Coupled with all the other evidence, Harry seriously doubted that either of them would see the outside world again for a long time, if ever, once they were finally put away. On top of his triumph over Voldemort and the Death Eaters, this would be the ultimate happiness for him, to see them both finally punished as they deserved...other than a tenderly passionate night (or several) with Ginny, that is.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day, Harry heard that regular weekly, hour-long counseling sessions had been arranged for Ginny with the witches' rape counselor at St. Mungo's. He wasn't looking forward to trying to get her to go to them, but knew he must if she were ever to achieve closure and put the subconscious memories of her ordeal to rest. Even if he had to go in with her, she was going to go. The only good thing about the counseling was that it would be on an outpatient basis. The first meeting was scheduled, in fact, for two p.m. the very next day, so he had to speak with her right away.

After they'd had breakfast (he'd even brought it to her in bed), he set the remnants of their meal aside and took a deep breath, then jumped in with both feet. "I talked to your personal Healer at St. Mungo's, and she believes it best for you to take rape counseling sessions."

Ginny was finishing her milk and gave him a hard look from above her glass. "But I'm fine. I don't need any counseling."

"I'm afraid you're not a proper judge, luv. You don't want to keep having nightmares about what happened, do you? The counseling sessions are designed so that you'll be able to put the subconscious memories to rest."

"Neither are you," she countered. "As for the nightmares, I'll be fine as long as I have you there to bring me out of them. As far as that goes, you need counseling as much as I do."

"That is not the subject under discussion here," he threw back. "If it'll make you feel better for me to be with you while you talk to the counselor, just say the word."

"I don't think they allow that, if memory serves me," she pointed out. "At least not as far as I know."

"Under certain special circumstances such as this, they do. The Healer told me so," Harry insisted.

"Well, that's fine...for people who need counseling. I don't," Ginny reiterated stubbornly.

"Yes, you do. I don't want to have to Stun you, but I will if I have to in order to get you there." Harry's voice was soft but firm, and Ginny knew he meant business. "It's only for an hour, Gin...and as I said, I'll be with you if you want me there. Then after the session, we can go out for supper or something. Please do this, if only to humour me."

Ginny sighed in affectionate exasperation but reluctantly gave in. "All right, since you're twisting my arm. And you don't need to take me out for supper afterward."

"But I want to," Harry insisted. "And by the way, the first counseling session is tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock."

"If I didn't know better, I'd swear this was a conspiracy to shanghai me against my will," Ginny opined dryly.

"No conspiracy, luv. We just want to help you."

"Uh-huh," she replied skeptically. "Which reminds me. Who else is in on this with you?"

"Everyone who loves you," Harry informed her. "So as you can see, you're far outnumbered."

"So I don't have a whole lot of choice, do I?"

"'Fraid not," came the matter-of-fact reply. "Look on the bright side. At least you're getting a weekly supper date out of it."

"I could have that anyway," she reminded him. "But if only to get everybody off my back, including you, I'll go."

"Thank you. You won't regret it ... and if I were you, I'd be thankful to have so many people who care so much about me. It's certainly more than I had for ten years of my life. If it hadn't been for you, Ron and your family, among others, Merlin knows how I'd have turned out. Maybe even gone over to the Dark side."

"Don't say that," Ginny returned, horrified. "Don't even think it!"

"Just teasing, luv. I wouldn't do that to you. Now may I owl St. Mungo's and tell them to expect you...or rather, us...tomorrow afternoon?"

"Go ahead," Ginny remarked unenthusiastically but didn't argue further, seeming almost resigned to her fate.

Harry sighed in affectionate exasperation but knew he had won, so that's what mattered. It took only a few minutes to owl St. Mungo's and let them know that Ginny would begin her counseling sessions as scheduled tomorrow afternoon.

\* \* \* \* \*

Again, Harry flew her to her appointment on his broom, always loving the feel of her warmth and perfume close to him, not to mention her arms around him and her cheek resting on his back. Upon arrival, they dismounted, and he put an Invisibility Charm on the Firebolt after putting it in a safe but accessible place, then went inside St. Mungo's and the psychiatric outpatient counseling office.

Once they got to the office, Harry gave Ginny's name and informed the young witch serving as receptionist that he would be accompanying her during the sessions at her request. "I understand it is permitted under special circumstances," he reminded the receptionist when she gave him a funny look.

"Yes, it is," she agreed. "It's just ... uncommon." She opened an intercom and informed the women's rape counselor that the two o'clock appointment had arrived. Harry and Ginny were then told where to go to meet with the counselor; a few moments later they were ushered into the office of a kindly-looking mediwitch who looked to be in her thirties, but was probably far older than that, owing to the long lifetimes usually granted witches and wizards.

"Greetings. I am Healer Arabella Collingsworth. I will be your counselor, Miss Weasley. I take it this is your ... boyfriend?" she inquired, looking Harry over at length.

Ginny nodded. "He said it was permitted for him to sit in on our sessions."

"And so it is. It's simply uncommon," the counselor returned. "But no matter. Have a seat, both of you." She gestured to the seats facing her desk.

The pair smiled and nodded in her direction before seating themselves. Once they were situated, Arabella smiled and asked, "Would either of you like any refreshment?"

"Butterbeer, if you have it," Harry replied before Ginny had a chance to draw breath to speak.

"Cold?"

"Please."

"One moment." Arabella opened the intercom again. "Angela, bring three cold butterbeers to my office."

"Yes, ma'am. Right away."

Five minutes later the receptionist came in with the three butterbeers on a tray. "Just leave them on the table near my desk, Angela. Thank you." The young witch nodded and left.

Not long afterward, the butterbeers were distributed, and Arabella sighed deeply before taking a swig and leaning back in her chair. "Before we get started, I want you both to know that I know what it's like to be ... sexually assaulted and understand virtually every feeling experienced by a rape victim, so I doubt anything either of you say will surprise me."

The couple were naturally curious as to what had happened to Arabella, but decided to shelve their curiosity for the moment. They were here to see that Ginny got help rather than make this a social call. Time enough to find out Arabella's story later on.

"Now tell me the story from the beginning."

This is where Harry decided to explain how the attack had come about. "Two adversaries of mine decided to ... get revenge on me by going after my girlfriend. One of them kidnapped her while she was on her way to Quidditch practice at our school, rendering her unconscious with a nonverbal spell, then tied her up and Disapparated off the grounds, using a relative of mine with whom I've never gotten along as an ... accomplice. I believe the main reason he went along with it was to be able to ... have sex with a girl, since he had not been able to up to that point."

"Pardon me, but may I inquire as to whether or not you have an ... established intimate relationship with your girlfriend, young man?"

"I have ... but then, we are engaged, so it's only natural," Harry explained. "But that's getting off the subject. One of my adversaries is a fellow wizard, and he took her to his family home upon abducting Ginny here." He gestured in her direction and latched onto her hand that she suddenly held out, keeping firm hold of it in order to calm her. After squeezing it reassuringly, Harry continued. "A friend of mine happened to witness the abduction and came to inform me within half an hour after it had occurred. I immediately took off to find her."

Harry took a breath after his lengthy speech, pleased to note that Arabella seemed both interested and caring of their feelings by not asking a lot of nosy questions.

"What did you find upon arrival?"

"My ... one adversary seemed to be expecting me and said that he had already had his way with Ginny and that my relative was now doing so, even as we spoke."

"Did he drug her in any way?"

"Yes. He gave her a ... love potion and planted a suggestion in her mind that I was the one who had assaulted her."

"At that point you had not been ... intimate with your girlfriend, is that correct?"

"Yes," Harry confirmed. "And because of what had happened, I was sure that I would never be able to do so."

"Do you intend to see that they are punished?"

"Oh yes, definitely. I have given copies of all the evidence I have to the Wizengamot, and it's only a matter of time until my main adversary is ... arrested. However, the other adversary is a Muggle, so I have to go after him in the Muggle manner."

"Do you plan on testifying in each case?"

"Most assuredly," Harry replied firmly. "So will some of my closest friends and members of my girlfriend's family, if only as character witnesses for both of us."

"Would you like me to add my report to your body of evidence?"

Harry was surprised but very pleased at the offer. "Yes. It would be very much appreciated. We need all the help we can get, especially since my one adversary is quite well off and is likely to be able to either bribe or buy off witnesses in his own favour. But I'm not overly concerned about that, since I have my own fortune, a large ... inheritance from my parents, and can do the same if necessary."

"You are an orphan?"

"Yes. My parents were killed when I was just a little over a year old, and I was placed with my mother's sister and her family. However, they were ... not kind to me, to put it mildly, and for that reason, I am very glad to be of age and able to get away from them permanently. I now live with my girlfriend's family, and plan to do so until we are married."

At this point Arabella looked intently at Ginny. "Have you anything you wish to say, Miss Weasley?"

"Definitely," Ginny assured her. "Harry ... my boyfriend ... recently told me all the details of my abduction. It turns out that the Muggle accomplice was his cousin. I had never met him before that and from what I've been told about him, wouldn't care to even if given the chance. It was sickening to learn that he had also raped me. The other rapist is a member of a rival House at our former school, Hogwarts. We were in Gryffindor House. This ... person was in Slytherin and we have always been adversaries."

Ginny took a breath, then continued. "I recently had a bad nightmare, mainly due to the subconscious memories of my ordeal surfacing in my mind. I had to be given a Calming Draught, and both Harry and my family believe it best that I obtain counseling in order to lay the bad memories to rest."

"And they're right. If you allow them to fester, they can only become worse. Believe me, I know ... and will do all I can to assist you in putting them to rest." She then turned back to Harry. "Have you anything to add?"

"I ordered my adversary to bring Ginny to me, and he did so. However, he did not dress her. Instead, he ... brought her to me wrapped in only a blanket."

"I'm so sorry. That must have been very difficult for you."

"To put it mildly! But I've managed to deal with it and put it behind me, with the help of Ginny and my friends. Also, once Ginny was returned to us...one of my friends managed to retrieve her clothes...we brought her here and made sure she received the treatment she needed."

"How does her family feel about her abduction?"

"They were very upset, to say the least. One of them even vowed personal revenge on her attackers, but I managed to talk them out of it, although it was not easy, to put it mildly. However, I have ... taken the responsibility for my girlfriend's medical expenses because her family has a limited income. Just the same, they are very proud and would insist on repaying me if they knew, so I would appreciate it if you don't mention this fact to them should you speak to any of them at any point in the not-too-distant future."

"I assure you, whatever is said in this office remains in this office," Arabella declared firmly. "That is, unless you and/or your girlfriend decide otherwise."

"Thank you," Harry smiled ... then they heard a soft clanging sound.

Arabella looked up and said, "Time's up."

"It's been an hour already?" Ginny could scarcely believe it.

"Oh, you'd be surprised how fast an hour can go by in a session like this," Arabella laughed. "Would you like to continue the appointments at two p.m. on this day every week ... Wednesday, I believe?"

"No problem," Harry assured her.

"Good. I'll see you next week, then." She stood up and ushered them out, praising Harry for all he was doing to help Ginny and her family, both emotionally and financially.

Harry smiled modestly and nodded in acknowledgment. "It's the least I can do for them after all they've done for me."

"Well, keep up the good work," Arabella told him.

"Oh, I intend to, I assure you," Harry replied with another smile. "Let's go now, Gin. Remember, we have a supper date."

"That's right," Ginny recalled. "Thank you for everything, Arabella."

"Glad to help in any way I can." She smiled. "See you next week." With that, the door closed behind the couple.

Once they were alone, Harry slid a strong but gentle arm around Ginny's waist and led her back to where his broom was situated, lifting the Invisibility Charm with a nonverbal spell; then they headed back to the Burrow after their supper date, where Molly and company were surely waiting to hear how the counseling session had gone.

They were naturally pleased to hear that it had gone well ... this time, at least. But what really made certain people's day was an owl post from the Ministry informing him that Draco Malfoy had recently been arrested for the rape of Ginny Weasley, and there was nothing even his furious father could do to stop it. The authorities had sufficient evidence to hold him, and nothing even Lucius Malfoy could do could change the fact of its existence. Draco was currently in a holding cell, awaiting scheduling of the trial.

Once Harry had told the others the latest developments, they felt like celebrating. Just the same, this was just the first step...and once the trial really got rolling, he knew not only he would have to testify but Ginny and company likely would as well. Even at that, he was sure they would be all too happy to do so, if only to ensure that Draco was put away once and for all.

Harry also fully expected a furious, threatening diatribe from Lucius at virtually any time, so he vowed to be prepared for it when it came...and he had no doubt that it would. For the time being, however, he intended to enjoy the knowledge and fact that Draco was no longer walking free to menace other young women; was in fact, sitting in a jail cell, most likely contemplating his probable fate. If Harry had his way, that fate would be a life sentence in Azkaban...and it would be no more than he deserved. This time no amount of money or influence-peddling was going to get him off, and that suited Harry and company just fine.

Fortunately, Harry had also bought a Muggle-type post box for the Burrow so he could get posts from the authorities in his old neighborhood, up to and including updates on the investigation involving Dudley and his assorted sex crimes. The evidence found in his room was currently in possession of said authorities, and despite any and all efforts by Vernon and Petunia, no matter what their claims...be it manufacturing evidence or unlawful entry...would change the fact that the evidence indeed existed and was in the hands of the law.

Harry also fully expected a countersuit from them at any time, if not a furious, threatening letter, but so far hadn't gotten any official-looking envelope from the Little Whinging constabulary nor one from his relatives. Just the same, Dudley's comings and goings were being watched closely, and he had a nine p.m. curfew. Both he and his parents had already been served with a warning that if he violated it even one time, or if any further incriminating evidence was found either on his person or in his room (which was thoroughly searched once a week), he would be formally charged with multiple counts of sexual battery.

Harry would have preferred him to be under virtual house arrest, because he knew what Dudley was capable of and wouldn't put it past him to at least try to give them the slip, but had to settle for the Little Whinging authorities keeping a close eye on him. Or at least as close an eye as they could. He also decided to drop a note to them and suggest that they speak to the families and friends of Dudley's victims, not to mention the victims themselves, if possible, and see if they couldn't get either statements from them or promises to testify for the prosecution at any possible trial.

In the midst of all this, though, the two young couples were going to school and just basically living their lives as normally as possible. Ron and Hermione had had to return to Hogwarts, but made sure to ask for any and all new developments with each owl post...and they were just as happy to hear of Draco's having been arrested as those at the Burrow had been, not to mention the latest developments involving Dudley.

Harry and Ginny were headed for the Leaky Cauldron when they were approached by the first member of the press ... one Kingsley Shacklebolt, a long-time reporter for the *Daily Prophet* as well as an Auror and long-term member of the Order of the Phoenix. However, he was here in his journalist capacity this time.

"Harry, may I talk to you? I'd like to ask a few questions regarding the recent arrest of Draco Malfoy on rape charges."

Harry wasn't fond of speaking in public hearing on such a sensitive subject, so he motioned Kingsley to accompany him and Ginny to the Leaky Cauldron; they sat down together and ordered meals for themselves, including mugs of butterbeer. Kingsley just ordered a mug of butterbeer, having an animated quill and pad similar to Rita Skeeter's ready to take down everything said.

"What would you like to know?" Harry finally said once they'd gotten situated.

"How did you ever manage to actually get Draco arrested, for one thing? Usually Lucius is able to get him off the hook for virtually everything."

"Not this time. I had some people at the Ministry dig, and they eventually found plenty of evidence to support my position. He's now cooling his heels in a holding cell, awaiting the scheduling of the trial."

"I'm also given to understand that he had a Muggle accomplice. What can you tell me about that?"

"That's true. The Muggle is ... technically ... my cousin. But neither of them have ever liked me and decided to get revenge on me by going after my girlfriend. He is also suspected of attacking several girls in my old neighbourhood. The local authorities even searched his room and found considerable evidence that linked him to the attacks. As a result, they watch him closely and he has an early curfew. If he doesn't keep his nose clean, they'll likely charge him with multiple counts of ... sexual battery, which means jail time if he is convicted, even above and beyond the rape charges I'm currently pressing."

"I imagine his parents aren't pleased with the whole affair."

"To put it mildly ... which suits me just fine. Especially since I'm of age now and they can't touch me, legally or financially...and have considerable evidence to back up my claims of not only ... rape for Ginny, but physical, emotional and verbal abuse against me. They may rant and rave and threaten, but they know it's all true, and if they press too hard, I'll go after them and enjoy doing it ... which I suspect is the main reason I haven't gotten a countersuit or nasty letter from them."

"Do you think you'll eventually win the case and that both perpetrators will be punished for what they've done?"

"I think so," Harry opined. "And that will be one of the happiest days of my life."

This was when Kingsley looked in Ginny's direction, hoping to at least get confirmation from her, if nothing else, but Harry's fierce look checked any comments he had been about to say. "Leave Ginny out of it, please. She will eventually testify, and you'll learn her thoughts at that point ... but until then, any questions you may have, direct them to me. I also strongly suggest we cut this interview short, at least for the time being, so she and I can finish our meal. Whatever else you want to ask, owl me at the Burrow and I'll do what I can to answer you."

Kingsley was reluctant but knew that Harry meant business, so he didn't argue. "Very well. Thank you for your time and the comments you've given me."

