

Those Beautiful Green Eyes

by Aureenna

Harry Potter, Seeker extraordinaire for the Chudley Canons, is retiring at the age of twenty-seven, looking to go back into the world of fighting Dark Wizards. As he is readying to enter into a new career as an Auror, he meets Ginny Weasley in the Leaky Cauldron. What happens when they get back together? overall fluff, right? Maybe not!

The Leaky Cauldron

Chapter 1 of 6

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As Ginny rinsed the bland, scented soap from her skin, she looked around her and thought that perhaps her hands had been cleaner before. The bathroom in the Leaky Cauldron was dirtier than she remembered it being. Of course, the pub had suffered like the rest of the Wizarding world in the last days of the War and was struggling to recover itself from the depths of destitution. It had been the same all over the Wizarding world when people had been so afraid of Voldemort that they suspected every dark corner and every quiet neighbour of a connection with the Dark Lord. Wiping her hands on her thighs, she looked herself in the mirror and gazed into her own brown eyes.

She had never felt so alone, she realised. For the past month, even breathing had been a trial. She half wished that she could have forgotten it completely, just stopped. *But breathing is automatic*, she thought with a sigh. She could no less stop breathing than she could stop herself from hating him. Rolling her eyes and breaking contact with the image in the mirror, Ginny brushed at an invisible piece of lint and reached out for the heavy door.

The air was thick with pipe smoke, although the only smokers were the two old wizards playing chess quietly in the corner. Stifling the urge to waft her hand in front of her face to clear the air, Ginny ordered a long drink and sat at a small table, watching as the bar filled up. Onto her third drink and feeling all the more maudlin for them, she barely looked up from her book when a cheer rang through the patrons. She had always liked trashy romances, but she had never been able to put her finger on what was so addictive about them. Yes, they all had the same boy-meets-girl; girl-hates-boy; girl-loves-boy plotline, but they all touched a nerve within her. She supposed that it had started after her second year at Hogwarts. She had realised then that she was a romantic soul; who else could have fallen for a web of lies spun by a bewitched diary? Even when she had come to her senses and realised that she was being used, she had not been able to resist the pull of romance. Even then, she had looked to Muggle novels to satisfy the need within her for what could be described as nothing other than "fluff." Mills and Boon weren't her thing, although she had tried them. Ginny much preferred to read something that was all about feelings, not sex. Regardless of how much her dorm mates and friends had teased.

When the raucous laughter coming from the direction of the bar became too loud for her to concentrate, she slapped her book closed in frustration, slipped it back into her bag and reached for her purse. It was sad that she was reduced to this, Ginny thought as she counted out her Sickles into one hand, hoping to have enough for another drink. When she found that she didn't, she shoved them back into the little bag in disgust. It wasn't about the money, not for Ginny. She had always been fairly poor, but this just wasn't where she'd thought she'd have been by now. She slid her Muggle jacket over her shoulders and picked up her bag, deciding to visit the bathroom one more time before starting the journey home.

"Ginny?" called an excited voice behind her.

Her stomach muscles clenched involuntarily, and she closed her eyes. She hadn't wanted to hear that voice ever again. She turned her head and looked at him, straight

into his deep grey eyes. Those eyes had once seemed so warm to her, she remembered. Despite what everyone else had said to her, she had seen all of the love that they could hold, and she had known that when they focused upon her, she felt warm, too. That was *before*.

"Leave me alone," she said quietly, firmly, turning her back without waiting for a reaction, walking confidently towards the door that led to Muggle London.

The air outside was biting cold compared to the warmth created by the press of bodies inside the Leaky Cauldron, and Ginny slipped her arms into her jacket, wishing she had her nice, thick cloak with her. *That was one of the problems in house-sharing with Muggles* she supposed. If she went about wearing great flapping cloaks and receiving owls at her window at regular intervals, uncomfortable questions would inevitably be raised.

A swift wind raged round the corner towards her, and she pulled her jacket tighter, wrapping her arms around herself for warmth as she cast her eyes over the graffiti-covered bus timetable display. By her calculations, she had a little over five minutes before the bus was due to turn up; more than enough time to walk to the next bus stop. Standing still would mean braving the cold, but walking ahead on the route would mean braving the Leaky Cauldron again. Reasoning that he would hardly be standing sentry outside the door, she took a deep breath of cold air and started walking briskly. Her nerves failed her though, and she stopped and peeked around the corner which hid the entrance to the pub even as she berated herself for being so un-Gryffindor-like. *All clear. So much for courage* she thought as she slipped around the corner and past the door, irritating herself further with the sigh of relief that escaped her lips as she turned off the pub's street.

"Ginny?" asked a voice, less sure of itself than before.

"I told you to leave me alone!" she hissed, whirling round to face him with fury blazing in her eyes.

He took a step back and held up his hands in symbolic surrender. "Hey," he started.

"Oh, Harry!" Ginny exclaimed as her lips broke into a grin. She stepped forward and wrapped her arms around him, so thrilled to see him again that all she was momentarily oblivious to everything but the feeling of his arms wrapping around her in return. The tall, red bus that rumbled past in the background was forgotten.

"Oh, Harry!"

He watched with confusion as her face changed from what seemed like pure hatred to absolute relief. Wrapping his arms around her with a gentle laugh, he pulled back slightly to look her in the face.

"Are you okay, Gin?"

"I..." she started. "I think I've just missed my bus."

Harry looked beyond her to the huge, red London bus rumbling around the corner and smirked.

"You have to get the bus to your flat?" he laughed, teasing playfully. "Does your dad wet himself with excitement every time he visits?"

"That's why I go to the Burrow," she explained with a grin as she stepped out of his arms. "But yes, a bus. And now the next one's not due for another forty minutes."

"Why don't you come into the Cauldron with me?" Harry suggested, trying to be helpful. "I'll buy you a drink. I was in there with some friends, uh, celebrating, and someone mentioned they'd seen you rushing out."

"I don't want to go back in there," Ginny said quietly as her grin faded.

"Shall I walk you home, then?" he offered. "If we have forty minutes before your next bus, I'd rather spend them walking than standing. We can catch up as we go?"

"There's no need for that, Harry," she said quietly. "I can take myself home; it's not too far."

"I made you miss the bus, Gin, and if it's not far, then that's all the better for me."

"Okay," she said, after a few moments of silent thought. "That would be nice."

They walked together quietly for some minutes, Ginny too concerned with the thought of pulling Harry away from his friends and Harry too concerned with the memory of the angry, hurt look on her face when she'd thought that he was someone else.

"So," he ventured. "What's new?"

You git, thought Harry, convinced he sounded like he was back in Hogwarts.

"Nothing for me." She smiled. "But what are you celebrating?"

"I'm, uh, retiring," Harry explained with a shy grin.

"At twenty-seven?" she laughed, scandalised. "No one retires at twenty-seven!"

"Well, I've never been in it for the money, Gin," he explained. "And Quidditch is getting unbelievably rough. I've had so many broken bones, so many rogue bludgers I just want to reach twenty-eight."

Ginny nodded thoughtfully as he continued.

"The truth is: my heart just isn't in it any more. I miss... ah, I miss fighting the good fight, Gin!" he exclaimed, enthusiasm wrapping itself around his voice. "I thought Quidditch would satisfy me, but it can't; it never really could after I left Hogwarts. Until the end of the war, Quidditch was a hobby; it was something I did to take myself up and away from Voldemort, to let myself breathe, and after his death it seemed like the natural thing to do. I had agents coming at me like flies to a dead rat; they all wanted a piece of me. But... it never had my heart, you know?"

"I know, Harry." Ginny nodded again and bit her lip to stop herself from speaking further, knowing that there was more to come out before he was done.

"I want to be an Auror," he said, looking at her with a smile. "I always did. I just... never got around to it."

"I suppose you have the money to allow yourself to do anything," she said, feeling his fervour begin to radiate through her.

They had come to a large crossroads, and Harry paused, waiting for Ginny to lead the way. He moved onto the roadside and held out his arm for her to hold.

"We're still friends, aren't we?" he asked her after conversation had subsided for a few minutes.

"We've always been friends, Harry," Ginny said softly. "And I'm happy for you if that's what you're after. I've always wanted the best for you; nothing's changed."

"That isn't where I was heading," he laughed before pausing for another long moment. "I was going to ask who or what had you so upset that you rounded on me like that at the Cauldron."

"Everyone has a past, Harry."

"And me more than anyone, Ginny. But... I'm here for you if you want me to be."

Ginny smiled and stopped walking. "We're here." Harry jolted to a stop too and reached out to hug her again.

She turned away from him to slide her key into the lock.

"Oh," he murmured, looking at a very plain looking door sandwiched between two small high street stores. "How many floors up?"

"Top level," she said with a sigh. "Woe is me. But at least the constant climbing gives me great thighs."

His face broke into a grin, and before he could stop himself, Harry's eyes slid down the length of her body, lingering on her denim-clad thighs.

"You look good," he said when she caught his eye again. Ginny stepped into the doorway and held the door tight against herself.

"Thanks. Thank you for walking me home; you're a brilliant distraction. If you're not going to be touring anymore, stay in touch. Owl me. We'll get together."

"I will, Gin," he said, smiling. "Good night."

"Good night, Harry," she said, clicking the door closed behind her.

A/N: With many, many thanks to my betas! You're heroes!

Thank you for reading. The next chapter involves Harry and Ginny's first date, even if it is unofficial! Keep reading. And review!

It's My Day Off!

Chapter 2 of 6

A first date and a nasty surprise!