Harry nodded in acknowledgment. "See you at the next Order meeting." He hadn't meant to be so short with the man, since Kingsley was generally fair and honest, but he was fiercely protective of Ginny and wasn't about to allow even him to browbeat her, as some journalists were wont to do in order to get the response they wanted from an interviewee.

With that, Kingsley stood up and left, at last allowing the couple to complete their meal and leave the restaurant, then return to the Burrow. Upon arrival there, they discussed it with the elder Weasleys, who praised Harry for his handling of the situation, as well as for not saying too much in front of Ginny, not to mention his cutting off Kingsley at the pass, since either action could easily set back the benefits of her counseling by weeks if done indiscriminately.

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Over the next several weeks, there were several owl posts, mostly from Kingsley with further questions; those Harry answered as best he could. Others, even from the *Daily Prophet* or *Quibbler*, if not from private citizens who were readers of same, seemed to be trying to either discredit him or Ginny, and therefore he chose to ignore them, especially if he recognised the name as either a family member or acquaintance of people who were either open Death Eaters or manic pureblood supporters like the Malfoys, if not both. Which reminded him, he still hadn't gotten anything from Lucius, and that was most significant. Maybe Lucius intended to save his worst venom for the public trial; at any rate, Harry vowed to be ready for him.

Even at that, he had been told that there was a fairly low likelihood of actual conviction and prison time for the offenders, that only about one-fifth of the rape cases even reached court, but he was frankly convinced that it would be different this time, particularly since there was so much evidence on their side to support their position. He had done some research and learned that many times the reason rape cases were dropped was for lack of evidence, either physical or forensic.

He also learned that most rapes were not reported, mainly because of the documented evidence that showed the disquieting and unfair statistics that many times the victims were made to feel like they were the ones being prosecuted, having to endure traumatic and embarrassingly probing interrogations into their private lives; whereas the defendant was rarely, if ever, asked such things.

Fortunately, there were also some statistics on their side: the fact that the younger the victim and the fact that Dudley had been a stranger to Ginny, not to mention the fact of her physical injuries made the likelihood greater that at least he would be convicted; although Harry intended to do everything he could to see that Draco was as well.

He was also not looking forward to the possibility that the Malfoys' defence lawyers were likely to attempt to drag both him and Ginny through the mud by either claiming that she was promiscuous or that Harry himself was trying to cover up his own wrongdoing. Little likelihood of that sticking, though, especially once the DNA sample reports were made public and admitted as evidence.

Not to mention both the Healers' and the Muggle doctor's reports...particularly the results of Ginny's medical exam, which the doctor had assured him showed that she had been subjected to attacks by *two* attackers, not just one, despite the fact that Draco had used the hypnotic suggestion that Harry was responsible for it all. Calling Ron, Hermione and other family members (or almost-family members) to serve as character witnesses for both of them should help on that score as well.

Nor could the other side claim they were lying if they openly stated that they were willing to take Veritaserum or (in Dudley's case) sodium pentothal so they would be obliged to tell the truth on the witness stand. Veritaserum was a very strong truth drug; only a few drops were necessary. Even Snape himself had said that it could make Voldemort himself spill his darkest secrets ... and Harry was sure it would make a significant impact if he were to publicly challenge Lucius and company to take some themselves, *then* testify as to Harry's, Ginny's, the Weasleys' or even Draco's character (or lack thereof). He only wished it could be used in *Dudley's* trial ...

While waiting for the trial to be scheduled, Harry made some inquiries and found that the best prosecuting attorney willing to act in their defence...his fees were ordinarily quite high...would be willing to work *pro bono* because of Harry's fame and his dislike for the Malfoys and their ilk. In other words, he would not be paid unless the case was won.

Of course, even if he hadn't agreed to donate his time and services, Harry had enough money to have paid him what he was worth, if only to ensure that justice would be done, at least in this instance. It had now been roughly fourteen months since Ginny's attack, and she seemed to be improving, at least according to Arabella, but Harry was still hesitant to have her testify, even if it meant a greater likelihood of conviction, particularly in Draco's case.

His research had also netted the fact that nine times out of ten, the victim knew her attacker, and this made conviction less likely, especially if it was even conjectured that they might have been consensually intimate at one point. Harry was dead certain otherwise, however, and intended to press that point until it sunk in, whatever he had to

do.

Especially the point that virtually the sole motivation for Ginny's attack had been revenge on Harry, the only way to hurt him being the serious injury or death of someone he loved. Harry was now convinced that one of the main reasons she had survived was because he had found out about her abduction fairly soon after it had happened and high-tailed it to the Malfoy mansion within half an hour after being informed by Neville what had happened.

By this time Arabella had given Harry her report covering the counseling sessions so far, and the results that she could see, not to mention the ones Harry himself had reported to her; then he had sent it on to the Wizengamot as well after keeping a hard copy to admit as evidence in Dudley's trial. Which reminded him, he had been gratified to hear that Dudley had finally broken his curfew the one necessary time and was himself now sitting in a holding cell, accused of multiple counts of sexual battery against various victims.

The Little Whinging authorities had also informed him that they had met with either the families or the actual victims themselves and gotten their statements...and that the statements in question were in their hands. Once the trial was scheduled, they would be admitted by the prosecution (Harry's side) as evidence against the defendant.

Of course, in the midst of all this, the young people were doing their schoolwork; Harry had even completed all the necessary makeup courses and passed the final NEWT tests with flying colours, officially having become a Hogwarts graduate once the results had been received, the majority of them being "Outstanding," if not "Exceeds Expectations." He was now preparing to take the necessary tests to become an Auror, which would likely take six to eight hours, then he would begin the long, arduous training, which was supposed to last three years.

He didn't like having to be away from Ginny for even a short time, but it was necessary in order that he be legally able to work as a dark-wizard catcher. After having successfully battled and vanquished Voldemort, however, he was at least fairly certain that his work wouldn't be all that hard now, although he was under no illusions that it would be easy, either.

He was also seriously looking into the possibility of taking extra Transfiguration courses specializing in Animagi transformations. What's more, he had pretty much already decided which animal(s) he wanted to be able to change into if necessary...a large, hawklike bird or a horse, both of which could live in the wild if need be. He was even considering asking Ginny to do the same, so in the event he had to go into hiding, she could go with him and they could live as animals as long as they had to, as Sirius had done while in hiding.

Once they got used to manoeuvring in animal form, that is. The nicest thing about Animagi transformations, though, was that they would be able to retain their human intelligence and at least some of their magical abilities, even in their animal form. They wouldn't be able to speak or hold wands, of course, so they would have to rely on nonverbal spells, mentally aiming at who- or whatever their target was.

To get back to the legal issues, Harry had even been sent a (supposedly) simplified layman's version of how DNA evidence was used in the UK criminal justice system by the Little Whinging constabulary. Despite their claims, however, he had only been able to get the gist of a fraction of it...such as the fact that related people tended to have similarities in their DNA patterns...but that it was virtually impossible for *unrelated* people to have a match in all of the thirteen designated spots in their DNA.

That basically meant that there would likely be several similarities in both Harry's and Dudley's DNA samples, mainly due to the fact that they were related. But even the most closely related people, such as parents and children, didn't always match perfectly in all thirteen categories ... and he and Dudley were cousins, so there would definitely be differences between their overall DNA. Differences which would likely prove his, Harry's, innocence in the matter of Ginny's assault and Dudley's guilt. (Not to mention Draco's, but that was another story.)

\* \* \* \* \*

He had had no idea he had been so absorbed in the hard copy of how DNA evidence was used in the UK criminal justice system until a loud knock brought his head up with a jerk to find Hermione standing at the door. "Harry!" she called impatiently, obviously having done so more than once.

"Yeah?"

"I've been trying to get your attention for the past ten minutes. Molly says to come down for supper." When he didn't reply to this, she strode over to the bed and looked down at the reading material spread over Harry's lap. "Just what is that, anyway?"

"Something I got from the Little Whinging authorities detailing how DNA evidence may be used in a criminal trial and what it is likely to happen when it is."

"Learned anything from it?"

"It's *supposedly* simplified for laymen, but I've still not been able to grasp a lot of it. However, *I have* been able to surmise this much ..." With that, he went on to detail what he had learned about how DNA could ID both related and unrelated people, about the similarities found in the DNA of related individuals, things like that.

"Does that mean that they're likely to confuse your DNA with Dudley's?" she questioned, sitting down at the foot of the bed.

Harry shook his head. "I doubt it. Even the most closely related individuals don't match perfectly all the time ... and Dudley and I are cousins, so there are bound to be plenty of differences as well as many similarities, if only due to the fact of the genetic differences between our parents." He was silent for a time, then smiled and said, "Oh, did I tell you that Dudley is sitting in jail right now?"

"No. That's great. What happened?"

"He broke his curfew and they picked him up, charging him with multiple counts of sexual battery. I was even told that many of either his victims' families or the victims themselves were able to give official statements as to what had happened to them and/or their relatives at Dudley's hands."

"Have you heard anything from your aunt and uncle?"

"No, and I think I know why, which suits me just fine. Not that I'm not sure they'd love to go after me with both barrels, accusing me of everything under the sun, but they don't dare, not with bonafide evidence from both Dudley's room and his victims in the hands of the law. But even if they did, they can't touch me, either legally or financially, because I'm of age. They also know bloody well that my testimony as to their abuse of me could easily put both of *them* away as well as Dudley ... and I've already decided that if they make even one move against me, I'll go after them with both barrels and make them regret ever crossing me."

Just then a loud yell brought both their heads up with a jerk, a yell they were certain that everyone in the household heard: "*Supper's ready! You lot get down here right now or I'll see to it that you go to bed without any!*"

"Molly shouldn't shout like that. She could lose her voice," Harry observed. "Just the same, we'd better get down there if we expect to eat."

Hermione smiled and agreed; within moments they had arrived downstairs to find Molly at the bottom of the stairs, her face like a thundercloud. However, she didn't say anything, just glared at them and ushered everyone toward the table; Harry took his regular seat next to Ginny, as Hermione took her regular seat next to Ron, and they dug in once Molly had seated herself.

Just the same, both Hermione and Harry made mental notes to fill both Ron and Ginny in on what the UK's latest laws were regarding rape and using DNA evidence in criminal trials at the earliest opportunity.

# Chapter Thirteen - Animagi Study/Ginny's Birthday

## Chapter 13 of 18

The couple discusses taking advanced Transfiguration classes in order to become Animagi; shortly thereafter, Ginny's 16th birthday is held.

It turned out that even the so-called simplified version was just as much *over*their heads as it was for himself and Hermione, but Harry and Hermione did their best to explain the things they *did* understand.

But even that much knowledge could only help them at this juncture, especially since Harry had finally gotten a communique from the Ministry (specifically, the Department of Magical Law Enforcement), which told him that the rape trial for Draco had been set for the middle of the following month, August, shortly after Ginny's birthday, in fact, which would make fourteen months since Ginny's attack.

It had taken over a year to reach this point, but Harry and company considered themselves lucky. Most likely the main reason for it was because of all the evidence on their side, but whatever the case, what mattered was that they were finally going to see Draco get what had been coming to him for a long time ... and that day couldn't come soon enough for Harry.

\* \* \* \* \*

After this, the couple discussed the possibility of taking the extra courses, which would enable them to become Animagi ... and Ginny found herself agreeable to becoming virtually any animal Harry might choose as long as it meant being with him. She had even heard that hawks mated for life, so if she and Harry had to live in the wild in animal form at some point, she believed that that might be the best choice for the two of them.

Especially the fact that they would be able to fly together...and wouldn't need brooms! However, if what McGonagall, an Animagus herself, had said in her last owl post was true, it would be necessary for them to learn how to feel comfortable in animal form before they could even attempt to live in the wild. That would take time, weeks if not months, so the pair could only hope that nothing would happen in the next few months or even the next year which would necessitate their going into hiding for any length of time.

They would also need to give their family and friends some way to identify them if they had to find them in animal form; Harry made a mental note to ask McGonagall about that in his next owl post. For the time being, however, he simply wrote and told her to sign them both up for the Advanced Transfiguration class specialising in Animagi transformations into birds and other avian species, at the same time asking her about how to develop distinctive markings or colours which would identify an individual Animagi while in their animal form.

Maybe Harry could be a black hawk and keep his green eyes, and Ginny a red one and keep her brown eyes. They'd have to see about that when the time came. Again, they could take the class via home study and even practice the transformations at home, but the final official registry would have to be done at the Ministry through the Improper Use of Magic Office, which covered Animagi and the registry of same.

Only a relative handful of witches and wizards had managed to master the advanced techniques necessary to become Animagi, but Harry figured if his father and Sirius could do it, so could himself and Ginny. In fact, it would almost have to be tougher to be able to change into a dog or a stag than a bird, so the latter change would be unlikely to be too difficult, as opposed to the former.

In the meantime, however, plans were being made to celebrate Ginny's 16th birthday; Harry was considering several things as potential gifts for her, including a beefcake photo of himself similar to the one she had given him for his birthday. If he chose that, he would certainly admonish her to keep it hidden, as she had done for the one he had given her, for such things are meant for the eyes of lovers only.

When the day rolled around, this time Harry was the one recruited to keep Ginny busy so she didn't learn what was going on downstairs until the proper time. He still recalled vividly what she had done to keep him busy and vowed to follow her example to the letter. He had pretty much mastered Legilimency by this time and could sense if she even considered trying to listen at the door for any stray sounds, so he made sure to divert her with passionate snogs whenever her thoughts happened to stray in that direction. Even as enjoyable as such interludes were, she soon gained a new understanding of the frustration Harry must have experienced in the same situation when she had so pleasantly (albeit irritatingly) diverted him so many times.

Even at that, Ginny would never forget the way Harry had awakened her on the morning of her birthday with a lingering kiss and tender smile, crooning, "Happy birthday, my so very sweet sixteen." She wasn't aware of it at the time, but he had even discovered a recording of a song with a similar name by a Muggle singer named Neil Sedaka and planned to have it played at some point during the party, maybe even dance with her while it was playing and sing along. Meanwhile, he had his hands full, so to speak, trying to keep her busy until they were called to come down for the party.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was nearly time for the party when Ginny got restless again and Harry again attempted to divert her via snogging; however, this time, she waved him off. "Don't touch me! I'm sick of waiting!"

"But it's nearly time. You can wait a few more minutes, can't you?"

"As long as it's no more than a 'few more minutes,' " she warned. "Any more, I'm leaving this room, and I'll hex you if you try to stop me!"

Fortunately for Harry, a knock came on the door a short time later; they looked up and found Hermione standing there. "It's time. Come on down."

"Thank Merlin," Ginny groused. On the way down, she told Hermione what she'd threatened to do to Harry if he tried to stop her from leaving her room even one more time ... and the older young woman laughed, prompting a dirty look from Harry in her direction even as he retained hold of Ginny's hand on the way downstairs.

As on Harry's birthday, it was almost too quiet, and he suspected that everyone was hiding in the kitchen, just waiting to yell "Surprise" when they opened the door ... and he was right. Molly almost smothered her youngest child in a tight hug and a sound kiss on the cheek; then her brothers who were present basically did the same, even Fred and George. But all the oldest male present, Arthur, did was place a simple kiss on her cheek and give a tender smile in his only daughter's direction. "Happy birthday, baby."

"Thank you, Daddy ... but I must remind you, I'm not a baby any more."

"I'll second that," Harry concurred, slipping a possessive arm around her and squeezing her. "Which reminds me ..." He caught Fred's eye, and the latter moved over to the nearby Muggle turntable to place the tone arm needle at the beginning of the 45 rpm disc and turn up the volume so all could hear. Soon the strains of Neil Sedaka's



famous 1960s tune filled the room, and those present with "significant others" pulled them onto the floor, Harry being the first.

After he had drawn Ginny into his arms and rested his forehead on hers, looking down into her soft brown eyes, his own green eyes soft with love, he began to softly sing. He was no Sinatra, certainly, although he could carry a tune...even at that, the sentiment was what mattered, especially to Ginny. She literally forgot that anyone else was in the world except herself and Harry as they moved and swayed together.

*Tonight's the night I've waited for*

*Because you're not a baby anymore*

*You've turned into the prettiest girl I've ever seen*

*Happy birthday, sweet sixteen*

*What happened to that funny face*

*My little tomboy now wears satin and lace*

*I can't believe my eyes, you're just a teenage dream*

*Happy birthday, sweet sixteen*

*When you were only six, you played with your big brother*

*Then when you were ten, you didn't like each other*

*When you were thirteen, you were my funny valentine*

*But since you've grown up, your future is sewn up*

*From now on you're gonna be mine*

*So if I should smile with sweet surprise*

*It's just that you've grown up before my very eyes*

*You've turned into the prettiest girl I've ever seen*

*Happy birthday, sweet sixteen*

Once the song ended, Harry lifted her face to his and crooned, "I love you, sweet sixteen," then kissed her even as everyone else present cheered and applauded. It took Molly's voice rising over the rest to bring them down to earth, even as Ginny blushed with a mixture of pleasure and embarrassment.