London is a beautiful city, Ginny mused, as she wandered slowly and peacefully through Kensington Gardens. She loved immersing herself in the Muggle world here, and forgetting all about Wizarding factions, old friends long gone, and her almost empty Gringott's vault. She ambled her way to the Broadwalk Café and bought a Muggle newspaper, deciding to sit down on the edge of the Princess Diana Memorial to read it. She rested the open paper on her crossed legs and plunged herself into problems and joys that weren't her own.

The balance of light changed suddenly. Ginny swivelled herself southwards to try and soak up any sunshine that might decide to show its face, only to be disturbed by a quietly amused laugh. She raised her eyes from the newspaper and ran them over some long, oddly gangly legs clad in black cords, hands shoved unceremoniously in pockets, a dark brown suede jacket slung over one arm, and a blue and white striped t-shirt that clung to muscles that looked out of place. Then there was the familiar broad and cheeky grin, laughing green eyes, and untameable hair. It wasn't a cloud moving over the winter sun that made Ginny shiver.

"Harry," she breathed. "You're in my light."

"Muggle newspapers aren't very good, you know," Harry said as he sat down on the lip of the fountain with her. "I remember a few times when I've had to try and use them to get decent news. It didn't work very well. Muggles are completely blind to what they see.... Thankfully."

"I know." Ginny folded up the newspaper and rested it on her lap. "That's why I like them."

Harry raised an eyebrow in question, but leaned back on his hands when Ginny brushed away the query with a shake of her head.

"I guess that means that you haven't heard about my last match?" Harry asked with a proud fire in his eyes.

"No," she lied, pretending that she hadn't sat and looked at the Daily Prophet's two page spread for almost an hour, watching him catch the snitch and then burst into celebration time and time again.

"I caught the Snitch in fourteen seconds," Harry boasted. "It's a new record. And we won the league! We haven't done that since 1892!"

"Yeah, the Chudley Canons always were a bit crap before you started playing, Harry."

"What a way to go out! What a match to retire on!"

Ginny smiled happily at him, enjoying the thrilled energy that radiated from him.

"Let's go and get some lunch," he said, jumping up from his low seat.

"I'm not hungry," Ginny protested as he lifted her by the hand to stand beside him.

"Liar," he said. "And it's my treat."

Harry linked arms with her and half-dragged her through the beautiful tree-lined avenue towards Palace Gate, past Kensington Palace and the Round Pond. They walked in relative silence, her protestations coming less and less often as they settled into a comfortable companionship, pointing out plants, views or birds of particular beauty as they walked.

"How are you enjoying your new training programme?" Ginny asked, wanting to get Harry talking about himself rather than asking questions.

He laughed. "Ah! So you *have* read the Daily Prophet!"

"Maybe." She grinned. "How long has it been now?"

"Three weeks. Honestly, I'm so busy that I end up just staying on campus. There are a couple of dorms there, but hardly anyone uses them, so I pretty much have them to myself. The training is just so tiring that I can't be bothered to go home when all I want is a bath and bed. This is the first time I've been back to London since I started." He sighed. "I was just enjoying a walk through the park before I headed home, but I'd rather go off for lunch, to be honest. There's nothing at home other than Hedwig!"

Ginny laughed and pointed towards a small bistro on a street corner. "How about there?"

"Looks good," Harry said, surreptitiously moving back onto the roadside as they crossed the street. Ginny smiled as he opened the door for her, and found herself wondering when he had become so chivalrous.

The bistro was small and inviting. Ginny noticed the warm atmosphere almost as soon as she was through the door. She unfastened her coat and took off her scarf, hanging both on the back of her chair before sitting down and looking around. The walls were a warm red colour, and the lighting was low, coming from one black iron chandelier and a few similar fixtures mounted onto the walls. It felt like dusk, despite the fact that it was just after midday.

"What do you fancy?" Harry asked.

Ginny laughed, raising an eyebrow.

"To eat," he clarified, laughing with her.

"Something plain, I think," she said, leaning forward to read the menu more closely. "I've been a bit poorly lately. Oh, I'm better now," she said in response to his questioning look. "I just don't want to push my luck."

"You were never the poorly type, were you?" he asked. "I don't remember you ever being sick when we were at Hogwarts."

"No, not really." She sighed. "But I guess everyone gets a bit ill now and then."

"Are you sure you're okay?" Harry asked, and when she nodded he called over the waiter to take their order.

"And I'll have lemonade, please," Ginny said, finishing their order. "It's too early for beer for me."

Harry laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "It's my day off."

Harry swiped the last of his bread around his empty plate and then sat back chewing, watching Ginny finish her lasagne. It wasn't often he was around women that were comfortable enough to enjoy their food in front of him, and Ginny's relaxed and familiar presence was more than welcome.

The past few weeks had been relentless, and yet, he knew that he had only seen the tip of the iceberg. Three weeks into three years of training, and Harry was already sure that his brain was filled to capacity. He had learned many different charms and potions to conceal himself, whether that would be making himself invisible without the use of a cloak, or letting himself blend into a crowd, unnoticeable to someone looking for him.

Then there were the theories of how to hunt, track and chase targets. Transfiguring a tracking dot to look like a stray thread or a spot of dirt was so easy after three weeks of almost daily practice that he laughed to think of how insurmountable it had seemed when he first entered the Auror Training Institute.

Not all of his training was about sitting in a classroom trying to learn new magical techniques. Every night Harry lowered himself into a hot bath, his aching muscles worn out from a gruelling physical work out. By the time he crawled into his Spartan cot, he was tired beyond dreams, and woke up the next morning with a start, convinced he had only just closed his eyes.

Harry found himself wondering how things could get more difficult, all the while knowing that anything he'd suffered until now would seem like nothing come the end. The journey wasn't over yet.

That he had passed the aptitude tests and managed to get into the training course did not mean that the job was in the bag, so to speak. If anything, Harry thought he would have to work harder and longer than his colleagues on the course. They were all fresh out of Hogwarts, still used to the regimen of learning if not the ruthless physical routine. He was Harry Potter. Everyone expected so much of him, because of his famous name and deeds now ten years old.

For the past decade, Harry had spent his time training hard and improving his Wronski Feints and Sloth Grip Rolls, not learning new charms and incantations. It was almost as though he had forgotten how to learn. He was beginning to get back into the swing of things though, now, and learning new wand techniques was becoming easier.

It was odd, Harry thought, that he found the assault courses and partner sparring a lot easier than the new spells. He was in exactly the opposite position to his classmates, all ten years younger. In fact, Harry realised, he felt positively old.

"What're you looking at?" Ginny asked, smiling cheekily as she slipped another forkful of lasagne into her mouth.

Realising that he had been staring, Harry flashed a quick smile of apology and looked around. A group photograph of the bistro staff caught his eye. They stood together in their uniforms, laughing and joking. It was just a Muggle photograph, of course, but Harry could easily see what was going on at the moment the flash went off. In fact, he thought, it reminded him of the numerous group photographs that Colin Creevey had taken of him and his friends over the years.

Poor Colin's DA training had not been enough to save him when the Death Eater Alecko Carrow had fired a killing curse into his back during Harry's final year at Hogwarts. Harry closed his eyes as a green light flashed through his imagination. Grimly, he fought against the memories.

"Are you okay?" Ginny asked, concern in her voice.

"Yeah," he said, opening his eyes. "I sometimes get flashbacks of memories I don't want to remember."

Ginny raised her eyebrows and opened her mouth to speak. She seemed ready to ask what he meant, only to think better of it and close her lips.

"Fish impression?" Harry asked playfully, pleased when she laughed. "Nice."

He lifted his pint glass and tipped the remainder of the oddly sweet and fizzy liquid down his throat before tilting it towards the waiter behind the small bar, asking for another.

"I was thinking about Hogwarts," Harry said wistfully as he set the empty glass back down on the table and leaned back in his chair. "And about all of the people we've lost."

Ginny's smile faded. Colin Creevey wasn't the only student who had been lost to Voldemort's final push. Dean Thomas, a boy that Harry hoped she had dated mostly to aggravate her older brother, had been taken too. They had been together for a few months when she was fifteen, and she had cared for him. To think that he was gone was still painful.

"It's funny," Harry mused. "The way that they always look happier in photographs than they ever did when they were alive."

"I don't know about that," Ginny murmured softly.

"It's true! Haven't you ever noticed?"

"I've never seen a picture of Dean," Ginny said quietly. "I don't have any photographs of him at all. I didn't think to spend my years at school snapping away at people, just in case they weren't going to be there forever. Rather stupid, really, considering the fact that we all knew what Voldemort was and what he wanted to do. And Dean a 'half blood' too. I should have thought. I was too naive."

"We all were, Ginny," Harry said comfortingly, slipping his hand across the table to hers and squeezing gently.

"Can't change the past, I suppose." She smiled a little. Her eyes were clouded with melancholy.

"Do you remember little Colin Creevey?" Harry asked, inwardly berating himself for calling him 'little'. But he would never be anything else, would he? Colin would have been twenty-six by now, he thought sadly. Ginny nodded. "His brother Dennis sent me a box of photographs that Colin had taken while we were at Hogwarts. I know there are some of Dean in there. There are plenty of all of us. Never could get the little bugger to put down his camera."

Ginny laughed gently and pushed her empty plate towards the middle of the table. She smiled in thanks to the waiter who placed a fresh glass of cool lemonade in front of her.

"When we're done, if you have no plans, you could come back to the house with me, and we could sort through them. You could have any you wanted. There really are hundreds," Harry said, wanting to spend more time with her. He couldn't remember the last time he had felt so comfortable in another person's company.

"That'd be nice. Thanks, Harry."

He grinned and picked up his new pint, revelling in the way the liquid gold coursed its way down his throat, coating every piece of him from the inside of his lips down to his stomach in tiny, fizzy bubbles. A few good gulps and the glass was only half as heavy when he put it back down on the table. He remembered the days when he struggled to get one pint down him in an hour.

"Day off," he clarified with a wink when he saw Ginny's face. Not sure whether that look was supposed to convey her amusement or shock, he suppressed a belch and asked for the bill. Ginny picked up her drink and set to it, matching and then passing him, until her glass was empty.

She laughed. "Let's go."

"Bloody hell," Ginny exclaimed with a gentle laugh. "This place hasn't changed much!"

The brief journey from Caledonian Road station to Grimmauld Place had barely changed at all. The same type of people always lived in the same houses, and although the names and faces might change, the atmosphere would always be the same. The gardens were all neat and tidy, although small, and the streets were crammed with cars.

The houses and gardens gradually got smaller as they got closer to Harry's house, and as they turned the corner into Grimmauld Place, it was almost as though they had entered a completely new district. The houses were small terraces, and somewhat run down. The gardens had disappeared at the turn of the corner. The road was narrower here, with room for only one row of cars down the side. The cars were parked at an angle rather than parallel to the curb; the Muggle Council Authority's attempt to solve the cramped conditions.

"Is it still protected by the Fidelius?" Ginny asked as number twelve seemed to grow out of the thin air.

"Yes," he said. "When Dumbledore died, his secret died with him. You wouldn't be able to see it if he hadn't included you in the original Charm, and I wouldn't be able to tell you."

"Oh, I see. That must make it pretty difficult to bring girls home!" she teased.

"I don't bring anyone here. It's my sanctuary. You're the first in... years. Even if I could let other people see it, I don't know how I would explain away Mrs. Black."

They stepped up the pathway towards the door. "Oh, fair enough."

"Bugger!" Harry groaned, searching his pockets frantically.

"What is it?"

"I can't find my keys!"

Ginny took a few steps backwards to stay out of his way as he patted himself down energetically, and let her eyes take in the house. Looking rather dilapidated, the house was much taller than it was wide, with four stories and then an attic. The roof was missing a few slates. Ginny wondered if that was how Hedwig got in the house where Harry wasn't there. The brickwork was dirty, and her eyes focused on a big, dark smudge by the first floor window. She was wondering what had left it when something else caught her attention.

"Harry?"

"Yeah?" he said, distracted with fumbling through his pockets.

"You've got a window open there," she said.

"What? That's for Hedwig."

"Window. Open. There." She pointed.

"Oh, right!" He passed her his jacket and piled his wallet, wand and other keys into her hands. "Hold these for me, would you?"

"Sure. Oh, be careful, Harry!" she called, watching him climb up the very decrepit looking drainpipe with surprising ease. The muscles in his arms and back were clearly outlined through his t-shirt. Ginny decided that they didn't look so out of place after all. The drainpipe gave a little wobble when Harry was a few metres from the ground, about half of the way to his destination. He bunched his leg muscles up and leapt for the small windowsill, grinning down at Ginny when her oaths of panic floated up to him.

"That was nothing!" he yelled. "You should see what they've been making me do at training!"

"In that case, Harry Potter, I don't *want* to see! Be bloody careful!"

Harry hauled himself up until he could rest his knee on the sill, and then reached his arm inside the window to pull it out wide. "There we go!" he said triumphantly. He thrust his head through the space he'd made and stood up, half inside the house.

"Hedwig?" he called, looking down into the hallway. "Hedwig?"

"Harry?" he heard Ginny shout.

"Hedwig! Bloody hell, Hedwig!" Harry pulled his legs into the window and jumped down into the house, picking up the beautiful owl that had collapsed onto the floor. Her amber eyes were open, and her feathers smooth as though she was untroubled. Her wings were spread in flight and her body braced for landing.

"Poor Hedwig," he said, lifting her in his arms and heading down the stairs to open the door for Ginny.

"What was wrong?" she said, a note of panic in her voice.

Harry stepped out from behind the door and nodded to the lifeless bird in his arms.

"Oh, Harry..."

"She was only sixteen years old," Harry said dully, grief and pain filling his voice. "She was supposed to live longer than this. Thirty-five, the books said."

Ginny wrapped her arms around him. Distantly, he knew she was trying to comfort him. He remembered how sad the Weasley family had been when Errol had finally passed. She would know how he felt, and Hedwig had been his only companion during the long summer breaks at school.

Harry wrapped his spare arm around her in return, pulling her close. His voice had quavered and his heart clearly ached, but Ginny knew that he had been through too much pain in the past to let himself cry now.

To those that didn't know him well, Harry seemed to be immune to pain. In truth, he was just good at hiding his reactions. He pressed his lips against the top of Ginny's head and kissed her hair. Merlin's Beard, she smelled good. He pulled away slightly, feeling that any romantic mood that could possibly develop at that moment would be spoiled as soon as Ginny remembered that he held a dead owl in his arms too.

She smiled up at him, and settled her head on his shoulder as she stroked her hand gently over Hedwig's feathers. "Harry," she said.

"Hmm?"

"Harry... she's not dead."

A/N: Thank you for reading! I hope you're enjoying, and if you are, please let me know through reviews.

The next chapter contains a visit to Hogwarts, secrets revealed and catch-ups with old friends.

Hogsmeade and Hermione.

Chapter 3 of 6

This chapter contains a catch up with old friends and a few answers.

Ginny watched Harry tear his eyes away from her to look at the motionless owl he held in his arms. "What?"

"Hedwig's not dead," she said. "Feel her. She's still warm, she's breathing... Just look at her!"

Harry held the owl closer. Ginny saw the relief on his face and smiled. Hedwig's eyes were open although glassy, and she was frozen in a landing position, but she was certainly still breathing. He laid his hand gently onto her breast as if to make sure that his eyes were not playing tricks. He sucked in an excited breath when Hedwig's chest moved.

"Ginny!" he said, his voice cracking. Harry appeared unable to say anything further. Instead, he wrapped an arm around her shoulders and crushed her to him, resting his jaw against the top of her head.

She hugged him back, tightly, but was aware of the preposterous position he was in, a woman wrapped in one arm and an owl resting on another. She patted his shoulder gently and pulled away from him, moving away from the door after making sure she had closed it when she came in.

"What's wrong with her?" he asked, almost tripping over an umbrella stand made from a troll leg as he led Ginny down the stairs to the kitchen in the basement. He sat on a very rickety, old chair and cradled Hedwig in his arms. "What do we do?"

"I have no idea," Ginny said quietly, lighting a small fire in the hearth with a murmured charm and a flick of her wand. "I'm sure that I probably paid less attention in Care of Magical Creatures than you did."

Harry absently stroked her feathers for a few moments. "Hagrid would know what to do."

"We can't just Floo into Hogwarts, not unexpected. Besides, Hagrid isn't on the Network, is he?"

"No, but the Three Broomsticks is." Harry shifted Hedwig slightly in his arms. "I'll Floo from the Central Station. You don't have to come with me. I know it's a long way and not quite what we had planned, but I have to go. It's not as though she's dead. Someone did this to her."

"I know," she said, worried too. "I'm coming with you, Harry."

"There's no need."

"I could do with seeing Hermione anyway," she said kindly.

Harry nodded and stood up, opening the fridge with one hand and pulling out two bottles of mulled mead. He opened them one after the other on the magnetic bottle opener that was stuck to the door of the fridge and passed a bottle to Ginny.

She took it automatically but didn't drink. "Don't you want to... well... go?"

He took a deep mouthful of mead and nodded. "Hedwig's not going anywhere, though, and classes will still be going on at the moment." He looked at the clock placed above the oven. "We probably have about twenty minutes before we ought to go to Hogsmeade."

"That makes sense," she said. "I guess you don't want a bunch of kids gawping at you either."

Harry pointed his bottle towards her in imitation of a charades 'on the nose' answer. "Actually," he said. "Could you pop upstairs for me? If you go into my bedroom, there are some really thick cloaks in the closet. We'll probably need them for the walk to the castle."

"No problem." Ginny placed her bottle down on the table untouched. "It's on the second floor, isn't it?"

"Oh, no. I moved into the main bedroom. Phineas' portrait gave me the willies too much. I'm on the first floor now, where you and Hermione used to stay."

She climbed the stairs warily, trying to be as quiet as possible so as not to disturb the portrait of Walburga Black that was covered with a thick and grimy curtain. As she climbed the next set of stairs, Ginny realised that the only things that looked familiar about the house were the pieces of furniture.

The wallpaper and carpets all looked different, although she suspected that they had just been given a good cleaning. The whole house seemed so much lighter than it ever had in the past. There were no cobwebs hanging about the ceiling anymore, nor were there swathes of dust covering every surface. She thought that the house was in good shape, at least on the inside.

Heaving slightly against the weight of the door, Ginny let herself into Harry's bedroom and took a quick look around. She found the wardrobe door and slid it open, and she stepped inside what was almost a separate dressing room to search out the cloaks. There were two very thick cloaks, one dark grey and one black, and she had trouble pulling them off the hangars. They were very heavy, but she knew that she would appreciate their weight when she was out in the cold air.

She kicked the wardrobe door closed behind her and lifted the cloaks into her arms. A dull thud sounded behind her and she saw a muted twinkle from the corner of her eye. Turning her head, Ginny noticed that she had knocked a framed photograph from Harry's dressing table.

She dropped the cloaks down onto the bed and bent to pick the frame up. She turned it over and saw her brother, Harry, and Hermione all rubbing their noses and looking crossly at her. Harry and Hermione gave up quickly and began to laugh and wave, but Ron continued to scowl at her. Hermione dug her elbow into Ron's side and rolled her eyes at him.