"Come on, you lot! Supper's ready! George, get *out* of that...that's your sister's birthday cake!...*Out*, I say, before I hex you!" She pointed her wand threateningly in her nineteen-year-old son's direction. George gave her a mock hurt look, but moved away from the cake and toward the table, where everyone else was going, including his twin, Fred. Soon everyone was seated at their designated spot, and Molly levitated the cake over to the table, setting it down in the centre just as neat as you please.

The one large candle in the centre of the gold, oblong-shaped cake decorated with red roses said, "Sweet Sixteen," and its two wicks, one on each end, were lit by the end of Molly's wand. "Happy Birthday, Ginny" was at the foot of the candle in red icing.

"Come on, Mum, I'm hungry," George groused.

"*Quiet*, George!" Molly scolded. "You'll get some cake soon enough. Just give your sister a chance to blow out her candles, then cut it." George gave a pleading look in Ginny's direction; Molly glared at him and he reluctantly subsided. A moment later she leaned forward and blew out the two flames; everyone smiled and applauded after singing, "Happy Birthday."

Upon removing the large candle, Ginny cut the cake with a regular cake knife since Molly had definitively vetoed her first choice, using her wand. Wands were too expensive to use so casually; even looking pleadingly at Harry was no help.

"Sorry, luv, I have to agree with your Mum," he returned with an apologetic smile. "At least for the moment. Once we're married, though, I'll get you a new one. Fair enough?"

Ginny gave him a sour look, but said, "I suppose so."

"Come on, luv, smile. It's your birthday!"

"Cut it out, Harry," she scolded, but ended up smiling anyway. Once the cake was cut and everyone was chowing down (that is, after the regular birthday meal had been consumed and the table cleared), especially George...who was currently on his third slice...Harry told the rest of the Weasleys that the rape trial for Draco was scheduled in just a few more days.

"Why didn't you mention it earlier?" Molly groused.

"Didn't want to spoil the party," came the apologetic reply.

"Don't apologise, Harry. It's the best news we've heard in ages. It's just that we'd have liked to have been able to celebrate it along with Ginny's birthday. Have you decided what you're going to say when you're on the stand?"

"For a while, I'll simply let the evidence speak for me ... then I'll take the Veritaserum and testify as to what happened the day of her abduction."

"Can imagine how old Lucius is going to react to that," Arthur commented with a derisive laugh.

"I intend to challenge him to take some himself," Harry declared. "It'll be worth whatever happens just to see the look on his face when I say it in front of the entire courtroom! The best part of the whole thing, though, is that *Draco* is going to be made to take it. I'm going to love every minute *of that*, that's for sure. Not to mention seeing him chained to a chair!"

"Who else did you plan to have testify?" Arthur put in.

"Ginny's counselor has said that she's willing to testify, not to mention the Healer who took care of her at St. Mungo's and the one who did the DNA sample analyses, as well as the Muggle doctor. Copies of their reports will also be admitted as evidence for our side."

"Well, you know that most any of us would be willing to serve as character witnesses," Molly assured him.

"I know, but there's a limit to how many can testify," Harry reminded them. "Five at the most, I think."

"But we can still come as observers, can't we?" she persisted.

"I think so; you'll just have to sit in the observers' section."

"When are we supposed to be at the courtroom?" was her next question.

"Nine o'clock Wednesday morning, the 16th. I was thinking we could all Apparate over there to save time."

"Fine. But now let's get back to the party," Ginny suggested. "Remember, it's still my birthday!"

With that, her birthday presents were given to her...but Fred and George's was the most memorable, something they said she could use to please Harry ... and they gave her the same warning they had given him, not to open it until she intended to use it. Harry still hadn't been able to bring himself to open *his* present from them, for that matter, although he pretended he had and told them that Ginny had enjoyed it so as not to hurt their feelings.

Ginny was just as aware of their quirky (not to mention bawdy) senses of humour, so she was just as apprehensive as to what it might be. The rest were more innocuous, all in keeping with Ginny's tastes but still within the limited family budget. Except for Harry's, that is; he had already told her that it wasn't something that could be opened in mixed company any more than hers to him could have been. She would have to wait to open it until they got back upstairs to their room.

Again, it was around ten by the time the party broke up and all couples headed for their respective rooms; Ginny couldn't help but wonder what Harry could have gotten her that couldn't be shown in mixed company; wouldn't it be something if it was similar to what she'd gotten for him? That would be great, but she couldn't count on it; she'd just have to wait and see.

They walked into their room and closed the door behind them; behind Ginny's back, Harry sent a nonverbal spell via a pointing of his wand toward the door, effectively locking it ... then moved over to the bedside table, used another nonverbal (and this time wandless) spell to remove the Invisibility Charm he had placed on her present, then picked it up and hid it behind his back before turning around to face her.

"All right, where's my present, Mister? The one you said you couldn't show me in mixed company?"

"Right here," he said, moving one arm to indicate the hidden present. "You just need to hold out your hands and close your eyes."

Ginny sighed in affectionate exasperation, but followed instructions. She felt him place something in her hands; then he directed, "Okay, open your eyes."

As it was with Harry, neither could Ginny believe her eyes. "Oh, my gods ..."

"Do you like it?"

"As someone I love very much once said, 'Like it? It's incredible!' "

It was along the same lines as the cheesecake thing she had given Harry, only this one showed him in *very* form-fitting clothes and giving her a come-hither look over his glasses, along with a provocative smile. His sky-blue shirt was half-undone and the black hip-hugger jeans clung to his slender, well-built body like a second skin. Dear gods, he positively *sizzled*!

"When did you have this done?"

"I made an appointment for about a week ago. I had awakened early, and you said the night before that you intended to sleep late, so I took a chance and flew off to Hogsmeade to get it done. It was kind of ... embarrassing to have to tell them what I wanted, but it was easier to do when I pretended that you were there smiling at me."

"It's wonderful. I love it. These 'cheesecake' pictures will help a lot whenever we can't be together ... not that either of us plan on that happening any more than absolutely necessary, of course."

"Especially not for the foreseeable future, anyway," he concurred. "Just the same, I'm glad you liked it. Oh, yes, something else I've been meaning to ask you ... *you* *also* still want to go through with the classes so we can eventually Transfigure into hawks, don't you?"

"Of course I do," she assured him. "If I'd changed my mind, I'd have told you long before this. Anything else?"

"Just thinking of something to do to close out your birthday," he returned with a sly smile. "How about what we did *omy* birthday?"

"Are you sure you're up to it? You know it's not for the faint of heart ... or those without *avery* strong sex drive," she pointed out.

"I wouldn't suggest it if I didn't think I was up to it. The question is, *will you* be up to it?"

Ginny gave him a suspicious look. "Is that a challenge, Mister?"

"Take it as you will," he threw back.

"All right, you're on. Come here, you!" She laughed and held out her arms; Harry couldn't move into them fast enough ... and with that first kiss, a very exhausting (but at the same time, *extremely* pleasurable) night awaited them.

## Chapter Fourteen - Draco's Trial, Day 1

*Chapter 14 of 18*

Basically, what happens during the opening day of Draco's rape trial, testimony and all, mostly from the prosecution (Harry's) side.

This time, however, the pair awakened at roughly the same time. Once each realised the other was awake, however, they smiled at each other before giving their customary morning kiss. "You must be getting the hang of it, luv. Last time we did it, you slept for most of the day!"

"More likely just getting used to you," he countered. "In fact, I feel like I did after our rematch on my birthday. Like I had eight hours of uninterrupted sleep ... and it's been a long time since that happened."

"What matters is that you can have it now," Ginny returned with a smile, the way Harry was looking at her making her want to snog the daylights out of him ... but just as they began doing so, their interlude was interrupted by Molly calling everyone to breakfast.

"Bugger," Ginny muttered under her breath as she moved off him. "I was hoping for another rematch. Oh well, maybe after breakfast ..." Her voice trailed off as she reluctantly got dressed; she kissed him again before leaving the room. "See you at breakfast, luv. Don't worry, I'll tell Mum you're coming."

Molly looked somewhat surprised at their showing up without her having to yell, but at the same time pleased not to have to risk losing her voice again. After everyone had a hearty breakfast, our couple decided to go back upstairs to their room, ostensibly for more studying, but in reality, Ginny had managed to convince Harry to do a rematch of their earlier interlude as they had done on his birthday. They might even decide to make it a regular thing on one another's birthdays, but that remained to be seen. All that mattered right now was being able to love one another again ... not only now, but for the rest of their lives.

\* \* \* \* \*

Four days later, precisely at 8:45 a.m., the family was gathered in a large group, all ready to Apparate to the Courtroom of the Wizengamot at the Ministry. After everyone had joined hands, they then Apparated to just outside the courtroom doors; a bustle of activity and voices could be heard from behind the doors as they approached them, getting louder as they opened them and entered.

The majority of the group headed for the observers' section while the others went to join the witnesses, both character witnesses (Ron and Hermione) and the witnesses that held the necessary evidence against Draco. Harry looked around for Draco, pleased to see that he was in the chained chair and Lucius was nearby as support for his son. He was sure if the elder Malfoy saw him, there would be trouble, so he tried not to make himself any more conspicuous than he already felt, despite the fact that he had wanted this and worked hard to accomplish it. Just the same, it wasn't going to be easy to endure, not for any one of them on either side.

Instead, he looked around for his attorney, spotting him near the seats where the Wizengamot customarily sat and going over to speak with him. They smiled and greeted each other. "Are all the witnesses here?" he asked.

"As far as I know," came the reply.

"When are they going to start the trial?"

"As soon as everyone's arrived and settled ... which should be any time now."

Not long afterward the half-dozen witches and half-dozen wizards, one of whom closely resembled Dumbledore (Harry was sure this had to be his old headmaster's brother, Aberforth, they looked so alike), filed in and took their seats; then the older wizard put the tip of his wand to his throat and spoke so everyone could hear.

"This is an official trial of the Wizengamot, the main legal body of the Ministry of Magic. We are gathered here today, at 9 a.m. on August 16, 1998, to determine the guilt or innocence of one Draco Lucius Malfoy, presently accused of the kidnap and rape of Miss Ginevra Weasley, youngest child and only daughter of Arthur and Molly Weasley, on June 18, 1997 at the Malfoy family home. Is the prosecution counsel ready?"

Harry's attorney spoke clear and true. "Yes, your honour."

"Defence counsel?"

"Yes, your honour," came the cold, crisp reply from the Malfoys' direction, and Harry noted a tall, thin wizard reminiscent of Sirius and about the same age, but only in looks. His demeanour was the polar opposite.

After opening arguments from both sides had been presented, the wizard who resembled Dumbledore said, "Call your first witness, counsel for the prosecution."

"Prosecution calls Harry James Potter," the attorney said; Harry took his place in the witnesses' chair. "Please state your name for the record."

"Harry James Potter," was the reply.

"You have been ... acquainted with the accused for some years, have you not, Mr. Potter?"

"I have," Harry confirmed.

"Have you ever personally known him to do anything like this before?"

"Not to my knowledge, although I'm given to understand that he has done ... other things which could be construed as such. I assume your honour has the body of evidence from the Ministry I sent earlier concerning this?"

"Yes," the older wizard confirmed. "It shows that the defendant has a history of abducting and raping young witches, twelve at present count, the first attack having occurred four years ago, the latest being Miss Weasley fourteen months ago, usually by rendering them unconscious, then tying them up and bearing them to his home with the intent of ... sexually assaulting them."

"Yes, sir," Harry confirmed. "And if you want details of ... Miss Weasley's abduction, I'll be happy to provide them. But first, for the record, I wish to state that I'm willing to take a dose of Veritaserum in order to ensure that the full truth about the incident is known by the court."

His eyes searched for Ginny and their gazes locked; he was pleased to see that Ron and Hermione flanked her on each side, each holding a hand. He tried to smile reassuringly, but couldn't be sure if he had succeeded; finally, she smiled bravely and drew herself up to her full sitting height. After taking the swallow of the strong truth serum, Harry began.

By this time, he knew that Lucius knew he was there and that it was only a matter of time before he lashed out. Harry could only do the best he possibly could to be prepared for it and hope that Lucius had not been allowed to bring his wand into the courtroom; otherwise things could get very nasty, indeed. Usually it was Wizengamot policy to confiscate the wands of all witnesses and observers from both sides in order to ensure maximum safety of all witnesses and observers, the two boxes being about as polarised as you could get. Just the same, Harry didn't put anything past Lucius; after all, being a Death Eater, he was likely to know numerous wandless, nonverbal (and Dark) ways of causing magical havoc.

"We had had a Quidditch practice game scheduled for 3:30 p.m. on June 18, and ... Miss Weasley, being one of the Chasers, was supposed to play, but never showed up. I was Captain of the team and couldn't help wondering why; finally, a friend of mine, Neville Longbottom, rushed onto the pitch and told me that he had been witness to her abduction. You also have Neville's testimony, your honour, and each of you have listened to it?"

The older wizard nodded.

"Good. Well, to continue, I ... strongly suspected where she had been taken and headed there as rapidly as possible. Upon my arrival there, Draco came out and told me what he had done to her. In addition, he showed no regret nor remorse whatsoever."

"Are you referring to the sexual assault, Mr. Potter?" the attorney inquired.

"Yes, sir. He ... even said that my Muggle cousin, his accomplice, was presently having his own way with her, even as we spoke."

"I recall your telling me that this was the point at which your friends arrived, one Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger, to back you up."

"Yes, sir. Ron is one of the victim's ... Miss Weasley's ... older brothers; Ms. Granger is a close friend of hers...and mine."

Harry shot a glance in the elder Malfoy's direction; he looked like he was ready to pop, he was so angry, but he couldn't deny any of what Harry said because of the Veritaserum he had taken. Just the same, even Veritaserum wasn't foolproof, although this was a new batch, having just been brewed, so it was unlikely to be defective. Again, standard Wizengamot policy to ensure total and complete truth from witnesses.

"What happened then?" the attorney prompted.

"We ... ordered Draco to bring her back to us. He did so, although he did not dress her. Instead, he simply wrapped her in a blanket and handed her to me. We then took her to St. Mungo's for treatment."

"How long was she there?"

"Two days, sir."

"May we know the Healers' findings?"

"Yes, sir," Harry agreed. He exchanged glances with the attorney, who then called out, "I call Healer Araminta Higgenbottom to the stand. Mr. Potter, you are excused." When the aforementioned Healer passed him, they nodded in each other's direction as he headed back to join his friends.

Shortly after Harry sat down beside Ginny and took her hand, Hermione having moved over one, the Healer's testimony began.

"Healer Higgenbottom, how long have you worked at St. Mungo's?"

"Thirteen years, your honour," she replied.

"You were on duty the night of June 18, 1997, were you not?"

"I was," came the confirmation.

"Were you the one to examine Miss Weasley?"

"I was."

"Please tell us your findings, for the record."

"Very well. My findings showed that she had been ... sexually assaulted in a brutal manner, both vaginally and anally. She was even bleeding from both spots, and to close her wounds required minor surgery."

"Would you say that the number and severity of her wounds indicated that there had been more than one attacker?"

"Most assuredly," came another confirmation.

"Were you also aware that Miss Weasley had been drugged?"

"Yes, your honour, although by this time the effects of the drug had worn off."

"Can you tell us what kind of drug was used?"

"*Amortentia*, a strong love potion."

"Can you tell us anything else?"

"I was given to understand by the victim's boyfriend, young Potter, that young Malfoy had also given her a hypnotic suggestion that young Potter had done it rather than himself and his Muggle accomplice, young Potter's cousin, in an attempt to implicate him in her assault and cover up their own actions in the matter."

"Is there any concrete proof of this?"

"Yes, sir. I have also been informed that Miss Weasley has been taking rape counseling for the past six months at St. Mungo's; her counselor's findings have even been admitted as evidence, if memory serves."

"Is her counselor present at this time, Mr. Potter?" the attorney called to him.

"I believe so, sir," Harry replied, looking around for Arabella and spotting her a short distance away, having silently observed the proceedings prior to this point. "She has also told me that she is willing to testify in the prosecution's behalf."

The attorney then exchanged glances with the Dumbledore-like head of the Wizengamot, who then called out, "I call psychiatric Healer Arabella Collingsworth to the stand. You are excused, Healer Higgenbottom." Araminta Higgenbottom smiled, nodded and stepped down, returning to her seat in the witnesses' section.

Once Arabella had taken her colleague's place, the older wizard said, "I understand you are a psychiatric Healer."

"Yes, your honour. I specialise in women's issues, particularly rape. Miss Weasley's case was referred to me fourteen months ago. I was informed that she had been having recurrent nightmares about the night of her abduction, fighting and screaming in her sleep. That is when it was decided that she obtain counseling in order to deal with the nightmares."

"May I ask who requested this counseling?"

"Young Potter, sir, Miss Weasley's boyfriend. However, it was done with the full knowledge and consent of the Weasley family."

Everyone turned in Harry's direction but he pretended not to notice their scrutiny, simply tightened his hold on Ginny's hand. Finally the attention of the assemblage was re-directed to Arabella.

"Has she shown any improvement since your counseling sessions began?"

"Markedly," Arabella reported. "There has been a considerable drop in the amount and severity of her nightmares. She has also shown considerably less reluctance for physical contact from family, friends and her ... romantic interest, young Potter, who has also been sitting in with her during the sessions."

That was when the other attorney seemed to come to life. "Objection! Only the victims themselves are supposed to be in with the counselor."