She stuck out her tongue and placed the photograph back on the table, still laughing gently about it as she descended the stairs, cloaks in arm.

"What's so funny?" Harry asked when she returned to the kitchen.

"Oh, nothing," she said, putting the black cloak down onto the table while pulling the grey one around her shoulders. "Just my brother."

Harry shot her a confused glance but let it pass. Raising himself slowly from his chair, he held Hedwig out to her. "Here," he said. "Can you take her for a moment?"

Ginny reached out to take the bird, trying not to fumble too much but finding it very difficult to handle a rigid owl with her wings spread in flight. It was almost as though she had been stuffed.

"This is a faff," she said, and stepped back, taking the black cloak in her hands. She stood behind him and slid it over his back, gently reaching around his shoulders to fasten the stiff clasp. She smoothed the cloak over his shoulders and let her eyes and hands roam down his arms, feeling the solid muscle beneath. *Not so out of place at all*, she mused silently.

Harry led the way upstairs. After he unfastened all of the locks on the front door, he plucked Hedwig out of her arms, cradling the owl much more easily than Ginny had.

They walked side by side to the Floo Station, where a few people looked at them askance, but did not comment. They queued together silently and didn't speak again until Harry had handed over a few small coins to the attendant.

"Who's going first?" Harry asked when it was their turn to Floo.

"I will, I guess," Ginny said. She stepped towards the hearth and took a handful of glittering Floo Powder. Flinging it into the fire, she stepped into the green flames and turned to face Harry again. "The Three Broomsticks!" she called, smiling at him, and disappeared in a whirl.

Nine years had passed since Ginny had last sat at a table in the Three Broomsticks, and absolutely nothing had changed. Madam Rosmerta still stood behind the bar, and the décor was the same. It was so familiar in here that Ginny could almost imagine life as though the last decade hadn't passed.

What treats those weekends in Hogsmeade had seemed when they were students! A little bit of freedom. Yet now, Ginny would gladly trade her lot of freedom for the security and innocence of a life back in Hogwarts. People weren't lying when they said that school days are the best of life.

Harry stepped out of the fireplace in a flash of green light, and strode over to where Ginny stood. "Let's go," he said, nodding politely to the woman behind the bar. Ginny laughed at the sight of him, bewildered, unable to understand how he could cradle Hedwig, pull his hood over his head and open the door for her simultaneously.

"What's so funny?"

"You are." She laughed. "You're such a... man!"

"Last time I checked," he joked, a good dose of humour in his voice.

"I wonder which one of the twins is here at the moment," she thought aloud as she looked at their shop.

Fred and George were born entrepreneurs, it seemed. Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes had expanded beyond Diagon Alley within a few short years. While this was fabulous luck for the twins and for the whole Weasley family, it was unfortunate for the competition who struggled to create products so wonderfully inventive and original. Zonko's Joke Shop had re-opened for a few brief years after the War with Voldemort, but never managed to regain its hold upon the novelty market. Fred and George had been leasing the premises for four years now, and one of them could usually be found in the Hogsmeade branch during weekends.

"Isn't Angelina due to go into labour soon?" Harry asked.

"Oh, yeah. Of course. Fred will probably be with her, so it'll be George."

"Shall we visit on our way home?"

Ginny nodded and pulled her hood tighter around her. The cold wind seemed to be flying at them from all directions at once, pushing her this way and that. Icy needles rushed at every piece of exposed skin, and Ginny struggled to keep her hood on as she held her head down against the attacks. The sky had darkened considerably in the few minutes since they had left the Three Broomsticks, and a large winter's moon battled to peek out from behind raging clouds.

Looming out of the darkness, the Hogwarts exterior gate was tall and imposing. Two winged boars topped two very high plinths. Ginny was almost sure she saw their wings moving. Anything was possible in this wind. The sky brightened momentarily as they walked through the gate, the moon sliding out briefly between clouds.

"This way," Harry said, moving off the path to the left.

"We're going into the Forest?" Ginny shouted, trying to be heard over the wind.

"Hagrid's!" he called back to her.

Of course, she thought. She had never gone straight to Hagrid's house from the gates before. In her school days she had always made the journey from the castle. The Hogwarts grounds were disorientating in the dark, and too far past in her memory to feel familiar. Sticking close to Harry, she heard a loud and vicious barking before she saw the lights through the mist.

Harry jumped up the steps and knocked heavily on the door.

"Jus' comin'!" boomed Rubeus Hagrid's voice. The door swung open and a blast of heat pushed its way out. "Harry!" he shouted, a huge grin spreading across his face. "Come in, come in, quick now! An' Ginny too. Hello, my dear!"

Hagrid slammed the door shut behind them. Fang sniffed at Harry's bundle.

"Wha's that?" Hagrid asked. Harry pushed his cloak off his arms and showed Hedwig to him. "Hedwig? Blimey, what's wrong with yeh?" he asked, taking the owl from Harry so remarkably gently for a man with such strength.

"We went back to my house and found her like that on the floor," Harry explained.

"Well, she's bin petrified," Hagrid stated simply. "Thought yeh would have recognised that, Harry, an' you, Ginny."

Ginny and Harry met eyes across Hagrid's huge table and she realised that he was right. In Ginny's first year at Hogwarts and Harry's second, several students and one particularly unpleasant cat were petrified by seeing reflections of a basilisk that had been living within the Chamber of Secrets, a room hidden in the castle that only the heir of Slytherin could access. Hermione Granger, one of their closest friends, had been petrified herself, and they had both visited her in the hospital wing. They should have recognised it straight away.

"Can you... fix her, Hagrid?" she asked.

"Oh yes!" He beamed. "Well, not me specifically, no. Between Pomona an' me we should be able ter work somethin' out."

"Will it take long?" she asked.

"We'll have ter wait fer the mandrakes to mature o'course." He gave Harry a look of deep sympathy. "I'm afraid yeh'll be without Hedwig fer quite a while, Harry."

"Whatever it takes to fix her. Like Ginny said."

"Good! Now how's about some tea?"

"Make sure yeh visit Hermione before yeh go," called Hagrid as Ginny and Harry made their way from his cabin. His voice was easily carried over the howling wind. "She'd be heartbroken if she found yeh'd bin here an' didn't say hello!"

"We will, Hagrid, thanks! Bye!" Harry bellowed over the brewing storm. He grasped Ginny's outstretched hand and entwined his fingers with hers as they made their way together towards the castle. The wind whipped their cloaks ferociously around them. Despite the cold, Ginny felt warmth pulsing through her. Knowing that the castle lay to the east, they battled their way through the gusts until a huge pair of oak doors emerged through the misty distance.

The doors opened surprisingly easily. She looked at Harry. He seemed overcome with a sense of nostalgia as they entered the entrance hall. She felt it too. There was no one there, but Ginny was reminded of her very first day at Hogwarts.

The castle had seemed so imposing and unbelievably grand. The entrance hall was still lit with torches fixed to the walls, and the House hourglasses were still displayed prominently against one wall. She felt a huge swathe of pride run through her when she noticed that Gryffindor's hourglass easily contained the most stones.

As she took off her cloak and swung it over her arm, however, she noticed that two stones tinkled up to the top half of the hourglass again. Harry had noticed too and they laughed knowingly. Some mischievous Gryffindor had just lost ten House points.

"She's in McGonagall's old office," Ginny said, heading up the stairs ahead of Harry.

"I'll follow you up in a moment." He gave her hand a squeeze before breaking contact and sticking his head in the broom cupboard to see what students were riding these days.

Ginny climbed the pristine marble stairway and turned left. Remembering the days when Filch stalked the corridors, she found herself creeping along as quietly as she could. *It was such a shame about Filch* she thought as she walked, waving occasionally at paintings that recognised her. For such a miserable old git to have committed an act of heroism was completely unexpected. Yet perhaps that was why people had focused so strongly upon it.

"Valiant Hogwarts Caretaker saves Students!" had screamed the headlines. Ginny's inner-cynic had realised that the people who had written these articles of glowing praise were the same people that had suffered him throughout their school careers, but he *had* done something wonderful.

As a Squib, when the Death Eater Alecto Carrow had cornered a group of students in Snape's Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom, Filch should not have been able to do anything to stop her. He certainly shouldn't have been able to use any magic against her. When Dean Thomas had been shot in the back with the Avada Kedavra curse, Filch had picked up Dean's wand and had screamed "*Stupefy!*" in her direction. Miraculously, it had worked. He ushered all of the students out of the classroom ahead of himself. Argus Filch had taken a killing curse to the back himself as he brought up the rear of the escapees when Carrow came out of her stunned state.

Yes, Ginny thought. It was a shame about Filch. She rapped lightly on Professor Granger's door and opened it when an exasperated sigh and a "Come in!" came in response.

"Ginny!" Hermione said, a smile transforming her troubled features. "What are you doing...?"

A distressed sniffing caught their attention and Hermione excused herself for a moment, walking the young boy to her office door. "Stay in the dormitories after curfew, and we'll have no more problems with each other, Daniel," she said to the youth with unruly black hair and wonky glasses. He looked remarkably familiar. She pushed the thought aside after the boy had nodded and left the room, giving Hermione all of her attention. The two women hugged, stood by the door, and the Transfiguration Professor continued where she had paused earlier.

"What are you doing here in weather like this? Goodness, you must have come from Hogsmeade too! There are ~~all~~ sorts in that Forbidden Forest. You ought to be more careful!"

"Oh, I didn't come by myself," she said. "I had a big manly-man to look after me."

"Really?" asked Hermione, sounding intrigued. "And where is said manly-man? Last news I heard, you were with..."

"Taking points from your own House, Hermione? How McGonagall of you," came a voice from the doorway, bantering playfully.

Harry had seen the boy heading towards Gryffindor Tower, fighting tears all of the way, and had remembered leaving this office feeling much the same many times during his own school years.

"He pulled a Harry Potter on me," Hermione explained as she moved to hug him in welcome and then closed the door behind them. "Wandering about the castle after curfew last night."

"Well, what do you expect?" asked Harry, laughing. "The Marauder's Map is probably still out there somewhere."

"Oh, no, it's not," she said confidently, tapping her filing cabinet as she passed it on her way to sit behind her desk. "How do you think I caught him? Our caretaker is rubbish! I have to do it all myself."

"Devious," he teased.

"At least it's not in the hands of a miscreant like you," she said with an affectionate smile, offering cups of tea all around.

"So what's brought you two out here tonight? It's awful weather for it."

Harry agreed. The view out of her window was bleak and unwelcoming. The Quidditch pitch had completely vanished into the darkness, and no stars could shine through the clouds that raged across the sky. He smiled when Hermione shivered and slipped her shoes off under the desk, folding her feet underneath her on her comfortable leather chair and wrapping her hands around a hot cup of tea.

"Hedwig was attacked," Harry said simply.

"*What?*"

"She was petrified."

"Goodness! When did this happen? *Where* did this happen? Is she ok?"

"We don't know when it happened," Ginny said with a sigh. "Harry hasn't been home for weeks. We went to Grimmauld Place together this afternoon to look through photographs, and Harry found her lying in the hallway looking as though she'd been hit with a spell as soon as she came in the window."

"And she's fine," Harry explained. "Or she will be. Hagrid and Professor Sprout will sort her out."

"Yes, Pomona does have a batch of mandrakes on the go." Hermione nodded thoughtfully. "Who would attack Hedwig?"

Silence pervaded the small group for a few moments.

Harry was still lost in his own thoughts when Hermione sighed.

"I think the more prudent question is who would want to attack *you*, Harry?"

"Me?"

"You don't really think that someone would go to the effort of setting up a trap for Hedwig, do you?"

"A trap?" Harry said incredulously. "I haven't had someone try to attack me off the Quidditch pitch for a bloody decade! *Why* would they start now?"

"If we knew that, we'd know who was behind it."

A/N: Thank you for reading, and I hope you're enjoying my little tale so far!

The next chapter contains a first kiss and the start of something special.

Please review!

A First Kiss.

Chapter 4 of 6

Here follows Harry and Ginny's First Kiss. I hope it pleases! A secret is revealed in this chapter; I hope you're not all too disgusted with Ginny's taste in men to keep reading.

Ginny stared in confusion. "I don't understand," she said quietly.

"What's that?" Hermione asked.

"What petrified Hedwig?"

Harry linked his fingers together as he stretched his arms above his head. "What do you mean?"

"Well," Ginny explained, "what is it that petrified her? When was she petrified? How did she get into the house after she'd been petrified?"

"Oh, I see," Hermione murmured.

"I don't," said Harry. "She got in through the window, obviously. As for when, does that matter?"

"When it may have happened matters a great deal," Hermione said firmly.

"Why?"

"The house must still be protected by the Fidelius Charm. That means that if she was attacked outside of the house, someone has been watching you and has noticed that you vanish somewhere along Grimmauld Place." Hermione leaned forward. She spoke carefully, in the manner of one giving bad news. "If she was attacked inside of the house, Harry, then that means that someone we know attacked her."

"Attacked me," Harry corrected.

"Yes. You're in trouble here, Harry. Someone is after you, and we need to figure out whom and why."

"She was attacked inside the house," Ginny said positively.

"How do you know that?"

"The window, Hermione. Harry had to climb into it earlier today because he forgot his keys. That's when he found her lying on the hallway floor. To get into that window she would have had to fly up and in, not just glide in. Wouldn't that mean that she had to have been attacked when she was already inside the window?"

"Well, momentum would have carried her if she was very close and already on the right trajectory when she was struck with a spell. But, yes," Hermione agreed. "I see what you mean. It is likely she was attacked inside the house."

"Someone I know broke into my house and cursed my owl?" Harry asked, incredulous. He pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes, as though relishing the pressure. Maybe it allowed him to focus his concentration.

"Don't do that," Ginny said gently, reaching for his hands and pulling them away from his face. "It can't be good. You'll crack your contact lenses or something."

"They're soft lenses," he said with a smile. "They'll be fine."

"But, still." She smiled, giving his hand a squeeze as she wrapped it within her own and held it in her lap. "Don't do that."

"Uh... yes," Hermione interrupted, seeming delighted at how close Harry and Ginny were. "Where were we? Ah, yes. Somebody must have broken in, Harry. The window was open?"

"Yeah," he said, nodding in agreement.

"That was very clever of you. Leave a window open and be surprised when somebody breaks in. Well, that's how they got in, then."

"Who would do this?" Ginny asked, unable to tear her eyes away from their entwined hands. "And how did they do it?"

"It looked like she was cursed as soon as she flew in the window," Harry said. "But why would somebody wait for me in the first floor hallway?"

"Perhaps Hedwig interrupted an intruder who just shot a curse at her?" Hermione suggested, shrugging her shoulders.

"Perhaps," Harry agreed.

"Give me a moment." Hermione excused herself from the room, clicking the door closed behind her.

Ginny looked up and caught Harry's eye. She grinned at him before bursting into laughter.

"Straight to the library," he said, laughing with her. She lifted his hand to her lips and pressed a gentle kiss against his knuckles before he let go and went to stand by the window.

"The wind isn't raging so much now," he said, gazing out over the school grounds.

"Come back here, Harry."

"Hmm?" he asked, glancing briefly over his shoulder. "And the clouds are disappearing. I'm starting to see some stars at last."

"I said, come here, Harry."

Harry turned his back to the window and smiled at her, looking somewhat nervous. He sat next to her on the couch.

Ginny angled herself so that she was leaning towards him and took his hand in hers. "Why are you afraid of me?"

"I'm not afraid of you, Gin."

"I know that we haven't spent any real time together over the past few years. You've had your life going on, and I've had mine too. Today has been an exceptional day, and I can't help it. I feel really close to you."

"Me too," he admitted.

She took a deep breath. "And it seems, though, every time I get a little closer to you, you pull yourself a bit further away. I don't understand why."

"Today *has* been an exceptional day," he agreed. "I'm worried that this isn't really what we want. Maybe we're both just acting under all of the tension and pressure of today."

"Maybe we are. Does it matter?"

"It matters." Harry's smile was gentle. "It matters because I don't want you like this. If I have you at all, I want it to be properly, in a relationship. Not a quick roll around due to lust and tension and a long bloody day!"

"A roll around?" Ginny said, bemused. She reached for his hands and looked into his eyes earnestly. "Harry, I've wanted you for years! Our lives just moved in different directions."

"Yeah, well," he said defensively.

"You're the one who dumped me, remember," Ginny reminded him. "Life could have been so very different for us if you hadn't."

"Life could be so very over for you, you mean. Do you think Voldemort would have left you alone if he'd have learned I had a girlfriend?" Harry shook his head. "Don't be ridiculous! He would have gone straight for you, and he would have killed you. Merlin, he tried going after the bloody Dursleys, and I never gave a hoot about *them*."

"I know," she soothed. "I understood why we broke up at the time. I understand now. I was just saying that we grew apart. You must have expected it. Wasn't that the whole point?"

"It was." Harry sighed.

"I understand," Ginny said, squeezing his hand gently. "You're scared, I know you are. Not of me, perhaps, but you're scared. Things are changing... for us both. You've just started a new career and there's all of this Hedwig business to worry about.

"For me, I've just got a promotion at work, I'm recently single, and you've come back into my life. And I'm pleased about that. I know that I'm coming on strong here, Harry, but this is important to me. I don't want to say goodbye to you again."

"Recently single?" he asked.

"I should have known you would latch on to that," she said with a sigh. "Now isn't the time to talk about it, but yes, I'm recently single."

"I heard the rest of it too, Ginny. I don't want to say goodbye to you either."

Releasing his hand, Ginny leaned forward and pressed her lips gently against his. Harry closed his eyes and lifted his hands to either side of her face. His thumbs gently stroked along her jaw as he kissed her back, softly pushing his lips against her own.

"One step at a time, then?" she asked him as he freed her from his grip.

"Two at a time is quicker," he laughed, kissing her again.

"Oh! Excuse us!" laughed Hermione, a grin plastered to her face. Stepping out of the doorway to allow her companion entry to her office, Hermione closed the door behind him. Long black robes billowed around the legs of a tall blonde man as he strode into the room and stood by the fireplace.

"Harry," he said with a genial nod. "Ginny."

"May I re-introduce you to Hogwarts' new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher," Hermione offered, her arm extended towards the blonde man.

"It's good to see you again, Ernie," Harry said, standing up to shake his hand. "I should have known you could never get enough of this place. First Prefect, then Head Boy and now you're Professor Macmillan!"

"Would be Head of House too," Ernie said jovially. "If Sprout would retire."

"I guess Dumbledore's Army really paid off for you!" Harry laughed as he sat down again. "Defence Against the Dark Arts? Good job it's not cursed anymore!"

"Well, nothing's happened to me for the past three years anyway," Ernie said politely. "I'm sorry I don't have a lot of time. I have some students in detention, and I shouldn't leave them alone for long. Goodness knows what they'll be getting up to. What was it you needed me for?"

When Hermione had explained the situation surrounding Hedwig's attack, without mentioning the fact that Harry's house was protected by a Fidelius Charm, Ernie put his hands on his hips and rocked back and forth on his toes as he thought.