"Not any more," Arabella went on. "It is now permitted for one family member or close friend to sit in on counseling sessions, if the victim requests it."

That seemed to deflate the other attorney considerably, and he didn't speak again for some time, simply exchanged glances with Lucius. Harry could also feel Lucius's cold eyes on him, certain that he would have killed him if it had been possible here. Just the same, he intended to ask his attorney to order bodyguards for him and the Weasley family outside the courtroom for the duration of the trial (and possibly after) for Harry and company's own protection.

"Do you believe that Miss Weasley will continue to need counseling?"

"Definitely," Arabella declared. "She has ... improved greatly, but her assault was brutal, and in cases like this, it often takes many months, if not years, of counseling, for the victim and those closest to her to achieve closure and deal with the aftereffects of the attack. I firmly believe that this will be necessary with Miss Weasley."

"I am also given to understand that Miss Weasley and young Potter recently became engaged to be married."

"Yes, your honour," Arabella confirmed.

"Do you believe this will be therapeutic for her or what?"

"It's always ... therapeutic, as you put it, for the victim of virtually any physical assault, rape in particular, if she can manage to achieve both regular emotional and physical closeness with someone close to her, be it a romantic interest or family member."

"Do you believe she's ready for such ... closeness?"

"I do," Arabella confirmed, casting a lingering glance in Harry and Ginny's direction; sitting side-by-side, hands tightly and intricately entwined, the pair exchanged tender glances in the prosecution witnesses' box. Arabella smiled knowingly to herself before returning her attention to the head of the Wizengamot. "In fact, it has been ... instrumental in her more-rapid-than-usual recovery."

"Have you anything to add?" was the final question.

"No, your honour. What I've not said here is in my report. Peruse it at your leisure."

"Thank you, Healer Collingsworth. You are excused." Arabella smiled, stood up and took her leave. The older wizard then returned his gaze to the prosecution attorney. "Have you any more witnesses to call, Counselor?"

The attorney, one C. Thomas Howard, also a noted wizard and a long-time member of the Order of the Phoenix, said, "One more, your honour. I call Ms. Hermione Jane Granger to the stand."

Everyone's eyes, including those of Ron, Harry and Ginny were on Hermione as she made her way to the witnesses' chair and seated herself.

"State your name for the record," the older wizard directed.

"Hermione Jane Granger."

"You are a close friend of Harry Potter and Miss Ginevra Weasley, are you not?"

"Yes, your honour. I have known them for six years. We went to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry at first; then upon our graduation this past June, I became engaged to one Ronald Bilius Weasley, Harry's closest friend and ... Ginny's older brother. We are due to be married this Christmas."

"Congratulations. Now if we may get on with the testimony?"

"Of course, your honour."

"What can you tell this court as to their character?"

"Harry is basically a gentle, caring person, but has experienced much emotional and physical abuse in his life. Just the same, it takes a lot to arouse his anger. However, once it is aroused, it's best to stay out of his way. Otherwise, he's just as likely to hex you as look at you."

"Are you saying that when he's angry, he becomes violent?"

"Generally, only if provoked beyond endurance, and not always then. Ginny's abduction is a case in point. I was given to understand that he was ... quite angry at Malfoy for his abduction of her and intended revenge. However, upon arrival, he seemed to have a change of heart, because when Ron and I arrived, all he and Malfoy were doing was talking. Even at that, I still detected great hatred and contempt for him and his actions on Harry's part, simply from his tone of voice.

"After we had gotten Ginny to St. Mungo's for treatment, Harry chose to maintain a vigil at Ginny's side, somehow feeling responsible for being unable to prevent her assault and unwilling to leave her side, even when both Ron and I pleaded with him. He has even been the one to cover her medical expenses, both at St. Mungo's and with the psychiatric Healer."

This was a new thing to the rest of the Weasleys, all of whom exchanged glances of stunned surprise, having been told that the medical services had been donated...although Ron, being Harry's closest friend, had known otherwise for some time. "However, Harry has told me more than once that he will not accept any monetary compensation from them. His main concern is that Ginny recover, both emotionally and physically. He didn't do it to be compensated; he did it out of love for Ginny."

"What can you tell me about ... Ginny?"

"Despite the reputation of redheads for having wicked tempers, Ginny generally doesn't show hers either, unless provoked beyond endurance, like Harry. However, when she is, watch out!"

"Are you saying that *she* is a violent person when angry?"

"As I said, generally only when provoked beyond endurance. For the most part, Ginny is quite gentle and sweet-natured."

"What about her interactions with the opposite sex?"

"She has had several boyfriends before Harry ... but since their reunion, they have shared an exclusive relationship. As mentioned earlier, they are engaged and will be married upon Ginny's graduation from Hogwarts next June. Incidentally, she is taking home courses so as not to fall behind on her witchcraft studies. She is due to take her NEWT tests in a few months, in fact."

"Have you ever known her to have any physical interaction with the accused prior to this?"

"Never. Ginny dislikes Draco intensely. And even with her ... former boyfriends, the most that was ever between them was snogging."

"What about her interactions with Harry?"

"I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to divulge that information, your honour. That is a private matter, just between the two of them. However, *can* say that they are very much in love, and I expect them to remain so."

"Does her family approve of her relationship with young Potter?"

"Definitely. They have even informally adopted him as another son, and since his leaving his former home on Privet Drive in Little Whinging, Surrey, several months ago, he has moved in with the Weasleys and will remain there until he and Ginny are married and purchase their own dwelling."

"Have you anything further to add?"

"Only that her family has requested me to inform you that Ginny has never been, and will never be, sexually promiscuous, no matter what certain others present may try to do to convince you otherwise. They, and we, Ron and I, not to mention Harry, know her best, and feel confident in the accuracy of same."

Hermione was unable to help a smug smirk in Lucius's direction and saw his face darken even further, but again, he didn't dare say anything, since Hermione had also taken a swallow of Veritaserum (as had all the other witnesses) to ensure the truthfulness of her testimony.

"Thank you, Ms. Granger. You may be excused." Hermione smiled, then stood up and took her leave, returning to her seat between Ron and Harry, who now had a protective arm around his fiancée; her head was cradled on his shoulder.

"This concludes today's testimony for the prosecution. Testimony for the defence will commence upon the court's re-convening tomorrow morning at ten a.m. This court is now adjourned."

With that, everyone present prepared to leave, the defendant and his backers first, then the rest of the witnesses after Harry and company had thanked them for their testimony. There had been no time for the Muggle doctor to give testimony today, although if there was time tomorrow, C. Thomas had promised that he would have the opportunity then, so Harry had to contact him and tell him where to come, as well as to bring the results of Ginny's medical exam with him. Harry made a mental note to do so upon arrival home.

"Did you see the look on Lucius's face, Harry? I feel sure he would have killed you if he could," Hermione remarked, again with a smug smirk. "And let me tell you, I enjoyed throwing that last bit in his face. He deserves it after all the evil he and Draco have done!"

"Just the same, I can tell that this was not easy for Ginny to endure," Harry countered, giving Ginny another look of mixed love and concern. "In fact, I'm even considering asking C. Thomas and Arabella if she can't sit the rest of this trial out."

This was when Ginny seemed to come back to life. "Your concern is appreciated, luv, but I don't want to miss a moment of the trial, however hard it may be on me. I especially want to hear sentence pronounced on that slimy git for what he did to me. You and Arabella will just have to do what you usually do and help me deal with any ... adverse aftereffects."

Harry was still reluctant, but knew it was all but useless to argue with Ginny once she had made up her mind. "If you say so. I just hope we don't end up regretting it." At the mention of Malfoy, however, the mental picture of Draco chained into the criminal's chair brought a smile to Harry's lips ... lips which usually had little reason to smile, but now after this, would have more reason than ever, particularly if Draco and Dudley were both convicted of their crime against Ginny. Best of all, Harry intended to be instrumental in the conviction of both.

"We'd better get home now," he announced to everyone. "Especially since Ginny and I are due to start our extra Transfiguration courses so that we may become Animagi." No one argued with him, and eventually the entire group had once again gathered together in the outside corridor from the courtroom and Apparated back to the Burrow, already mentally and emotionally preparing themselves for what tomorrow's testimony was likely to bring.

## Chapter Fifteen - Draco's Trial, Day 2

### *Chapter 15 of 18*

Basically, Day 2 of Draco's trial, where the defence is presented, such as it is...and in the end, Draco is convicted. As expected, there is plenty of publicity in the aftermath of same, both positive and negative, even in the midst of our couple's Animagi study and practice. Harry also receives some material concerning Dudley's upcoming trial, including a letter from his relatives.

Technically, the best the so-called defence team could bring to bear was certain past doings of Lucius and company for the Ministry, claiming that no one who did so much philanthropic work for them could possibly have raised a son who was a serial rapist. A weak defence at best, but considering all the evidence Harry and company had against them, it was all they had ... and it could only get worse.

Even their best defence, after having to take Veritaserum, would seem like it was helping the prosecution, but not even Lucius's best lawyers could find a way around it without casting suspicion on themselves. Even then, they had no idea that Harry intended to challenge Lucius to take some himself when he decided to act as a character witness in his son's behalf, and not even his purported reputation for philanthropy would be able to get him out of having to take it.

All the same, everyone who was there the first day was there on the second, although the witnesses who had testified previously were now sitting in the observers' section along with Harry and the Weasley family. Once again Draco was sitting in the criminals' chair, chained securely, and the Veritaserum was brought to him. He stiffened and his fists clenched, but he

took it.

"Now, young Mr. Malfoy, if you would kindly give us your account of what happened on June 18, 1997," the head of the Wizengamot stated.

Harry and company couldn't help exchanging grins. With Veritaserum, Draco would be obliged to tell the truth and end up incriminating himself in the bargain. Harry didn't see any way in the world that he could possibly weasel out of this...and frankly, after what he had subjected those girls to, especially Ginny, he deserved whatever he got and then some.

It was really too bad that Harry hadn't thought to hire a gorgeous streetwalker to go to the Malfoy home and ambush Draco in his bedroom, ravishing him as he had those

girls ... and then have her turn around and claim that *he* had assaulted *her*. It would be priceless! Unfortunately that would likely have made him look just as bad as Draco, even as pleasant a scenario as that was, so Harry had to put that out of his mind. The real-life scenario was going to be priceless enough because Harry knew that he literally had Draco and company dead to rights.

"Well ... I had done some research on the family of Harry Potter," he said, knowing that every word he said brought him closer to a life stint in Azkaban, but the Veritaserum controlled him and he could not do otherwise.

"For what purpose?" came the next question.

"I ... wanted to see how they felt about him. If they ... disliked him as I do, I intended to see if they would be willing to work with me against him."

"Did you succeed?"

"I ... found one member of his family, his cousin Dudley Dursley."

"Did he agree to help you?"

"He did. All the same, he ... didn't strike me as very intelligent. Otherwise, he would have seen through me. He wasn't even able to tell that I was a wizard, which seemed ... strange, because of the fact he is related to Harry."

This went over big with those in the observers' box; Harry's grin got even wider. When even Draco could see how stupid Dudley was, yet recruited him anyway, that didn't give his side much hope for either freedom or leniency from the Wizengamot.

"What did you decide to do?"

"We ... decided to go after Ginny Weasley, Harry's girlfriend. I told Dudley about her and promised him he could have her if he would help me."

"Why did he agree to help you?"

"He ... dislikes Harry as much as I do. Besides, he had been ... unable to get a girl up to this point."

"Did neither of you consider what might happen if Harry discovered what you were doing?"

"I ... figured I could handle him," Draco returned. "Besides, I made sure that he and his friends would be busy elsewhere, so they could not interfere until it was too late."

"How did you manage to abduct her?"

"I Apparated with Dudley to the Hogwarts grounds, waited for Ginny to show up, then rendered her unconscious with a nonverbal spell, conjured up some ropes to tie her up with and took her to my family home."

This was the point that Lucius got a look of pure horror on his face. "Stop this! Stop this travesty immediately! Can't you see how difficult this is for him?"

It was also the point at which that Harry was unable to remain silent any longer at this insufferable hypocrisy. He jumped to his feet and called out, "Difficult *tdtim*? What the bloody hell do you think *I've* been through because of it? What Ginny and her family have been through? Because of your money, you've always been able to escape punishment. Well, this time no amount of money or influence-peddling is going to get Draco off!

"Neither of you know the meaning of suffering and, as far as I'm concerned, deserve every bit of hardship coming to you! In fact, I wouldn't put it past you to have been responsible for framing Sirius Black and making him spend twelve years in prison for crimes he never committed! Neither would it surprise me if you and your Death Eater cronies killed those people!

"Draco is at least getting a trial, which is more than I can say for my godfather! And if you think it's difficult seeing Draco made to tell the truth about *his* crimes, I'd like to openly challenge *you* to take Veritaserum and tell us about a few of *yours*, particularly the ones you committed as a Death Eater!"

Hermione and Ron both pulled hard on Harry's sleeves in an attempt to make him sit down, but Harry didn't seem to feel it. "Harry, stop it! Stop it right now! This isn't going to help!" Hermione hissed softly.

It was Ginny who finally made him stop. "Please, luv, this *isn't* going to help us. Sit down *now*!" Harry did, albeit reluctantly, but was still angry, still wanting to shout accusations, but content to sit silently now that he had been able to say what he wanted to say. Now all that was necessary was to wait and see the repercussions of his statements, particularly his challenge that Lucius take Veritaserum and be made to tell the truth about his own crimes, much less those of his son.

But Lucius had been waiting for just such a moment to lash out and did so. *Silence*, you smart-mouthed, half-blood brat! I should have known you were behind this! You have no right to even still be alive! Your blood-traitor father and filthy Muggle mother deserved everything they got, just as your blood-traitor godfather did! And if you say one more word against us with those unworthy lips, I swear in Merlin's name that I'll kill you!"

This time it was the solicitor trying to calm Lucius down, but he would not be calmed. Not until the head of the Wizengamot put his wand to his throat and shouted out, "Order! Order in the court *now*!" did things quiet down. Only then did he turn to the observers' box and quietly but sternly admonish Harry. "Young Mr. Potter, kindly remain silent during these proceedings, or else I will be forced to have you removed."

Fortunately Harry wasn't the only one lectured. "And Mr. Malfoy, you will kindly control your temper, or else I will have you removed as well and allow your son to face his trial alone. I allowed your presence because it is a parent's right to stand with their child in a situation like this, but no amount of money gives you the right to abuse or threaten another person in a court of law, particularly not one with a legitimate grievance against a member of your family. Draco, you may continue."

Lucius gave the head of the Wizengamot a killing glance but did not argue, remaining quiet but silently seething the whole time Draco was giving testimony.

"I ... then took her and Dudley to my personal wing at my home and ..." Draco could no longer continue.

"Is something wrong?"

"I ... cannot continue, sir," came the soft reply. "Not unless my father is allowed to remain. He will ... remain silent if I ask him to." Draco gave his father the first pleading look Harry had ever seen from him, and Lucius visibly, albeit reluctantly, pulled himself together.

That prompted Draco to continue his first-hand account. "I ... used her first, then allowed Dudley to do so. It was during the latter situation that Harry showed up, bent on revenge. I had been unaware that we had been observed abducting her, but surmised it was the only way Harry could have learned what had happened."

"Can you really blame him for wanting revenge after what you and his ... cousin, I believe ... did?"

"No ... I cannot blame him," Draco was forced to admit. "Shortly afterward, his friends Ron, Ginny's brother, and Hermione Granger showed up and demanded that I ... return Ginny to them immediately."

"And did you?"

"I did, sir ... after making sure that Dudley had finished. Then after they left, I took him back home."

"Is that all that happened?"

"Yes, sir."

There was a silence in the room at this point, not to mention tension so thick that it could almost literally be cut. Finally, the head of the Wizengamot said softly and with great regret, "After that confession, young Mr. Malfoy, I have little choice but to ... assume your guilt in this matter and sentence you to life in Azkaban for not only the kidnap and rape of Miss Ginevra Weasley, but the assaults of all the other young women in question. Have you anything further to say?"

"No, sir."

"Then I officially declare this trial ended. You will be returned to the holding cell until we can contact Azkaban and obtain official transportation for you. Take him away." The older wizard gestured to two older official-looking men, and they released Draco from the chained chair, only to take him back to the holding cell to await transport to Azkaban, which would likely be his home for the rest of his natural life.

Lucius followed him out silently, and that was the last the others in the observers' box ever saw of them. "Well, you did it, Harry," Ron observed. "Draco's had it. Now if you can just do the same with Dudley ..."

"Oh, I will," Harry returned softly but ominously. "I assure you, I will. *No one* hurts people I love and gets away with it. Voldemort didn't, Bellatrix didn't, Draco didn't ... and Dudley won't, either." Ginny stepped up to Harry and he opened his arms; she stepped into them and they lovingly enfolded her. "One down, one to go, luv. Best of all, I got some revenge for Sirius as well as you in the process, even if I *wasn't* able to see Lucius forced to take Veritaserum. It was worth missing that just to see Draco taken away."

Fred and George clapped Harry on the back, congratulating him, even wanting to hoist him onto their shoulders again, but he vetoed that until they got back to the Burrow ... then they could do whatever they wanted in the privacy of home. The Wizengamot officially adjourned the trial and everyone departed, the large group once again disappearing out and back to the Burrow for a private celebration. It wouldn't be completely over until Harry saw Dudley led away to his own imprisonment, but for the moment, it was enough to know that Draco would receive his just punishment...and that his, Harry's, own efforts had brought it about.

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One may be assured that plenty of publicity was generated by the news of Draco Malfoy's rape conviction, and not all of it positive, although Harry was definitely encouraged by the amount it *did* engender. Just the same, he knew that Lucius had to be plotting revenge against him and vowed to be prepared for it. Just one article, in fact, engendered considerable comment on both sides of the fence, as it were ... one which came out roughly a week after the trial ended, entitled *Lucius Malfoy Vows Revenge for Son's Rape Conviction*.

But it seemed that Kingsley Shacklebolt, the one who wrote the article, seemed slanted in favour of Harry and company, because he included copies of the DNA reports obtained from the Wizengamot, showing that Harry alone could not possibly have been responsible for Ginny's rape, but rather, that the results showed there had been a *double* attack. Certainly it showed similarities between Draco's, Harry's and Dudley's DNA, but also considerable differences, which Kingsley explained was mainly due to the genetic differences between their parents, despite the fact of the latter two's having been fairly closely related. (For the first two, there were also spots in their DNA reportedly unique to those born of wizarding families or who had at least one pureblood wizarding parent, which both Harry and Draco did.)

There was even a side article featuring the news that Harry and Ginny were now officially engaged to be married and how happy they reportedly were in spite of all the publicity surrounding the trial. They even mentioned the fact that Harry planned to push rape charges against his cousin; however, it would take time to get that started, so they had to be patient. If it took fourteen months to get Draco on the stand, it would take at least half that long, if not as long, to get Dudley on the stand, particularly if Vernon and Petunia ran true to form and did everything they could to try to throw the proverbial monkey wrench into Harry's efforts to obtain justice. But he had gotten this far, so Harry wasn't about to stop now.

Just the same, while waiting to hear regarding Dudley, Harry took steps to protect himself and the Weasley family from anything Lucius might try to do to harm them, up to and including placing various protective spells, wards and charms on the Burrow, not to mention bodyguards consisting of various members of the Order of the Phoenix uniquely qualified to protect their charges, which included the noted ex-Auror "Mad-Eye" Moody (the real one this time, of course), whenever anyone needed to go somewhere and wanted to make sure they would both go to their destination and return home safely.

Harry was also pleased that Ginny ended up not having to testify at Draco's trial after all, even though she had assured him that she was prepared to do so if necessary. Just the same, it wouldn't surprise him if she was called upon to testify at Dudley's trial in order to ensure his conviction. Moody, in fact, had been the one to accompany Harry once it came time for him to take the necessary tests so he could officially work as an Auror.

He and Ginny were also working diligently to become Animagi (specifically, able to turn into hawks so they could live as mates in the wild if called upon to do so). He kept McGonagall updated on their progress, asking advice every so often, particularly on how they could develop unique markings which could identify them even in animal form. He had even learned that the corrective properties of his glasses could be incorporated into his animal form and there would be gold rings around his eyes when in hawk form to designate same.

He was also pleased to learn ways that he could choose the plumage and eye colouring he wanted as a hawk, as could Ginny, and both of them practiced those spells diligently over the ensuing weeks between the end of Draco's trial and the beginning of Dudley's. McGonagall also assured him that they would definitely be able to communicate mentally with one another while in animal form.

And it definitely didn't do any good for Harry's male ego to know that Transfiguration was coming far easier to Ginny than it was to him, even though they were practicing together at every opportunity. She had even been able to turn completely into a hawk at one point, even managing to fly and land on Harry's shoulder, communicating mentally with him while perched there, careful not to dig her hawk's talons into his unpadding shoulder.

Just the same, Harry had to admit that she made a truly beautiful female hawk with her red-gold plumage and deep brown eyes. All the same, she could only hold the shape for roughly ten minutes. It was necessary to be able to hold a given animal shape for at least fifteen minutes at a time in order to officially become an Animagus.

*Don't worry, luv, you'll make it eventually,* she assured him.

*But I've been practicing just as much as you, yet you picked it up more quickly* he returned petulantly. *The best I've been able to do is sprout wings and feathers!*

*That happens sometimes. Some people pick things up more quickly than others. Nothing against you. Remember, I wasn't able to hold the shape as long as necessary, so I still need to work on that.*

Of course, since it ended up taking six months for Dudley's trial to be arranged, Harry finally did manage to do the same thing Ginny did, turning into the black hawk with green eyes that he wanted, including the gold spectacles-like rings, even doing the same thing that Ginny had done, landing on her shoulder and communicating mentally with her while in bird form even while making sure that his hawk's talons didn't dig into her unprotected shoulder.

By this time, Ginny had been able to perfect her shape-holding abilities, so she was now officially a registered Animagus. It would take another month or so before Harry was able to do the same, but what mattered was that they *did* both make it and could now change whenever they wished to do so. Even at that, McGonagall warned that they had to periodically turn into hawks and live as such for progressively longer periods of time, starting with one day and gradually working up in order to be sure of their ability to eventually live long-term in the wild.



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It wasn't long after this that Harry got an official-looking envelope from the Little Whinging constabulary telling him that the trial of one Dudley Philip Dursley on charges of both the rape of one Ginevra Molly Weasley as well as various other unnamed victims of sexual assault would be taking place within a week, which would make the date February 23, 1999 ... a total of twenty months since Ginny's attack.

Harry also had a good laugh at the hypocritically hurt letter that had been enclosed from his relatives.

"... I know we've had our differences, Harry, but surely you can find it in your heart to put such petty mistakes behind you and forgive us. What did we ever do to you that you would subject us...subject Dudley...to such cruel and unusual punishment, such public ridicule and embarrassment? After all, we're family!"

He read it out loud, laughing once again. "Can you believe their bloody audacity? All they've put me through, and then they expect me to forget all that and overlook what that scumball has done to the girl I love! What did they do? Try this ... locking me in a broom closet for ten years. Physically and emotionally abusing me at every opportunity, not to mention allowing Dudley to terrorise me at every turn. Making me do all the worst kind of household chores.

"Denying me food and material things. Come to think of it, I wouldn't want anything from them anyway! If Mum and Dad could know what they've done, they'd likely join me in hexing them into the middle of the next century, if not suing them for felony child abuse!"

"It's not *my* fault my parents died so young and I had to be left with them. What's worse, they took their hatred of them out on me. Frankly if I'd had a choice, I think I would have *preferred* an orphanage. And one thing's for sure ... after this, if anyone asks, I'll tell them *have* no family. At least none by blood that gives a damn about me. In fact the happiest day of my life was when I left that house of Hell for good! If I never see them again after the trial, it'll be too bloody soon!"

"How Mum could possibly have turned out as well as she did in such a family, I'll never know. I also find it virtually impossible to believe that she could have been any relation whatsoever to them. Unfortunately Sirius's family was no better. Just the same, if Dudley had only seen fit to leave Ginny alone, I would have left *them* alone, would have had little reason to do what I'm doing ... but Merlin forbid he ever do the decent thing!"

Harry's companions didn't blame him one bit for his anger, hurt and bitterness, knowing that the Dursleys deserved everything Harry intended to throw at them and then some. Even his worst wouldn't be nearly enough to compensate Harry for all he had endured at their hands. Just the same, what mattered was that Dudley would finally be punished as he deserved.

Harry would see to it ... and if Vernon and Petunia even attempted to stand in his way, he would go after them as well and enjoy every moment of it. In fact, by the time he got through with them, they wouldn't know what hit them, so if they knew what was good for them, they would simply sit back and let their spoiled rotten hoodlum brat take his medicine for once. It just went to show that it didn't pay to get on a wizard's bad side!

If they even said a word to him, he intended to say, "Be thankful I'm only here to see Dudley punished, though after what you've done to me, I'm very tempted to go after you as well and do everything I can to prove that you knew about everything he's done, accosting those girls, yet covering it up. If you don't back off, one word from me and you'll be lucky not to be run out of town on a rail, if not literally tarred and feathered! So I suggest that you not give me any more reason to prosecute you than I already have."

Harry sighed and rested the hand that held the letter on one leg. "Oh well, I suppose I shouldn't let it bother me any more. The important thing is that I'm finally away from them forever ... and as long as my dear cousin is finally punished as he deserves, I'll be content. Which reminds me...did you all want to be there at that trial, too? I think I can arrange it."

Naturally everyone readily agreed, Fred and George even offering to hex any one of Harry's erstwhile relatives whenever he said the word. Harry laughed again, his heart warmed by their obvious affection for him. "Thanks, mates, but that won't be necessary. It'll be enough for me if you're all there to sit with me."

Why couldn't he have had a foster family like the Weasleys to grow up with, someone like Molly for a foster mother? Would that have been so much to ask? Why did Dumbledore think it so bloody important that he be with blood kin, especially if said kin turned out to be so abusive, both emotionally and physically? What advantage could there possibly be to that? Guards could have been put on virtually any wizarding home to protect him and his foster family from Voldemort, so his life could have been so much different. It was even said that adversity made one stronger; well, then he ought to be the strongest person in the world!

Harry could also imagine what his relatives would say when he said that he was actually engaged to be married. "How could *you* possibly have a fiancée?"

"Well, I do," he intended to throw back. "And I'm happy to say that even though Dudley did everything he could to destroy it, he failed ... so I intend to enjoy every moment of my marriage to the girl I love while he sits rotting in jail for the rest of his life...which is nothing more than he deserves!"

Just as he would throw back if they said, "How do you know so bloody much?"

"I keep my eyes and ears open...not to mention my mind ... which unfortunately, is more than I can say for either of you. Incidentally, I no more care for anyone to know I'm related to *you* any more than you care for anyone to know that you're related *to me*...so we're even. And after this, how is it going to look to your highbrow friends for you to have a son who's a convicted rapist?"

He frankly wouldn't put it past them to say, "You ... you ... You're nothing without your effing wand!"

"Want to bet? I know wandless magic now...not to mention nonverbal spells."

Even at that, they probably wouldn't give up. "You still could have paid people to plant evidence, pay so-called witnesses to say what you wanted them to say against Dudley."

"I could have, yes," he would admit. "But I didn't. There was no need to. The evidence was already there. It was just a matter of finding it...not to mention a matter of opening one's eyes and admitting the truth to oneself, something you two are sorely lacking the ability to do, especially where your son is concerned. I've already beaten one of 'my own kind,' as you put it, so what makes you think I won't do the same to you ... and then some?"

In fact, as soon as he had become old enough to know and understand what was going on, the absurdity and unfairness of his situation, Harry had built up a wall to take refuge behind...a wall behind which he would be at least relatively safe from the majority of verbal and physical abuse heaped on him from the Dursleys almost from day one. Only a relative handful of people had ever breached that wall since he had left that house of Hell, most of them in the Weasley family.

First Ron, Molly, and Arthur, then Fred and George ... and finally, just recently, Ginny. The only one who wasn't (at least technically and only for the moment) in the family who had managed to reach him emotionally had been Hermione. That is, the only one in his age group. Other than them, only Dumbledore and Sirius had managed to win his affection; all in all, the only ones who had ever been anywhere near worthy of it. (There were others he *liked*, of course, but Harry was only referring to those he actually *loved*.)

Harry had never imagined he would ever see the day he would actually be able to take steps to ensure that Dudley would actually be punished for what he had done to Ginny, nor that it was now only a matter of days until the trial, which would seal his fate for the rest of his natural life. Neither had he ever imagined that he would ever be looking forward to seeing the Dursleys, but the best part of the whole thing was that once the trial was over, he would never have to lay eyes upon them again...or even *think* about them again if he didn't want to. And frankly, considering what he had endured at their hands, why would he want to? He would have far better, happier things to think about ... such as Ginny, their upcoming marriage and all the joys which that entailed, both physical and emotional.

# Chapter Sixteen - Dudley's Trial, Day 1

## Chapter 16 of 18

Basically, what happens the first day of Dudley's trial, including the testimony of prosecution witnesses.

This time the proceedings would need to take place in a Muggle court, but it really didn't matter to Harry as long as Dudley finally got what had been coming to him for years. He had contacted the Muggle doctor he had taken Ginny to and made sure he brought along his findings on her medical exam, not to mention the DNA findings from the Muggle hospital, the only ones his erstwhile relatives would put any credence to whatsoever. Of course, considering that it was against Dudley, they might try to do everything they could to discredit them too, simply because they came from Harry. Well, they could discredit them all they liked; it wouldn't change the fact of their truth one iota. The law would know that and act accordingly, and that's what mattered to him.

As in the first trial, he intended to testify, just as he intended to have Ginny testify and at least one of his friends as a character witness. If not Ron or Hermione, Fred or George, maybe one of the older Weasleys. He also planned to have some of the Order discreetly keep an eye on them because he wouldn't put it past Lucius to attack them even here, and he wanted to make sure they were as safe as possible.

He had also made some discreet inquiries and learned to his scarcely-concealed delight that it was perfectly legal to use sodium pentothal in order to get the truth from defendants; it was polygraph (lie detector) tests that were inadmissible in court as evidence. He couldn't be sure if the substance would work on him or his wizarding comrades, but he still intended to take it (and have *them* take it, in an attempt to offset claims by Dudley's side that there was lying going on).

The solicitor in this case was a Muggle friend of C. Thomas, who had already contacted him and again offered to work *pro bono*, effectively donating his time and services unless the case was won...and he assured Harry that he would do everything in his power to see that it was. If he could manage to see Dudley led away to life in prison for what he had done to Ginny, Harry would be immensely thankful...for as long as he lived.

The trial was due to start fairly early in the morning, at nine a.m. February 23, 1999, in the Muggle court in the township of Little Whinging. Since it was a very small township in the Surrey province, space was limited in the observers' section, most of which was taken up by the Weasley family, and witnesses' section on the prosecution's side, most of it taken up by Harry and Ginny, his friends and the Muggle doctor.

Harry was unable to stop smiling when he saw Dudley led inside to the defendant's chair in handcuffs, Vernon and Petunia the only ones on his side since the members of Dudley's gang had long since been incarcerated themselves. Even though Harry had had nothing to do with their having been arrested, he couldn't help thinking that their arrests were merely forerunners of Dudley's own, which he had definitely had *plenty* to do with.

He wasn't sure if they were aware of his presence or that of his friends, but with a part of him, he hoped they were, wanting them to be every bit as apprehensive as they deserved to be after what Dudley had done.

It was precisely at 9 a.m. that the proceedings began; the judge's (and a female judge at that) voice rang out clear and true, "This court is now in session, this trial to determine whether one Dudley Philip Dursley of number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey, is guilty of twelve counts of sexual battery, the latest one having occurred twenty months ago, against Miss Ginevra Molly Weasley of Ottery St. Catchpole, Devonshire, fiancée of one Harry James Potter, also of Ottery St. Catchpole, Devonshire. Counsel for the prosecution, call your first witness."

"The prosecution calls Harry James Potter to the stand," the Muggle solicitor for the prosecution called out. Harry felt the cold, sharp eyes of his aunt and uncle stabbing into his back as he made his way to the witness stand, although he pretended not to feel anything, as he had many times in the course of his life with them, sometimes necessary in order to simply survive another day in their custody.

Once Harry took his place in the witnesses' box, the solicitor asked him to raise his right hand. "You swear that the testimony you are about to give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

"I do, sir," Harry assured him after taking an injection of sodium pentothal.

"You may sit." Harry did so. "Now, young Mr. Potter, if you would kindly give us some background information on this case ..."

"Gladly, sir. My fiancée, Miss Weasley, was going to a practice game of our favourite sport, a form of polo, when she was allegedly abducted by my cousin and an accomplice of his. These actions were observed by a friend of mine, who reported that the latter rendered her unconscious, tied her up with ropes and escaped with her and Dudley to his, the accomplice's, family home. There, they both sexually assaulted her, by the accomplice's own admission...an accomplice who is now himself in jail."

"Can you offer proof of this ... sexual assault?"

"Yes, sir. Once my fiancée had been released from the hospital, I took her for a medical exam with a doctor I know; he is present in this courtroom and is willing to offer his findings in said examination on the prosecution's behalf."

"Thank you, Mr. Potter. The prosecution now calls Dr. William Thomas Billingsley, M.D., to the stand. You are excused, Mr. Potter."

Harry smiled, stood up and left the box, passing the doctor on the way, acknowledging him with a nod.

Once the silver-haired, hazel-eyed physician had been sworn in and the injection of sodium pentothal given, the prosecution solicitor said, "How long have you been a physician, Dr. Billingsley?"

"Twenty-five years, sir," came the calm, softly accented reply.

"You first met young Potter and his intended on the afternoon of July 8, 1997, at two p.m., is that correct?"

"That is correct," the doctor confirmed. "He had contacted me with a request to examine his intended to confirm that she was ... healing properly from the injuries sustained in her sexual attack three weeks before."

"And you did so?"

"I did."

"Please tell us your findings."

"I discovered that she had been brutally assaulted, both vaginally and anally, minor surgery having been necessary to close her wounds."