"It could have been anyone," he said. "Anyone could have broken in and cursed your owl."

"Would there have been a way to do it without being there?" Hermione asked. "I'm sure that I've read something about Delayed Curses or Contact Curses or something like that. I just can't remember where I read it. It's really frustrating."

"Contact Curses?" Ernie said, raising his eyebrows. "Yes. They exist, but I don't think they're used as often as they could be."

"How do they work?" Ginny asked him.

"A curse can be left in a specific place or on a specific object without harming those that go past it, until somebody touches it. It would have been quite possible for your house to have been cursed at any time over the past three weeks, if you haven't been there, in the hope that you would be the first to enter it yourself and would be petrified. Your owl beat you to the punch, if that's the case."

"So when Hedwig flew into the window, the curse activated and she was petrified?"

"That would make sense if a Contact Curse was used in this case. I don't think that it's likely, Harry," Ernie explained. "They're rather rare and more difficult to cast than they look. Like I said, anyone could have entered your house and cursed her in person. They needn't have been at a distance."

"I see," Hermione murmured, standing to see him out. "Well, thank you, Ernie. You've cleared up a little mystery for us."

"Anytime," he said, making his way towards the door again. "Good to see you again, Harry. And you, Ginny."

Closing the door behind him, Hermione slipped off her shoes again and pulled her robes over her feet as she sat down.

"Is it cold in here?" she asked rhetorically, pointing her wand towards the fireplace. *Incendio*."

A small fire began to roar in the fireplace grate, flickering and lightening the room considerably.

"It looks to me," Hermione said, looking deep in thought, "as though someone has broken into Grimmauld Place and set a Contact Curse. This has to have been someone in the Order, doesn't it? Who else could get into the house?"

"What about someone like Narcissa Malfoy?" Ginny suggested. "As Sirius' cousin, wouldn't she be able to get into the house? She must have known where it was before the Fidelius Charm even existed?"

"That wouldn't happen," Hermione confidently declared. "The Fidelius Charm would work on her, too. It would be like having the house address on the tip of her tongue, knowing that she knows it, but not being able to remember."

"Are you sure?" Harry asked.

"Yes. If Narcissa Malfoy wanted to go into number twelve, Grimmauld Place, she wouldn't be able to find it. She could wander up and down the street for hours knowing that the place felt right but not knowing why it wasn't there. She would just confuse herself out of wanting to find it."

"So, you're right," Harry sighed. "It has to have been one of the Order. But who would do this to me?"

"I have no idea," Ginny admitted.

Hermione shook her head too. "Who have you offended lately?"

"No one," Harry said. He shrugged. "Unless someone has lost money on a bet on one of my Quidditch matches or something, I really don't have a clue."

"Well, not recently perhaps," Hermione paused then suggested, "someone in the past?"

"No one."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, yes," he said. "But I must have. Somebody from the Order of the Phoenix has it in for me, and I want to know who it is."

"Harry?" Ginny asked, a thought slowly elucidating.

"Yeah?"

"What about Fletcher?"

"Mundungus Fletcher?" Hermione looked thoughtful. "Yes, he got sent to Azkaban for stealing from the house, didn't he?"

"No," Harry said. "He was sent to Azkaban for impersonating an Inferius, although he did steal and sell on some of the Black heirlooms. I made a complaint against him though, and that might have been another strike against him. Maybe."

"Who else could it have been?" Ginny asked. "Fletcher had access to the house, and none of the other Order members would have anything close to a gripe with you, Harry."

"She's right," Hermione said. "Mundungus does have the most motive to go after you, Harry. Who knows what Azkaban has done to him? Maybe you were the only person he could think of to blame."

"But wasn't he released over two years ago?" Harry asked.

"Yes, I think so." Hermione nodded in agreement. "But he vanished, didn't he? I remember reading in the paper that he had gone into hiding. I'll have to check some facts and get back to you."

"Mundungus," Harry muttered. "I can't believe it."

"We could ask Percy if he's heard anything about him," Ginny said.

"That's a good idea," Hermione agreed. "Can you get hold of him easily?"

"No," Ginny admitted. "But I can leave him messages in a few places. He'll answer them when he can."

"How would Percy have heard anything more than we have?" Harry asked.

Ginny looked at Harry in surprise. She looked at Hermione, who shrugged, and then back to Harry.

"He's in training to be an Auror too, Harry," Hermione said. "Haven't you seen him on your campus?"

"No, I haven't."

"Third year students don't spend much time at the Auror Training Institute," Ginny explained to Hermione. "They tend to shadow qualified Aurors, to learn what it's like 'on the job.'"

"Oh."

"I had no idea he was in training," Harry said, surprised. "I always thought he was happy behind his desk."

"He'd been trying to get on the course for years before they took him on," Ginny laughed. "He was so relieved when he got his acceptance letter!"

"I can imagine," said Hermione.

"What was I saying? Yes, I can get messages to him."

"Brilliant," Harry said, standing up. "You do that, Ginny, and ask him about Fletcher. Hermione, if you could try and find out more about him yourself, we'll have to meet again and talk it through at some point."

"I'll send an owl and we can arrange it. Or I may just pop my head through the Floo," she said. "It's getting late. Do you two want to go home through here rather than through Hogsmeade?"

Harry looked at Ginny and raised an eyebrow.

"It is late," Ginny said. "George will be in the pub himself by now. We'll have missed him."

"We'd love to use your fire." Harry smiled. "Thanks Hermione. It's bloody cold out there."

"I'll keep an eye on Hedwig for you," she promised, offering the pot full of Floo Powder to each of them. "But I'm sure she'll be okay."

"Of course she will," he said confidently. "She's in Hagrid's care."

"You go through first, Harry," Ginny suggested. "I want a quick word with Hermione."

"Okay." He laughed. "But no talking about me."

"As if," she teased.

"I'll just go on to the house, okay? Take your time." Harry smiled warmly at her. "London Central Floo Station!" he said, disappearing in a whirl.

"Well, you must be dying to ask me," Ginny said, taking her place on the sofa again.

Hermione smiled and came to sit beside her. "I am." She nodded. "Are you and Harry...?"

"I don't know what Harry and I are." Ginny sighed. "I feel really connected to him. I haven't seen the bloke more than ten times in the last ten years, and two of those occasions have been within the last month. He's been flirting with me all day. It's been brilliant. Then we came here and he kind of pulled back a little bit. When you left the room earlier, the first thing he did was stand up and move away from me. It was like he'd suddenly realised that I was interested and that made him nervous."

"Harry's quite shy underneath the teasing and jokes, you know."

"I know that. I just didn't expect him to be reserved with *me*. I told him that I wanted to be with him, to pursue this, and he agreed with me. Then he kissed me and you

bloody walked in..."

"Yeah," Hermione said as she grinned. "Sorry about that."

Ginny laughed and shrugged, taking a sip of the tea she still held in her hand.

"And you and Draco?" Hermione asked.

"Over. Done. Gone. Dead. Finished. Past."

"What happened?" she asked gently. "I know that you... thought a lot of him."

"I couldn't be a part of his world, Hermione. He's a Malfoy, I'm a Weasley. Grey eyes, brown eyes. We weren't ever supposed to be together. I don't know what we were thinking."

"What did you see in him anyway?"

"Aside from a wicked sense of humour and sex appeal? He's not all bad, you know."

"I know, but he's so... *Malfoy*."

Ginny smiled secretly and took a deep breath. "He's a wonderful man if you take him for who *he* is. Compare him to someone like Harry or Ron even, and I suppose Draco would come out on the bottom. He has his own way of going about things that I don't agree with, and he lives in a completely different world. That was our problem. I couldn't forgive him for not being what I wanted him to be. I couldn't be happy with who he was. So it couldn't work. It really does just boil down to that."

"That makes sense," Hermione sympathised. "What was it that pushed you too far?"

"One too many dinner parties at Malfoy Manor that I wasn't invited to," she said with a wry smile. "I know, I know, it's pathetic. But what kind of excuse did I need? We'd only been together for three and a half months. Despite how *right* we felt sometimes, we also felt *sowrong*. When I told him that I'd had enough and wouldn't be seeing him anymore, his pride was wounded or something and his temper flared. I'm best out of it."

"So, you're looking to Harry now?"

"Well, we'll just have to see how that goes. It could be something or nothing."

"You and I both know it's not going to be nothing," Hermione laughed, standing up and straightening her robes. "You'd better get a move on, Ginny. I have to make some patrols of the corridors, and Harry will be sat in that cold kitchen of his, waiting for you."

"It's been brilliant to see you," Ginny said as she hugged her friend.

"You too, Ginny. Be sure to come more often!"

"I will," she promised, smiling as she threw a handful of Floo Powder into the flames. "London Central Floo Station!"

Hermione sighed and wrapped her arms around herself. "It took them long enough," she said under her breath.

"Dobby?" Harry asked, looking into empty space. The small house-elf materialised in front of him, covered in clothes. Two large woollen hats sat on the top of his bobble head, one a very bright sunny yellow and one maroon, worn at opposing angles so that they could both be seen. A child's blue t-shirt with a superman logo reached past his knees, beneath which one green and one pink sock showed.

"You liked your Christmas present, then?" Harry asked, knowing that he had not seen the house-elf wearing anything else since he had given him the parcel.

"I loves it, Harry Potter!" Dobby said proudly, stroking his hands down the shiny Superman transfer. "Super-Dobby!"

"Definitely Super-Dobby." Harry laughed.

"What can Super-Dobby be doing for you, Harry Potter, sir?"

"Could you make up the guest bedroom for me when you have a chance?"