"It is said that the alleged accomplice gave her an hypnotic suggestion that it was her intended, young Potter, who had assaulted her, but that this conflicts with your findings."

"It does," the doctor confirmed. "I found evidence of *two* attackers, not just one, and in both places on Miss Weasley's body."

"It is now commonplace to use DNA to discover the truth regarding sexual assault. Were there any tests made of the bodily fluids found in her body?"

"There were."

"Were you the one who performed these tests?"

"No, it was a colleague of mine," Billingsley admitted. "However, he has given me power of attorney to speak in his behalf, since he is unable to be present in this courtroom at this time. He discovered that although there are ... similarities between the DNA found in Miss Weasley's body and that of young Potter, none of the latter's DNA was found in her body. Rather, it was that of the two alleged attackers, one of them being the defendant."

"You know the defendant personally, do you not?"

"I do. He and his parents have been regular patients of mine for seventeen years, ever since his birth."

"Did you ever treat or examine young Potter during those seventeen years? He lived with them for the majority of that time."

"I did. Usually it was for things like a black eye, broken arm or broken nose; young Potter claims it was as a result of ... physical altercations with the defendant, who is considerably larger and heavier than himself."

Harry stole a quick look in his uncle and aunt's direction. Petunia was white with suppressed fury, and Vernon was a most satisfying shade of puce, which usually meant he was ready to almost literally explode with anger. He was sure they'd have loved to be able to say that he was lying about said altercations; unfortunately, nothing and no one could refute the doctor's testimony because of the sodium pentothal.

"Have you any explanation for why young Dursley would assault Miss Weasley?"

"I was given to understand that it was done primarily to obtain revenge against young Potter, young Dursley's cousin," the doctor replied. "Up to this point, young Dursley had been unable to obtain a girlfriend of his own. His accomplice promised that he would be able to have Miss Weasley, his cousin's girlfriend, if he assisted him in abducting her. What he and his accomplice were unable to do to young Potter physically, they were able to reach him emotionally by the assault on the girl he loved."

"I see," the attorney remarked quietly. "Is there anything you can add, Doctor?"

"Not at this time, sir."

"Very well. You are excused, Doctor." Billingsley smiled, stood up and left the witnesses' box to return to his seat in the witnesses' section.

The prosecution attorney then called out, "I call Miss Ginevra Weasley to the stand."

Ginny exchanged glances with Harry and her family; Harry gave her a reassuring hug and smile, which gave her the strength to make her way to the witnesses' box.

After being sworn in and taking the sodium pentothal, Ginny began her testimony.

"You are presently engaged to the plaintiff, one Harry James Potter, are you not, Miss Weasley?"

"Yes, sir. We have been engaged since August of last year."

"You were not engaged at the time of your assault?"

"No, sir ... although we had been steady dates for some weeks prior to my assault."

"How many weeks, may I ask?"

"Five, sir."

"Had you ever met either of your attackers prior to your assault?"

"I had met one, sir. He was a fellow classmate of Harry's and myself at our ... former school. Harry's cousin, however, I had never met before, although Harry had told us, myself and my family, about him." She stole a quick glance in the direction of the witnesses' box in order to obtain strength to speak further from both Harry and her family.

"How old were you at the time of your assault?"

"Fifteen years and ten months, sir," Ginny replied.

"How old are you now?"

"I turned seventeen six months ago."

"Were you aware that you had been sexually assaulted when you first awakened in the hospital?"

"I had felt sore and in some pain, but had no idea what had happened to me. It wasn't until two months after my attack that I was told."

"Who informed you of the details?"

"My ... fiancé, Harry, my brother Ron and his own fiancée, one Hermione Granger, both friends of Harry's."

"What did they tell you?"

"That I had been rendered unconscious, tied up and taken to Dudley's accomplice's home ... then assaulted there. I was also told of the hypnotic suggestion that was designed to make me believe that Harry had assaulted me, not to mention the swallow of a powerful drug, similar to a love potion, also given to me by the accomplice."

"What else?"

"Harry said that the accomplice admitted to what he and Harry's cousin had done to me, but there was nothing he could do to change what had happened. Both my brother and his fiancée demanded that I be brought to them, and I finally was. The accomplice brought me out, wrapped in a blanket, I'm told, and ... gave me to Harry. They then took me to the hospital for treatment."

"That is all you were told?"

"This is what happened," Ginny declared.

"Did you need any follow-up treatment?"

"Once my ... physical injuries, already documented today, had been healed, I began having nightmares about my ordeal, and it was decided that I needed psychiatric counseling in order to put them to rest."

"Who decided this?"

"Harry and my family, sir. Harry was also the one who covered the costs of my medical care."

"Do you believe the counseling has been helpful to you?"

"Very much, sir, although I was reluctant to have it at first."

"Why were you reluctant?"

"Because I believed it to be unnecessary at the time."

"You now know otherwise, do you not?"

"I do, sir."

"Is there anything you can add?"

"Only this, sir. That it was nauseating to learn who had actually assaulted me, and that the hypnotic suggestion didn't work, because I knew Harry too well to believe that he could ever be responsible for my assault. He has always been gentle and loving with me; I feel certain that he could never harm me, unlike my attackers, who didn't seem to care how much they hurt me as long as they got ... satisfaction."

"Thank you, Miss Weasley. You may step down."

Ginny smiled, stood up and left the witnesses' box, returning to her seat next to Harry in the witnesses' section. He hugged and kissed her in welcome, as did Hermione; Ron hugged her.

"You did great, Gin," they whispered to her with congratulatory smiles.

"I did my best," she assured them.

"That's all you can do," Harry assured her. "Coupled with all the other evidence on our side, I feel sure that your testimony is going to be the clincher, the key to put Dudley away for life. Best of all, my aunt and uncle won't be able to do a thing to stop it, no matter how they try ... and I have no doubt that they will."

"But there won't be time for their side today, will there?"

"I don't think so," Harry replied. "They'll probably adjourn now and the trial will resume sometime tomorrow."

As it turned out, he was right. A short time later, the judge said, "That concludes this trial for today. Arguments for the defence will commence at ten o'clock Friday morning. This court is now officially adjourned."

With that, everyone filed out of the courtroom, Dudley again being led away in handcuffs while Vernon and Petunia simply gave Harry killing glances and departed without speaking to him, which suited him just fine. He was sure they were saving their worst venom for the following day, and vowed to be prepared for whatever they might come out with, whatever accusations they might make. For the time being, he had no complaints with how things were going and frankly felt ready to celebrate, but knew it was premature to do so until and unless Dudley was actually convicted and led away to prison.

"Ready to go home, everyone?" he asked, eyes sweeping over everyone in his immediate vicinity.

"Ready," they answered as one. Then everyone joined hands and Disapparated out of the room, heading back to the Burrow to discuss the happenings of the first day of Dudley's trial and speculate on what might possibly happen on the second (and hopefully final) day coming up tomorrow.

## Chapter Seventeen - Dudley's Trial, Day 2

*Chapter 17 of 18*

Basically, what happened the second day of Dudley's rape trial.

Everyone was up bright and early and Apparated to the courtroom as a group, as they had been doing from the start. When they entered the courtroom, it was already bustling with activity; the judge was on the bench and Dudley already in the defendant's chair, his court-appointed lawyer at his side. Harry couldn't help thinking that if anything was a losing proposition, this was, if only because of the fact that his side virtually had them dead to rights. But the law stipulated that both sides had to be heard, so that's the only reason they were here at all.

Harry suppressed a wicked grin when he saw Vernon and Petunia enter and take their seats. Before this day was out, they would know well the wrath they had engendered by abusing him for so many years...and if he had anything to say about it, they would never forget that it was their own fault this day had ever come. If they had only treated him decently, like a true member of the family, he would never have even considered doing this ... but no, they had to be nasty and abusive, physically, verbally and emotionally, every chance they got.

He was convinced that they had enjoyed every minute of it too, as if by abusing him, they were somehow getting back at the absent James and Lily. The worst part of the whole thing, though, had been their punishing Harry for something he had had absolutely no control over. He frankly didn't think them capable of decency of any kind; if they were, there would have been indications of same well before now.

It was around a quarter after ten that the trial officially began; after the traditional opening statements by the judge, Dudley was given the injection of sodium pentothal and

asked for his account of the day Ginny had been attacked.

"I'd just left the house when I saw this tall, thin, blond chap coming up the walk; he'd said that he was lost and looking for my house and that he'd been told it was on this street. I told him he'd found it and asked what he wanted us for. He then asked if I'd heard of Harry. I told him that Harry was...technically...my cousin, and couldn't help wondering how he could possibly know him, because only someone who knew his true background could know of my family's connection to him.

"He'd claimed he didn't, simply that he'd heard of Harry and understood he was quite famous. That was when I told him how ... my family felt about having him in our house, that we had no idea how or why he'd ever ended up on our doorstep. My visitor said it was because of my mother's being the sister of *his* mother, plain and simple. Well, it wasn't plain and simple to me ... or us. All of us would have been a lot better off if he'd gone to an orphanage, another family or even the streets. Anywhere but with us.

"My visitor then asked if I was aware that Harry had a steady girlfriend. I said I wasn't, that none of us were...and had a pretty fair idea why he hadn't ever mentioned her. He then described her to me; she sounded like a very beautiful girl and I ... wanted to meet her." *To put it mildly!* Harry thought with a mixture of bitterness and pain at what he, Ginny and the entire Weasley family had gone through at Draco and Dudley's hands.

"I had no idea how this bloke could know so much about her, but vowed to find out why, whatever it took. I thought if I could have her, it would be a perfect way to flaunt what I'd done in Harry's face and enjoy his reaction, since I believed at the time there was nothing he could do to avenge her. It turned out that I was ... very wrong about him. Both me *and* my parents. But at this late date, I doubt he would ever forgive us for what we've done to him, how we've treated him ... and I couldn't blame him."

*Damn bloody right!* Harry thought again, bitterness and pain again stabbing through him. The only good thing about this was that Dudley would be punished for what he had done...and if he, Harry, had his way, his scumball cousin would be put in jail and the key thrown away. He'd not see freedom again for the rest of his natural life...and Harry frankly hoped that Dudley lived a long time with the memory of the monstrous thing he'd done to an innocent young girl whose only "crime" was a romantic connection to Harry.

But he also intended to strike a blow for all the other victims who could not be here and see that justice was done for them as well ... and for that, he would see to it that Dudley was put away for life, whatever he had to do to accomplish it. It wouldn't change what had happened to them, of course, but at least they and their families could rest easier, knowing that their attacker had received his just punishment.

Dudley was asked to continue and did so. "My co-conspirator then gave me a photo layout of Harry's girlfriend and her more obvious charms, claiming that Harry had a layout just like it. I never knew if he did or not, though." Harry thought of the cheesecake photo of Ginny in the brief, lacy teddy and smiled in spite of himself. His cousin had been right for once; it just wasn't precisely in the manner he'd been told.

"I didn't like having to knuckle under to this bloke and told him so. He shot back that he had the knowledge I needed and that if I wanted to have the girl, I'd do well not to argue with him. He then told me how we were to go about abducting her, but that I wasn't to tell my parents anything about it, that if they asked, I was to say I was going to meet some friends."

Harry shot a furtive glance in Vernon and Petunia's direction and was well satisfied at the mixture of shock and anger on their faces ... but for once, not directed at him. It was obvious that they'd never dreamed that their spoiled rotten hoodlum brat was even capable of betraying *them* and that it wasn't going to be easy (to put it mildly) for them to have to live with such knowledge. Just the same, Harry was frankly glad that they would. If Dudley could treat even his own parents so shabbily, no one was safe from his rottenness, that was for sure.

"It was shortly after that that I'd had an idea, to ... capture Harry and tie him down so that he would have to watch as my co-conspirator and I had our way with the girl he loved. I'd even considered having him stripped so we could note how aroused he got at what we did." This time there was a shocked silence that reverberated throughout the entire courtroom, and it wasn't lifted for several minutes.

This was definitely the time that Harry was hard-pressed to control himself. If he'd had his wand, he'd likely have killed Dudley right then and there. That was about as low as one could go! Ginny sensed his pain and anger and gave him a loving hug and kiss; only her ministrations kept him from jumping up and physically attacking Dudley. He had to allow the law to punish his erstwhile cousin; there was no point in his ending up in jail as well. As he had been told time and again, neither Draco nor Dudley was worth it. Harry had much better things to do with his life than waste it sitting in prison.

"Fortunately for Harry, my co-conspirator vetoed my idea. He said we couldn't afford to have too many people involved in our scheme, because the more that knew, the more likely it would leak to both my parents and ... the law."

*One of the few even marginally decent things Draco's ever done,* Harry thought wryly. *Even at that, I have no doubt that if he'd realised this at the time, he'd have gone ahead with it.* Which made Harry devoutly thankful that Draco *hadn't* realised it ... not until it was too late to back out, anyway.

"Just the same, I tried to convince him to go along with it ... yet he emphatically refused, and warned me that if I tried to implicate him in any way, he'd sue my family for everything we had...for defamation of character, at the very least. He claimed his family had a lot of money and that we could not possibly have won against them."

That was another thing Dudley was right about, Harry had to admit. The Malfoy fortune had gotten both Draco and Lucius out of countless scrapes with the law before, but this time no amount of money or influence had been sufficient to keep Draco out of jail. For once the justice system had worked as it was supposed to, and the guilty parties were finally going to be punished as they deserved.

"I demanded to know just who he was; he said that we'd get along fine as long as I did what he said. Otherwise he'd destroy me and enjoy doing it. I think it was then that I realised the bloke couldn't be any ordinary person." Again, shock and anger showed on Vernon and Petunia's faces at the knowledge that their precious baby boy had ever lowered himself to associate with one of those lowlife freaks. It was bad enough to be related to one *without* that.

Harry frankly was enjoying every moment of this trial, surprised that Dudley had managed to figure out that Draco was a wizard at all, much less so soon. He was brought back to reality by Dudley's continuing his account of the June day twenty months ago when he and Draco had managed to turn not only Harry and Ginny's lives upside down, but those of her entire family by their attack on her.

"We then ... transported to where he said Harry's girlfriend was and abducted her."

Harry and company exchanged glances; it sounded like Draco had used Apparition to transport himself and Dudley onto the Hogwarts grounds. In spite of himself he was impressed at his adversary's skill in planning the abduction for the one day in June that the inability to Apparate would be lifted in order that the students of the proper age who wished to practice Apparition could do so. By a strange coincidence, it had also been the day that Quidditch practice had been scheduled, which therefore ensured that Harry and his friends would be busy so they would be unable to stop Draco and Dudley until it was too late.

Neither was it hard for Harry to imagine how Draco had managed to get an Apparition License so soon, since his seventeenth birthday had only been roughly two weeks before the incident. It would have had to have been a combination of Draco's studying ahead and Lucius's greasing palms with his blood money for him to have managed it.

"I don't know what he did, but he somehow rendered her unconscious, then tied her up and we ... transported again. I ... marveled at how beautiful she was and well understood how Harry could have fallen for her."

This prompted Harry to turn his head and smile tenderly at Ginny, as well as tighten his grip on her hand. In spite of himself he had to admire his cousin's taste in women...one of the few good things about him. He just wished Dudley could have left Ginny in peace, but that was obviously too much to ask ... the prospect of driving Harry crazy simply too tempting.

"My companion then took us to an opulent mansion and sealed us in a room, then tied down the girl and ... had his way with her. After stripping her and blindfolding her, of

course. Not to mention hypnotic suggestion." That was another thing Harry was frankly surprised that Dudley even knew about, much less knew the term for. "He made me watch for so long that I nearly went mental. It was around six o'clock that he finally motioned me over."

Harry recalled upon closing his eyes in pain that that had been only a few minutes before his arrival, and didn't want to imagine the dark fantasies that Dudley must have acted out, much less Draco. The damage to Ginny's body...the sweet body he loved so much...had showed the results of same all too graphically, and he doubted he would ever forget the sight as long as he lived.

"It's all right, luv. It's ... all behind us now," Ginny tried to soothe him, gently stroking the back of his neck to make him look at her, then leaning over to kiss him warmly even as her fingers laced with his even more tightly than usual.

"I know; I just wish it hadn't had to happen."

"Well, it did, and there's nothing we can do to change it now," she pointed out. "What matters is that the nutters who did it are going to be punished as they deserve. We'll have to be content with that."

He moved to caress her nearest cheek with his free hand and smiled. "I love you."

"And I love you," she whispered. Then they returned their attention to Dudley's account of June 18, 1997.

They were unaware (nor would it have mattered if they had been), but Vernon and Petunia had looked in Harry and Ginny's direction. "Look at that," Petunia sniffed when she noted them exchanging a kiss. "Disgusting. Kissing in public! But then that's no more than we should expect of *their kind*." Obviously they were unable to recognize love when they saw it, even now, conveniently forgetting all the Muggles who did the same thing. That was beside the point. To someone with Vernon and Petunia's attitude, anything a magical person did was deemed "disgusting" or "nasty."

By this time he had reached the part where Draco had come in and ordered him off Ginny so that he could return her to those who had come for her...Harry, Ron and Hermione. Just the same, Harry was stunned, if not utterly shocked, however, when Dudley said, "In spite of what we had done to her, I ... couldn't help feeling sorry for what the knowledge was going to do to those closest to her and believed that Draco should have at least ... dressed her again before taking her back to them."

Since when would Dudley give a damn about that? Was he actually sprouting a conscience at this late date? Stranger things had happened, admittedly, but Harry never thought he would ever see the day that Dudley actually cared about the feelings of anyone besides himself. Unfortunately, he had reformed far too late to effectively redeem himself...and not only in Harry's eyes, but the eyes of the law.

Not long afterward, Dudley's account concluded and the judge said, "Is that all you have to say?"

"Yes, ma'am," Dudley said more meekly than Harry would have imagined him capable of, but considering that they were in a court of law and this woman held his fate in her hands, he must have deemed it logical to assume a meek demeanour, if only to attempt to sway her.

Unfortunately for him, the woman saw through him and was not moved in the slightest. "Very well. Would either of young Dursley's parents care to make a statement in their son's behalf?" she asked. When both tried to get up, the judge firmly stated, "Only one parent, please."

Petunia moved up to stand beside her son, giving a triumphant look in Harry and company's direction. "I shall be glad to, your honour." With that, she began her diatribe of how Harry had supposedly humiliated and belittled Dudley, conveniently forgetting all the times she, Vernon and Dudley together had done the same to Harry, sometimes even ganging up on him. One time they had beaten him so severely that it had taken him several days in a healing sleep at St. Mungo's to recover enough to recuperate at the Burrow under Molly and Ginny's care...and this only after Lupin and Tonks had managed to rescue him, having become concerned when Harry did not contact them as promised.

They temporarily froze the Muggles with Body-Bind spells, although after seeing what they had done to poor Harry, were tempted to Petrify them so they could never hurt him again. They had vowed to have hard words with Dumbledore, intending to do all they could to see that Harry was taken away from those beasts. They weren't relatives, they were monsters! The bond of blood obviously meant nothing to them, so why should Harry continue to be subjected to their abuse? Anywhere would be better for him than there!

Harry was unable to take more than half an hour of his aunt's two-faced hypocrisy before feeling obliged to speak up.

"I can't believe your bloody audacity, *Mrs. Dursley*. Never again will I call you 'Aunt' because you are no relation to me whatsoever, despite the fact that my mum was your sister. How she could ever have turned out as well as she did in such a family as yours, I'll never know. You're just lucky that all I'm after is justice for my fiancée rather than prosecuting you, although if the whole truth was known, the penal system would be likely be locking *you* up right next to your hoodlum son!

"I'll tell this entire court the real story right now. You locked me in a broom closet for eleven years. Physically, verbally and emotionally abused me at every opportunity...and what's more, allowed Dudley to do so. Denied me food and material things, not to mention love and attention. But come to think of it, I wouldn't want anything from you anyway! If Mum and Dad could know what you've done, they'd likely join me in hexing you into the middle of the next century just before suing you for felony child abuse!

"It's not *my* fault my parents died so young and I had to be left with you. What's worse, you took your hatred of them out on me, punished me for something I had absolutely no control over. Frankly, if I'd had a choice, I'd have *preferred* an orphanage. And one thing's for sure ... after this, if anyone asks, I'll tell them *have* no family. At least none by blood that gives a damn about me. In fact, the happiest day of my life was when I left your house of Hell for good! If I never see any of you again after this trial, it'll be too bloody soon!"

However, it was as if Petunia had gone temporarily deaf, because her reply was as follows: "How could *you* possibly have a fiancée?"

"Well, I do...and we'll be married within the year, which is more than you'll be able to say for your jailbird son, for now and years to come! I'm also happy to say that even though Dudley did everything he could to destroy us, he failed ... so I plan to enjoy every moment of my marriage to the girl I love while he sits rotting in jail for the rest of his life...which is no more than he deserves! Incidentally, I no more care for anyone to know I'm related to you any more than you care for anyone to know you're related to me, so we're even. And after this, how is it going to look to your highbrow friends for you to have a son who's a convicted rapist?"

"You ... you ... freeloading, good-for-nothing, ungrateful, filthy, stinking freak! You're nothing without your effing wand!" Petunia spat back venomously.

"Want to bet? I know wandless magic now...not to mention nonverbal spells."

"Well, it's nothing more than one might expect from one of *your kind*. In fact, it wouldn't surprise me if you'd paid people to plant evidence and so-called witnesses to say what you wanted them to say against Dudley!"

"I could have, yes," Harry admitted. "But I didn't. There was no need to. The evidence was already there, if you'd had brains enough to admit it...something you and your husband are sorely lacking the ability to do, especially where your *precious son* is concerned! I've already beaten one of 'my kind,' as you put it, so what makes you think I won't do the same to you?"

Petunia was momentarily stunned and shocked, but that was all that Harry needed. "Be thankful I'm only here to see Dudley punished, not to prove that you knew about everything he's done, including accosting those other poor girls, yet covering it up ... although I could easily do so if I chose to. If you don't back off, *Mrs. Dursley*..." Harry made sure to say this in a manner which conveyed all his bottled-up hatred and contempt for her..."and *right now*, one word from me in the ears of the right people in this town and you'll be lucky not to be run out of town on a rail, if not tarred and feathered! So before you say another word, I strongly suggest that you not give me any more

reason to prosecute you than I already have ... because if you do, I swear you won't know what hit you by the time I get through with you."

Harry's tone was calm, yet deadly effective...so much so that it penetrated even Petunia's thick skull, and she closed her mouth with a snap, turning on her heel and heading back to the seat next to her husband.

"Is all the testimony concluded?" The defence lawyer reluctantly nodded at a hard look from Petunia when the judge asked. "Very well. I shall deliver the verdict once the jury has had a chance to deliberate ... although I don't expect it to take very long." She looked pointedly at Dudley, then at his parents, before her eyes came to rest on Harry and his tender solicitude toward Ginny.

What could have made these people abuse a gentle, sensitive, orphaned boy so terribly, turn him so against them that he would disown them completely and declare that he would gladly kill them, given the chance? She wasn't sure she wanted to know, now or ever. What mattered in this instance was that justice was done, and she intended to do everything in her power to see that young Dursley was punished as his crimes against both his cousin and the latter's fiancée warranted. Barely half an hour later, the jury foreperson came back and handed a slip of paper to the judge; she said, "Dudley Philip Dursley, please rise."

Dudley reluctantly did so.

"The jury has just delivered its verdict. You have been found guilty of twelve counts of sexual battery against various female victims, not the least of which is your cousin's fiancée, one Ginevra Weasley, punishable by life in prison. Sentence will commence as soon as transport can be found to take you, and upon your arrival at the HMP Latchmere House Prison located on Church Road, Ham Common, Richmond, Surrey, the nearest one to your home. However, I suggest you not attempt to escape, because our officers, both here and at the prison itself, are trained to kill if they deem it necessary. Take him away." Two uniformed officers came up on either side of Dudley and took hold of an arm.

Petunia screamed, "No! No! He's innocent! He's innocent!" but no one heeded her. In fact, Vernon was actually trying to calm his wife, but she would not be calmed. Finally it was deemed necessary to have her sedated; they then left the courtroom, Petunia now quiet but still sobbing softly. Harry refused to feel any sympathy for her; none of the Dursleys held any further meaning for him.

All that was important to him was the fact that Dudley was being led away to prison...to a life sentence without the possibility of parole for many years. By the time he was (if the prison authorities decided to grant it, that is), it was likely that both Vernon and Petunia would have died. And by that time, Harry would likely have forgotten about all of them; he would be too busy living his life, too busy loving Ginny and whatever children she gave him.

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Upon leaving the courtroom, all decided to go out to celebrate, and Harry gladly picked up the tab for everyone in his future family by marriage. All the attached couples, including Harry and Ginny, had romantic dinners and dances at the fanciest wizarding restaurant his Gringotts gold could buy. The rest he gave leave to do as they wished, even return home, although none did.

They had too much to celebrate for that and intended to do so for as long as they wished, especially Fred and George. Harry and Ginny's personal plans also included a passionate night of shagging each other silly upon their return home. For the time being, though, all that mattered was that justice had been done and they could at last begin to put the last twenty nightmarish months behind them.

## Chapter Eighteen - Wedding/Honeymoon/Conclusion

### *Chapter 18 of 18*

Harry and Ginny's wedding and honeymoon, then the conclusion...including what happened once they have their first child and how it affected both Draco and Dudley.

The next several months almost literally went by in a blur, there was so much activity going on in preparation for the upcoming wedding between Harry and Ginny. It had been decided to maintain Harry's privacy as much as possible, that guests would be kept to a minimum and limited only to those closest to the couple, be it by bonds of blood or friendship. The head of the Division of Marriage and Children at the Ministry would Apparate in to marry them when the time came, and the Burrow would be magically expanded to hold all the family members, both by blood and marriage.

Molly and Arthur had recently learned that Ginny's other five brothers intended to come and bring their wives/families...Bill with Fleur and their two children; Charlie with his wife, Rosabelle, who was now six months pregnant; Percy with his wife, Penelope, and their son; Fred with his new wife, the former Angelina Johnson; and George with his fiancée, whose name Harry could not immediately recall but whom he knew from school, although she had been in the same year as the twins. Ron, of course, would be there with Hermione, whom he planned to marry six months after Harry and Ginny had "tied the knot," as it were.

As it turned out, even with magic, they barely managed to pull it off, with all the hundreds of myriad details. At best, Molly was sure that they'd missed something along the way. Of course, even if everything didn't turn out perfectly, what mattered was that the young couple would finally be married. For a long time, no one was sure that it would ever happen, what with Harry's stubborn insistence on breaking up with Ginny, even ostensibly to protect her from Voldemort and company. Not to mention her rape trauma at Draco and Dudley's hands and the ensuing trials for both.

Fortunately, all that was behind them now, and everyone closest to the couple were certain that once they were married, they would remain so for the rest of their natural lives ... and considering how long wizards and witches usually lived, that would be at least a century, if not more. But when one loved as they did, even that would seem but a short space of time.

Molly was also convinced that Ginny would likely be every bit as prolific as she was, the proverbial brood-mare, but that seemed to be par for the course...at least in the Weasley family, the members of whom tended to procreate like rabbits. Thankfully Harry had plenty of money left to him by his parents, and they wouldn't have to skimp and save as she and Arthur always had.

Of course, they didn't intend to simply live off his inheritance; he definitely planned on being an Auror part-time and a DADA teacher the rest of the time when not occupied with his Auror duties; he would simply have to obtain a teaching degree in order to do so, although that shouldn't take too long. Ginny would be a Healer at St. Mungo's, specialising in patients with Spell Damage; those three things would bring in a fair amount of money, so financially they were pretty well set. (Not to mention emotionally, but that was to be expected, given their deeply tender yet equally passionate love for each other.)

Almost before they knew it, the wedding day had arrived. Even at the last minute, there seemed to be a million and one details to take care of; Molly was glad to have her myriad daughters-in-law there to help out...or at least Rosabelle, Angelina and Hermione, daughter-in-law-to-be. With Hermione's brains and organisational ability, the reception had been planned in roughly half the time it would ordinarily take, and it would also be held in the living room of the Burrow once the wedding decorations had

been squared away.

Harry, Ron and his five brothers were all helping each other dress for the wedding, all the married ones assuring their younger companions that it would turn out just fine and not to worry about a thing. Not that either fully believed them, of course, but pretended that they did because there was no time to argue the point...the wedding was in less than an hour.

The women and children were in Arthur and Molly's bedroom, the children being readied first, and Arthur was delegated to keep an eye on them while the women got ready and prepared both themselves and the nervous, but at the same time ecstatically happy, bride-to-be. All too soon, a knock came on the door to Fred and George's old room; Bill answered the door to find Molly standing there in her mother-of-the-bride wedding finery.

"You look great, Mum," Bill opined when he saw her.

"Thank you, son," she smiled even as she turned attractively pink. "How are you lot coming along? Ready yet?"

"Pretty much. Harry's just putting on the finishing touches. Of course, he's been doing that for at least the last hour. I swear, I never saw anyone primp so much, not even Fleur!"

Unfortunately that was just about the time that Harry came up to them. "I heard that, Bill," he returned in an ominously quiet tone. "You're lucky I haven't got time to get you for it right now since I'm getting married in less than half an hour. Besides, I don't care to have to explain to my future wife just why I hexed her older brother into the middle of next week on our wedding day. Besides, I seem to recall just how long *you* primped when you were getting married to Fleur!"

"Primp? I never primp," Bill doggedly claimed.

"Oh, yes, you did...and at least as long as I supposedly have, if not longer. Don't try to deny it. Everyone in this room was there and can corroborate my story."

Bill held up his hands in a gesture of surrender. "All right, all right, I concede. Mainly because we don't have time to argue. Take a look at the clock."

All eyes turned to the nearby clock on the wall and decided to Apparate downstairs to save time; upon arrival they took their designated places. Molly noted that Hermione and Rosabelle were now looking after the children, surmising that Arthur had gone to join Ginny and prepare to walk her down the aisle. Not long after they arrived, the wizard who had been chosen to marry her and Harry Apparated in and took his place behind the flower-decorated altar.

Not long afterward, one look from Molly in Fred's direction prompted him to start the Wedding March; it was then that the doors to the living room opened and Arthur walked in, Ginny on his arm, a vision in white lace, her long red-gold hair loosely curled and white roses entwined through it in lieu of a veil. She also carried a bouquet of white roses and pink baby's-breath held together with white ribbons.

Neither Harry nor anyone but Hermione knew this, either, and wouldn't until the reception, but Ginny had conjured up a lacy garter and even now it was on her right leg just above the knee. She frankly could hardly wait to see the look on Harry's face when she finally told him, especially when she told him that she had done it for his benefit so that he would be able to get in a brief caress in public, if only on her leg, while removing the garter in preparation for her throwing it to all the as-of-yet unmarried ladies in the room.

A short time later, she reached the altar where Harry and Ron waited for her; Hermione had followed Ginny down the aisle and presently stood behind her, a vision in blue lace and her hair also entwined with roses...this time blue silk ones, her chestnut hair done in an upsweep with tendrils hanging down both the sides of her face and the back of her neck, although her bouquet was also white roses.

The bride and groom then linked arms and hands, turning to face the wizard from the Division of Marriage and Children. The wizarding ceremony was similar in many ways to the Muggle ceremony, but there were at least two significant differences, although Harry could not recall just what they were at the moment. Even at that, he was sure the wizard from the Division did...but he wasn't particular in that regard. What mattered to him was that he and Ginny were finally going to be married.

"Did you wish to have the two wizarding marriage procedures done or not?"

"With all due respect, sir, we would prefer to simply be married," Harry returned quietly. "That is, if you don't mind. It wouldn't make the marriage any less legal, after all. We can have it done later on should we decide to renew our vows at some point."

"Of course not, young man. Of course not. I quite understand. So let's get on with the ceremony, shall we?"

And they did.

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If Harry thought he'd been nervous before the ceremony, it was nothing to how he felt either during or after it. The worst part, at least for him, was when he'd had to put the ring on Ginny's finger. He missed it at least twice, smiling at her apologetically before finally managing to slide the ring on...his mother's wedding ring. She, on the other hand, had no trouble whatsoever in placing his father's wedding ring on his finger.

For him, the best part was when they had been pronounced husband and wife and he was given leave to kiss his new bride. And one may be assured, Harry did so, long and tenderly...but at the same time, with barely suppressed passion. He could hardly wait to be alone with her, and was sure she felt the same when it came to him. But he had been unable to help blushing when she had whispered about the garter on her right leg, which would give him a chance for a brief caress while removing it.

*It's not the same*, he told her mentally even as she lifted her dress above her right knee and allowed him to slide the garter down her leg, lifting her foot briefly so he could slip it all the way off. *It helps, but it's not the same.*

*I know, luv, but we'll be alone soon enough. Hang in there,* she whispered back with a provocative smile, lightly stroking the back of his hand that removed the garter.

*Please, Gin, don't do that. I can scarcely control myself as it is* he mentally shot back at her.

*Sorry, luv. Couldn't resist*, she returned apologetically. *Let's get out of the way now; they've got to set up for the reception.* They moved to a secluded corner of the room. *I know a perfect way to pass the time*, she suggested. *How about a nice snog while we're waiting?*

*What in Merlin's name are you trying to do, luv, kill me? I already told you how hard it is for me to control myself* he scolded her affectionately. *If I started snogging you now, I don't think I'd be able to stop.*

All the same, they began to do just that...and it was fortunate that everyone else was too occupied with preparing for the reception to realise that things between the newlyweds were fast getting out of hand. What they finally ended up doing was ducking into the nearby hall, which fortunately was situated so no one could look into it without turning a corner and thus alerting the lovers to anyone that might be coming. That is, if they were in any condition to notice!

*Sod it! I can't stand it any longer. Gin, lower your knickers while I lower my trousers and boxers. Your dress can cover us.*

After they had done so, Ginny wrapped her legs around her husband's hips while he situated himself between her legs and began to move his hardness sensuously, even deliciously, within her, his lips and tongue fairly devouring hers even as his hands pressed her tightly to him. They did their best to keep quiet but at several points were sure that they had been heard, although fortunately no one came to check. Good thing, too, because neither were far away from a mind-boggling climax resulting from their



impromptu yet very passionate shagging.