"Yes, Harry Potter. Is the Weezy girl staying?"

"Well, I don't know," Harry said. "She may, she may not. I'm going to offer and see what she says."

A loud knock filtered down from the floor above. "I is getting it, Harry Potter!" Dobby nodded at Harry and vanished instantly.

"*Incendio*," he said, pointing his wand at the fireplace. A small fire glowed brilliantly, sweeping away the gloom that seemed to pervade the kitchen.

"Hey," he said as Ginny descended the stairs.

"Hi," she replied, smiling. "I didn't know that you had Dobby here."

Harry nodded as he stared at the flames in the grill, fascinated as the wisps of fire changed from burning yellows to reds. "Yeah. He's happy here. He keeps the place beautifully. Are you hungry?" he asked, reaching into one of the pockets on his cords. "There's a great take-away place not so far away. I'd have to go out for it since they can hardly deliver, but it's not far."

"I'm not hungry, actually."

"Oh, good," he said with a laugh, jingling coins from one hand to the other, counting them quickly. "I haven't got much Muggle money anyway."

"We're complete opposites, Harry," she said, grinning. "In the Muggle world, I'm loaded! I never really get to spend my wages on anything other than my rent, so it just builds up and up. It's wizarding money I'm short of."

"You have a Muggle job?" Harry asked.

"Yeah. I work in the British Library," she explained. "It's a huge Muggle library not too far from here. They have a copy of everything published in the whole of the UK and Ireland, plus millions of others...literally. There are over one hundred and fifty million items in the vaults. I work down in the vaults rather than with the public. I help to catalogue and process everything new we get. That way I can keep an eye out for any books that they shouldn't have."

"You mean wizarding books?"

"You'd be surprised how often it happens," she said, nodding. "Some old biddy comes in with a book she found in her late sister's loft, thinking that it might be a valuable Medieval text, and it's really a battered copy of *Advanced Potion Making* or something like that. I 'ooh' and 'ahh' a bit, say thank you, take it and send it to Hogwarts for the kids who can't afford to buy their own books."

"You could always sell them," he suggested, "if you're short a Galleon or two."

"Well, they don't come in that often," she laughed. "And it's good to send them to Hogwarts. Most people wouldn't have thought of it, but second-hand books can be a godsend when you don't have money."

"You're right, I suppose," he agreed. "Maybe you could have your Pounds exchanged for Galleons at Gringotts?"

"Well, I could, but I don't live in the wizarding world very much any more, Harry. I live with Muggles, I work with Muggles, I wear Muggle clothes and I take the Muggle bus rather than Apparate everywhere."

"Why?" he asked as he began to fiddle with his wand, surprised. "Life is so much easier as a wizard. I love magic!"

"I loved it too," she said quietly. "Until I saw how easily it could be corrupted."

"I see," he said. "You know... Voldemort was a 'special case', if you like. We'll not see the likes of him again in this life-time. He was a special kind of evil. You needn't be afraid of him anymore. I killed him myself, with this wand."

"Why don't you talk about what happened that day, Harry?"

Harry sat silently for a few moments, idly tracing a finger around the tip of his wand. He raised his eyes to Ginny's. "Do you really want to know?" he asked. She nodded. "I don't talk about it because it was horrible. Imagine being scared of lifts, spiders, heights and snakes. That day was like being trapped in a lift with a glass bottom so that you could see precisely how far you had to fall, with snakes slithering around your legs and spiders swarming over your arms and head. Yet you had to brave it all and climb out of the top of the lift, up the wires to what should have been safety, but wasn't, because then you had to save the rest of the world too."

"Yeah," she said quietly. "You could've just said that you didn't want to talk about it."

"I've been saying that for ten years, but no-one wants to listen. I killed him. I used the Avada Kedavra curse. I've told the world that. I don't know why the world needs to know any more than that."

"We're all just... curious. Curious isn't the right word. It's like curious, but more."

"You're all just nosey and want the best gossip," he said teasingly, but with a real sigh.

"Something like that," she said as she smiled, glad to move on.

"Come here," he said, patting his lap invitingly. Ginny stood up and went to sit with him, perching gently on one of his legs. He wrapped an arm about her waist and pressed his lips to hers. "You can stay here tonight if you want."

Ginny stiffened a little and pulled away from him. "I don't think that's a good idea."

"I didn't quite mean like that," he laughed gently. "I'm glad to see you like the idea so much, though. I meant that Dobby has freshened up the guest bedroom for tonight, if you don't want to make the journey home."

"Oh," she smiled. "Still. I think I had better get home, I have to get to work in the morning."

"It's not so far from here, is it?" Harry asked. "I thought the British Library was right by King's Cross?"

"It is, but all of my things are at home," she explained. "Thank you for the offer though. That's very kind of you."

Ginny kissed his cheek gently and stood up, stretching a little.

"Are you going home *now*?" he asked, standing up too when she nodded. "I should've kept my mouth shut."

"I had to leave at some point," she laughed.

"Nah. I could lock you up in the cellar and use you as my sex slave," he teased. "Now hey, there's a good idea!"

"Keep dreaming," she said as she ascended the steps to street-level, knowing that his eyes were on her bottom.

"I will." Harry wrapped his arms around her and pressed his lips against hers, kissing her passionately as he stroked the small of her back through her jacket and shirt. "I'll owl you. We'll meet up on my next day off, if you're free too."

"I'll be free," she promised as Harry opened the front door for her. She kissed him lightly before turning her back and heading home.

A/N: Another large secret is revealed in the next chapter. Ten points to the first to guess. Please review if you enjoy!

Two Weeks Too Late.

Chapter 5 of 6

In which Ginny's life changes forever.

Unable to remember the last time that she had felt so awful, Ginny Weasley bent over the sink and cupped water to rinse her mouth out, holding her hair back with the other hand. Her stomach seemed to settle a little as she washed her hands. After flipping the toilet lid down with a bang, she sat down and took a deep breath, pressing

her hand against the flat of her belly. It was still churning.

After a brief moment of panic when she thought that she would be sick again, Ginny began to relax as the terrible swishing feeling subsided. She stood up and lifted a small but bulging black bag from a shelf next to the mirror. *I need a bigger vanity case*, she realised as she rifled through the contents, looking for a hair brush. She eased it gently though her locks and cherished the mindless motion. A hint of a burning smell startled her out of her reverie. Ginny bolted for the bathroom door.

"David!" she called, running towards the kitchen. The silver toaster was just beginning to smoke. Pressing the release catch, Ginny grabbed at the two pieces of blackened toast that popped into the air. She swore as she threw them down onto the counter. She turned around and glared at the man who was sauntering into the kitchen. "You burned your toast again."

"Did I?" he asked, peering around her to the overdone toast, which lay discarded on the bench. "Oh, right. Sorry about that. I was on the phone."

"Why don't you just make sure the setting's right before you start your toast off, Dave?"

"Because I expect it to be the way I left it."

Ginny rolled her eyes and smiled, her irritation forgotten. David was a very absent-minded kind of flatmate. Forever burning his toast and forgetting to bring their mail up from the post-box downstairs, he just didn't think about things the way that Ginny did. That's why she loved him so much.

They had met during Ginny's first week at the British Library, and they had instantly taken to each other. Back in the days when Ginny always Apparated to London, they had become close friends, although they had only spent the hours at work together. She had never understood why people said that gay men were the best friends a woman could have until the first time he had pointed at her skirt and just said, 'No.'

When David had complained of needing to find a new place to live and a new flatmate to share the rent, Ginny knew that this was the opportunity she had been looking for. Desperate to leave the Burrow and step out on her own, she had joined him in flat hunting around London. She learned after their first attempt that flat shoes were essential to survival.

This flat had been the thirteenth that they had looked at, and they had felt at home in it almost as soon as they had walked through the door. The neighbourhood was quiet, and despite living above some shops, there was very little noise to be heard. Having to climb two flights of stairs after a long day pacing the vaults of the Library was a bit of a pain, but the cheap rent, ease of location and atmosphere within the flat made it worth it.

Proof that, despite his scatterbrained personality, David was the ideal flatmate came during their first day together. He had happily given up the larger of the two bedrooms to her, laughingly agreeing that she probably *did* need more space for her shoes than he did.

"I'll make you some more," she offered as he kissed her cheek in friendly greeting.

"Thanks," he said. "And good morning! You're still sick, I hear."

"Yeah." She popped two more slices of bread into the toaster and fixed the heat dial to medium. "Sorry. I try to keep the volume down. I don't know what's wrong with me."

David stared at her for a long moment. She could feel his eyes on her as she bustled about collecting side plates from the cupboard above her.

"Ginny?"

"Yeah?"

"Have you ever thought...? Look. I'm not saying you're stupid or anything, but have you given any thought ~~to~~*when* you're being sick?"

"Eh?" She reached into the refrigerator for the margarine and blueberry jam.

"Come on, Ginny, you're not *this* daft. I know you're not. You're being sick in the mornings. You're fine by the time we get to work. About two weeks ago I should have had to hide in my room to escape from evil PMS-Ginny, but she never showed her face. You're pregnant," he stated, as though it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"No, I'm not," she said as she laughed, believing it to be a ridiculous idea.

"When was the last time you... um... *saw* Blondie?"

Ginny smiled briefly at his nickname for the boyfriend he had never liked and calculated in her head. "About five weeks ago."

He nodded slowly. When her face paled, he took the butter knife from her hand and pointed her towards her bedroom. "Go and check your diary."

Ginny trailed slowly towards her bedroom, almost afraid to pass through the door to where she could find an answer. She paused momentarily before entering and carefully closed it behind her. She heard David let out a long, sympathetic sigh as he lifted his breakfast from the toaster.