It wasn't much longer before Harry felt the telltale signs of imminent climax and began to increase the rapidity of his movements within his wife's body *Oh, gods ... Ginny ... I can't wait much longer ...*

*Nor can I, my love,* she mentally returned just before she herself began to feel the telltale signs of imminent climax. *Oh gods, Harry ...*

It seemed to hit them virtually simultaneously, washing over them like a virtual tidal wave of feeling; the only way they managed to keep from crying out audibly was by engaging in another passionate lip-lock. Ginny could scarcely breathe, in fact, but considering the almost indescribable ecstasy Harry had just given her, she hardly missed it...and was just as sure that he hadn't missed it, either.

Once she managed to unlock her knees from around him, he had to hold her up until she got her strength back so she could stand up again *My gods, that was great,* he shot provocatively at her. *With any luck, that should at least take the edge off until we can get through the reception.*

Even now, Ginny felt the strength coming back in her legs and managed to stand up by herself, shielding Harry as he replaced his trousers. Of course, they were still flushed with passion, so they would have to go to the loo to freshen up. Even at that, they probably wouldn't be able to hide their suspiciously bright eyes, but hopefully they could get away with it by saying they had been snogging.

Of course, it remained to be seen whether or not anyone would believe them, but that was a chance they had to take. What mattered was that no one could prove they had been doing otherwise. Once he was ready, they headed for the nearby loo and freshened up with a wet washcloth and drink of cool water. It wasn't until they'd stepped out into the living room again that they were spotted.

"Well! Where have you two been? It's time for the reception," Hermione informed them. "Or need I ask?" She gave the couple a knowing smile and look.

"We just decided to snog while we were waiting," Harry claimed with a straight face, although Ginny was extremely hard-pressed to keep hers straight.

"Umm-hmm," Hermione returned skeptically but didn't challenge them, at least not here. Time enough for that later. After all, even if they'd been doing what she suspected, they were married now, so it was perfectly legal. Of course, they'd been shagging long *before* that, but that was beside the point. What mattered was that they had acted responsibly by using the Contraceptive Charm. No need to use it now, of course, unless they chose to.

"Well, let's get going. The others are waiting." The couple exchanged Christmas-morning smiles behind their friend's back as they followed her back to where the others were waiting. They received knowing looks and smiles from still others in the group, but that was all...it was time to get to partying. Time enough for grilling later.

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The young couple had discussed possible honeymoon spots with the elder Weasleys and married brothers, finally deciding on the one where Arthur and Molly had gone on their own honeymoon. Harry was especially pleased to learn that it was Unplottable, which meant undetectable by Muggles and therefore his and Ginny's privacy was unlikely to be invaded by unwelcome visitors, especially during the times they planned on "increasing their carnal knowledge" of each other, as Fred had said with a sly wink in Ginny's direction, which provoked a blush from her and a dirty look from Harry, even though he knew his brother-in-law meant well and was only teasing.

Since Ginny's attack, he was fiercely protective of her, not allowing even her own family to upset her in any way if he could stop them. Harry indeed planned to shag her until neither of them could walk, but the last thing he'd needed was for anyone to voice it. Especially in mixed company, so he fully intended to get revenge at the first opportunity.

After changing into going-away clothes and making their goodbyes, the young marrieds climbed onto Harry's broom, Ginny's arms around his waist and her head resting on his back, especially once they had become airborne. Arthur had given Harry directions and coordinates, so he found it fairly easily after about an hour's flight. They landed in front of a picturesque little cottage surrounded by green grass and flowers; if Harry hadn't known better, he'd have sworn it was a Muggle dwelling. However, when he approached, all he needed to do was think, "Door, open," while carrying Ginny, and the door obediently opened to admit them.

Once he had carried her over the threshold and they were inside the sunny, fragrant room, they noticed the queen-size bed, which featured their favourite colours of sheets and pillowcases, not to mention the bedspread. Not that any of it would particularly matter once they got going hot and heavy, but for the moment, it was very much appreciated, and Harry intended to thank Arthur and Molly for the suggestion at the first opportunity. He would have been pleased to learn that the door had automatically locked behind them after they had walked through, even though he had not thought the nonverbal command for it to do so.

"It's beautiful," Ginny smiled. "Just the same, it's strange that Mum and Dad never mentioned this place before."

"I guess none of us were old enough to appreciate the information or put it to good use before now," Harry opined. *But I assure you that now that we do know about it, we will definitely put it to good use,* he finished in his mind with a provocative smile in his wife's direction. "What do you want to do first?" he asked. When she didn't give an answer right away, he reached for her hand and pulled her in the direction of the bathroom. "I have an idea. Let's check out the bathroom."

She simply followed him wordlessly, and upon arrival, Harry smiled lasciviously. There was a deep tub just big enough for two, with various types of soaps and other things for lovemaking purposes surrounding it on three sides. "I wonder if we can request our favourite music as well," Ginny remarked, deciding to test her theory by naming five of her favourite instrumental pieces: *Bolero* by Ravel, *Magic Works*, from the fourth-year Yule Ball, *Le Cygne (The Swan)* by Camille Saint-Saens, and *Waltz of the Flowers* from the *Nutcracker Suite*.

Harry looked surprised upon hearing the music begin, then smiled as he met his wife's eyes. "Seems like this place has many of the same properties of the Room of Requirement." He then decided to try out one of his own theories. "Two glasses of Dom Perignon, please." The glasses appeared on the side of the tub along with a tub of ice and a bottle of the aforementioned champagne in it.

The longer they stayed in the bathroom, the more ideas Harry got, until he finally said, "Tub, fill up with hot, soapy water at body temperature with a fresh outdoor smell." A short time later, the tub was ready. "Shall we, my lady?" he asked gallantly, accompanying his request with a sly wink and another provocative smile.

"I would be honoured, sir." She smiled. It didn't take long for them to shed their clothes and climb into the tub; for a time they played with the soap bubbles like children, then shared a nuptial drink of champagne shortly before Harry leaned over to claim his wife's lips. She discovered that he still had some champagne in his mouth, tasting it on both his lips and warm, wet and incredibly delicious tongue, which met hers even as his hands found her breasts and began to gently fondle them.

He smiled against her lips as she moaned with pleasure at his ministrations, then reluctantly moved his lips to trail them down her throat on their way down her body to do with his lips what his hands had recently done. Of course, Ginny wasn't just sitting there allowing him to have all the fun; her hands were busy too. She lightly stroked the back of his neck with one, and even as he claimed one breast, then the other, with his lips, he was unable to help moaning softly.

The other searched beneath the water's surface for what she knew would be there, his deliciously hard arousal, which she intended to fondle until he decided to stop playing around with her breasts and get inside her as she wanted. He gasped in astonished pleasure when her hand found him, her supple fingers inflaming him almost beyond control.

"Gin, if you keep doing that, I'll never last." His voice was a husky moan.

"You will if you get where I want you to be...and *right now*," she directed. "And I don't think I have to spell out where that is." Her arms and legs opened invitingly, and her smile told him all that needed to be said.

"Your wish is my command, sweet lady." He was reluctant to move away from her breasts, but told himself to come back to them at the earliest opportunity even as he situated himself as she wished, feeling her arms and legs wrap around him even as he began to move deliciously inside her, burying his face in her fragrant throat, feeling as well as hearing her soft moans at his movements.

"Harry ... dear gods, Harry ..." she softly moaned as she felt his hands move intimately over her.

"Gin, you're so delicious," he crooned passionately. "I could stay inside you forever."

"That's just where I want you to be, luv," she crooned just before he found her lips again in a deep, hungry kiss. "I feel so complete when you're inside me ... and so empty when you're not."

Then to her surprise, she began to hear some sexy soft rock songs begin, starting with "Love Won't Let Me Wait" by Major Harris; "With You I'm Born Again" by Billy Preston and Syreeta, followed by "Kiss You All Over" by the group Exile, "I'm in the Mood to Be Desired" by John Denver, and finally "Burning Love" by another famous Muggle singer named Elvis Presley, revered throughout that world as what they termed the "King of Rock and Roll."

If this song was any indication, both Harry and Ginny could well understand why he'd earned the title and intended to listen to more of his music at the first opportunity after their honeymoon was over. (Not to mention the other music!) For the time being, however, all that mattered was the nearness of the other, the love and passion they felt right now ... the love and passion they would *always* feel for each other.

Shortly after the last song ended, Ginny felt the movements of Harry's hips increase and knew it wouldn't be much longer before he reached the pinnacle of pleasure ... and when he did, she would be only one step behind. It wasn't long after that she felt him tense against her, then cry out softly and slump against her, utterly spent...at least for the moment. Barely a heartbeat later, Ginny felt herself climb the pinnacle, then softly cry out as she reached it, beginning the delicious fall before following suit.

But considering their youth, it didn't take long for either to recover and begin thinking along the lines of trying some of the items lining the tub tiles surrounding them. Harry had even begun to reach for one when Ginny said, "No, luv, let's go to bed now."

He helped her out of the tub and took the iced bottle of champagne, placing it on the bedside table. She marveled that the ice had not melted; it must have been specially charmed or something. The glasses too, since she discovered that the liquid inside them was also still cold, although it had been nearly an hour since the couple had taken a drink. Again, they would have had to have been specially charmed to remain cold that long.

For some strange reason, they had to dry each other off; there wasn't anything to do that for them ... but at the same time, it hardly mattered. The vigorous rubbing and such stimulated their desire once again, and it wasn't long before Harry placed her on her back on the bed and spread her legs, taking a swallow of champagne before proceeding to stimulate her there with lips and tongue.

She hadn't thought it possible to be able to climax again so soon, especially so intensely, but his lips and tongue were so incredibly talented that she couldn't help but do so, unable to help writhing and moaning at his ministrations. She'd wanted to wrap her legs around his neck, but thought better of it because if she had, she would likely have choked him and she had better plans for him.

Once she recovered, she took a swallow of champagne, held it in her mouth and gently pushed him onto his back on the bed, then got between his legs and took him in her mouth. Again, it didn't take long for her equally talented lips and tongue to pleasure him almost beyond endurance, noting how he writhed and moaned beneath her every bit as much as she had beneath him. "Sod it, Gin, bring me off already ... I can't stand it much longer ..." Only then did she do as he wished...and it was worth every moment he had waited for it.

Of course, this was only the beginning of a long, passionate night for the young couple, and by morning they had indeed shagged each other to such an extent that they could scarcely walk, but it had been worth every moment...and at no time had they remembered to use any sort of contraception. It was Harry who brought it up, strangely enough.

"I assume you realise that we never used any kind of contraception."

"Well, we *did* have other things on our minds at the time," she returned with a sly smile. "And if I remember correctly, you did say that you wanted to start having a family as soon as possible."

"In a few months. Not on our honeymoon. I wanted to have you to myself for at least a little while before having to worry about a child."

"Well, even if I am pregnant, I won't show for several months, and from what I understand, a woman's libido tends to increase during pregnancy, particularly the second trimester, so you'll probably get your share of shagging anyway," she pointed out.

"You have a point," he had to admit upon considering that fact for a moment.

"Damn bloody right I do. So I wouldn't worry too much if I were you. Let's just enjoy each other while we have a chance to be alone with no one to bother us."

"In that case ..." His lips found their way down her neck, then her throat and finally to her breasts once again, holding one in one hand while gently suckling the other, then switching. After a time she heard his husky voice croon, "Gods, your nipples are delicious, luv. I don't think I'll ever get enough of them."

This time Ginny had no objections whatsoever to Harry's lavishing his attention on her breasts. She had heard that most men favoured either a woman's breasts or her backside, but Harry seemed to enjoy both ... and that suited her just fine...as long as it was only her he was physically loving like this, for now and all time.

Of course, there were yet other things they intended to try in the way of sexual techniques, but there was plenty of time; they had the rest of their lives, after all. Just the same, over the week-long honeymoon, it got so Ginny could hardly wait for bedtime because she was never sure just what new technique she or Harry would want to try. One night it might be something one of the married Weasley brothers had told him, another night it might be her trying something either her mother or one of her sisters-in-law had told her about, things like that.

There was even one technique her mother had told her about which was unlikely to be needed until she was heavily pregnant, which as she had told Harry, wouldn't be for several months ... provided she turned out to actually be pregnant, the possibility of which she intended to check on at the first opportunity.

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And as it turned out, she was. What's more, it had taken until almost the last day of the honeymoon for either of them to be able to walk with anything resembling normalcy. It hardly seemed possible that either of them could possibly have been so randy, but in the case of honeymooners, particularly those who felt as they themselves did, it was entirely natural and normal, even though Ginny could just picture the look on Ron's face if she happened to mention to Hermione in his hearing just how much she and Harry had shagged each other during their honeymoon. (Not in Harry's hearing if she could help it, of course...and there was little danger either of them would mention it to him.)

Ron loved Harry like a brother, but at the same time was still most uncomfortable with the idea of picturing his best friend and sister snogging, much less shagging. He probably always would be. Even at that, it didn't mean he wasn't happy that they were together, finally married at last...and intended to do everything he could to see to it that they remained so.

What mattered was that two of the people he loved best were happy. Besides, he couldn't judge them when he and Hermione were doing the same things, so it was a good thing that their wedding was coming up next, because at the rate they were going, *she* was likely to be pregnant before too long ... particularly if they didn't have the presence of mind to use the Contraceptive Charm as responsible lovers were supposed to do.

Harry was especially pleased when Ginny told him of her pregnancy despite his initial concern, and she couldn't help but ask why. "As I once said, luv, I want something to throw in Draco and Dudley's faces, and once they hear that you're pregnant, the looks on their faces should be priceless. I only wish I could see them ... not to mention the looks on the Dursleys' faces."

"You no longer have a vendetta against them, do you?"

"Oh, I hate what they did to us, sure, but they're being punished for it, so that's what matters. For the time being, I intend to simply enjoy the idea of our being married and you being pregnant ... and that last bit is one story I won't mind people knowing. And once our child is born, you may be certain that I'll be the happiest, proudest father on the face of this earth!"

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***Daily Prophet, November 23, 1999:***

**"The Slayer of the Dark Lord Has Become A Giver of Life ... Harry Potter Becomes a Father"**

Draco Malfoy usually looked forward to the news, but not today; in fact, the above headline made him swear vilely and throw down the paper, then stomp on it until it was in pieces. He was certain that Harry had to be behind literally plastering the news media of both the wizarding and Muggle worlds with the news of his having become a father, knowing it would reach both the ears and eyes of the two he had put in prison for life and enjoying every moment of how it must be making them feel.

He would never forget the picture of a smiling Harry holding his beautiful, newborn, black-haired, green-eyed child, a daughter, his equally beautiful redheaded wife smiling beside him. Potter had best enjoy her while he could, for if there was any justice, she would grow up to eventually become a Death Eater and hate him as he deserved...maybe even kill him as his Aunt Bellatrix had killed her cousin Sirius Black, Harry's godfather.

Whatever happened, Draco hoped he would eventually read the headline,*Harry Potter Dies ... Famous Auror and Hogwarts Teacher Killed by His Eldest Daughter, A Death Eater. Wife, Friends and Family in Mourning*, or something along those lines. Only then, after Harry's own flesh and blood had killed him, would Draco feel vindicated and able to sleep peacefully again after how the bloody bastard had set him up.

***Little Whinging Courier, November 23, 1999:***

**"Harry Potter, Famous Relation of Local Family, Has Become A Father"**

Dudley Dursley reacted in much the same way as Draco when he read the above headline and saw the picture in the local paper his mother had sent him in prison. Hopefully she hadn't known that the story on Harry's becoming a father was in it. In fact, he was sure she wouldn't knowingly send something like that to him, knowing how it would upset him, seeing his smiling cousin holding his beautiful newborn daughter, a daughter with a mop of black hair and bright green eyes like her father, his equally beautiful redheaded wife smiling beside him.

His only consolation was that he and Draco had been able to have her before his cousin did. Too bad Ginny couldn't have gotten pregnant as a result of her rape by him and given birth to *his* child instead of Harry's. Certainly he had not used any sort of contraception, either ... but it must not have been the right time, dammit all! He would have to live with the fact that he would never again be able to have a woman, not for the rest of his life, because of what Harry had done, a fact he was sure his worthless cousin knew well and was enjoying every moment of throwing in his and Draco's faces. He could only hope that at least one of his cousin's children would one day turn bad and destroy Harry as Harry had destroyed him.

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As for Harry, he was enjoying his new life with Ginny and their newborn daughter far too much to concern himself overmuch with how it might be affecting the ones he had put in prison. However they felt and reacted upon seeing the headline and/or picture was no more than they deserved after what they had done to both Ginny and himself. He was truly thankful that Ginny had not become pregnant by either of her attackers; Harry doubted that either he or she would have been able to endure that, much less the Weasley family.

Fortunately that had not come to pass, and neither Draco nor Dudley would ever be able to either sexually attack or abuse another woman again ... and what's more, he himself had been the one to bring it about! Best of all, both were far away from both him and his family...and if Harry had his way, that's the way it would stay. His vendetta against them had ended the days their prison sentences had begun, although he was sure theirs against him would go on for as long as they lived ... but what mattered was that they would do that living behind bars and leave him and his family alone to finally live in well-earned peace, for now and all the years to come.