A tear traced a slow path down her cheek. *No*, she thought. *No*. Ginny's hands shook fiercely as she reached into the first drawer on her dressing table. Her red leather diary fell to the floor with a clatter. She lowered herself to the carpet beside it and leafed nervously through the pages. A wave of panic surged through her, and she had to close her eyes and concentrate on easing her breathing. She opened them and focused on a circled P half way down a page. That marked the start of her last period. She slowly flipped the pages to today's date. Four weeks, five weeks, six weeks.

Her head dropped instantly. *David was right*, she realised. How could she have been so blind? Switching positions so that she could hug her knees to herself, Ginny leaned against her bed and cried.

How could she have let this happen? Why now? Why Draco?

Jumping at a gentle knock on her bedroom door, Ginny swiped the heels of her hands across her eyes, momentarily not caring that she spread her mascara all over her face.

"Just a minute," she called, standing up and looking in her dressing table mirror. What a mess. She pulled a tissue from the box and quickly wiped away the streaks that cascaded down her cheeks. Considering herself presentable, she walked to the door, sucked in a rushed breath, and opened it.

"Oh, Ginny." David sighed, wrapping his arms around her while being careful not to tip the toast he had brought her onto the floor. A fresh wave of tears pushed forward, and she buried her head into his shoulder. "Shh," he calmed her. "Shh."

"David, I..." she sobbed. "I don't know how this happened."

"Well, I could fill you in on the details, sweetheart," he teased gently, "but you should have noticed at the time."

When his joking evoked nothing other than more weeping, he leaned forward and set down the plate on top of her chest of drawers. He sat down on the foot of the bed and pulled her down with him. "Come here," he said, settling her on his lap while he wrapped his arms around her. "There's no need for this, Ginny."

"You think?" she stuttered.

"Well, we don't even know if you're pregnant. All we know for sure is that you're late. See?" Ginny nodded her head slowly, her cheek rubbing noisily against where it rested on his shoulder. "We'll calm you down, and then we'll go down to the pharmacy and find out for sure."

Lifting her head, Ginny pressed a kiss against his cheek. "Thanks, Dave."

"Anytime." He hugged her tighter. They sat together for a long stretch of time, Ginny lost in her thoughts. Questions raced around her mind. What if she ~~was~~ was pregnant? What would Draco say? What would her family say? Could she cope at twenty-five with a baby? Could she have an abortion? Should she tell anyone? Answers were the problem, Ginny realised, not questions. She had none.

"Let's go," she said, standing up. "I need answers."

David groaned and stretched his leg out in front of him. Ginny murmured an apology for squashing him for so long. He just smiled in answer and stood up to give his leg a shake. He picked her jacket off the hook in the back of her door and opened it out for her. "Let's go," he said.

"I don't want to use this pharmacy," Ginny said as they walked along their street. "Let's go somewhere else."

"There's no shame in this, you know, Ginny," he asserted. "People have babies every day."

"Not people like me," she insisted, grasping his hand and pulling him across the road and away from their local pharmacy. "And not people like Blondie, either."

"How will he react?" David asked, almost positive that he already knew the answer.

Ginny raised her eyebrows and shrugged. "Who knows?"

She knew.

"If we turn left here, there's another one along the end of this road."

They turned the corner and walked in silence until they entered the chemist. Affronted by a range of products, Ginny and David looked at each other.

"Come on. Let's get 'the most advanced technology you'll ever pee on,'" he said, mocking the product's successful but annoying television advertising campaign. He picked a small box from the shelf and carried it to the counter ahead of Ginny, handing over a ten pound note.

"Thanks," she said. "I forgot to pick up my purse."

"Don't worry about it," he said. "Let's get home and get this done."

Their return journey was also almost silent, for which Ginny was thankful. Her mind was still racing, her belly churning with nerves. Although she was eager to complete the pregnancy test and find out her fate for certain, she was also terrified.

This is going to change both of our lives Ginny realised as she climbed the stairs behind David. She could hear rustling ahead of her and knew that he was unwrapping plastic from the box and putting the test together. She had been irritated by this at first, thinking that he ought to just leave her to it. Her annoyance melted away when she realised that he was probably as nervous as she. He might not have a baby in his belly, but his life would be turned around if she did.

David handed her a completed test wand as he closed the door behind them.

"Three minutes," he told her, pushing her gently towards the bathroom. "Go on."

"I don't need to go yet," she said, striving for a little more time.

David rolled his eyes dramatically at her and gave another little push. "Go."

When ten minutes had passed, David rapped on the door. "And?" he asked.

Ginny opened the door, her cheeks streaked with tears and her broken heart written upon her face.

"Pregnant," she said.

Ginny lay quietly on her bed, listening to the sounds of the road below through her open window. *My life is in tatters up here and none of them know it* Ginny mused, envying the position of the people down on the street. She wished that she didn't know herself. *If only it would go away*, she thought.

A wave of swearing crept through into her room. She smiled briefly. David had just dropped something. That was typical of him. She knew that he had been set on edge too. Their lives were both going to change, no matter what happened. If she chose to have the baby, could she still live with him? How would he feel about it? If she chose to have an abortion, how would he feel about that? It was something that they'd never discussed: their views on abortion. She never thought that it would be an issue.

David's opinion would never be enough to sway her on such an important matter if she thought that she had made the right decision. However, she realised that disagreement on such a touchy subject might pose problems for their living together. Her instinct was to believe that David would have faith in her own decision making skills, and support her no matter what she decided. Nevertheless, she worried.

Having never given any serious thought to motherhood, Ginny was blown away by her situation. She hadn't been in a long-term relationship for over two years, and the Muggle she had been seeing then wasn't interested in children. The prospect of motherhood had just never come up. She had certainly never considered being a single mother. Going back to Draco was not an option either. Even if she hadn't have worn disillusioned with their relationship, her lust and amour had quickly transformed into hatred when he had lifted his hand in anger.

I don't want to be a lonely single mother Ginny realised. *I don't want to be on my own. Who will want me with a Malfoy baby by my side? I'll be alone from now onwards.*

Could she even be a mother? Growing up in the Weasley household had given Ginny an unconscious ideal of the family. She wanted to be married to a man that she loved the way that her mother loved her father. She wanted to have a home, to provide a home. What kind of mother could she be, single and living with a gay Muggle?

Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the circumstances in which she found herself, Ginny began to pace the length of her bedroom. The owl perched on the edge of her window went unnoticed until it twittered at her impatiently. The owl's golden eyes stared at her unblinkingly.

"Who sent you?" she asked in a quiet voice, approaching it slowly. A thick cream coloured parchment envelope embossed with her name was attached to its leg. She untied the letter and absently stroked the owl on the head in thanks. Ripping open the envelope, she sank down on the bed and read it quickly.

Dear Ginny,

How nice to hear from you! Luckily I found your letter now; I wouldn't have been able to check again for some time, and you would have gone unanswered. Things are about to get interesting for me, plans have been made and traps baited, and [neatly scratched out]. Well, you know how it is! I can't say.

Regarding your question about Mundungus Fletcher, I have asked my colleagues and we have a little bit of information for you. Although he has been hiding from the public, Fletcher is an ex-convict and therefore his whereabouts must be registered with the Ministry. His last known address is outside of a little village called Burwash in East Sussex.

Other than that, I'm afraid I can't help you! Pass on my best wishes to Harry for me, and do take care of yourself! If she has been Petrified, Hedwig should be fine in the long run. I hope you get this little problem sorted out.

Your brother,

Percy.

Ginny lifted her eyebrows and sighed. *Pompous little twat*, she thought as she stood up. 'My colleagues,' indeed! Mentors, more like! She opened the window as wide as she could and scratched the back of the owl's neck.

"You can go now, lovely owl," she said. "Try not to be seen, eh?"

The owl swept out of the room grandly. She stuck her head out of the window and looked down to the street below, trying to see if any Muggles had noticed the large bird coming out of her flat. There were no faces turned up at her.

She re-read the letter as she continued pacing. *What a humongous pile of rat droppings he is*, Ginny thought, wondering how he always managed to sound so superior, even in a letter. She folded the letter and popped it back into its envelope before sitting down on the bed again. She let herself fall back onto the mattress, legs hanging over the edge of the bed. She slid her hands over her belly and wondered how long it would be before it started to swell. *There's a little person in there*.

Ginny stood up and shook her head thoroughly, trying to clear her thoughts. She opened her wardrobe and pulled out her trainers. She knew that the only way she would be able to think lucidly would be to go running. With the laces pulled tight and her shirt changed to a light vest, she slathered sun screen on her sensitive skin and rubbed it in impatiently. The sun shone brightly despite the chill outside, and Ginny had learned from her previous mistakes. Folding the letter in half carelessly, she tucked it into the waistband of her trousers and left her bedroom.

David was sat on the green sofa, stretched out along its length. "Want company?" he asked, tapping the television remote control rhythmically against his belly.

"Nope," she said as she opened the front door, flashing him a quick smile.

"Didn't think so," he muttered to the door that slammed behind her.

Enjoying the rhythmic thud of her trainers hitting the ground, Ginny ran aimlessly. She paid little attention to where she was going. Without realising it, she followed her usual path and headed towards Kensington Gardens. She ran often, not for the physical and health benefits, but because she found it was one of the few ways that she could free her mind to think. Monotonous motion allowed her to stop thinking about what she was doing, liberating her to concentrate on less tangible matters.

Ginny was terrified. Her future suddenly looked so different to the way it had even a few hours ago. Everything had seemed so certain. Her position at work was firm, and she enjoyed what she did. The smell of the library vaults filled her with pleasure, and she loved coming across the unexpected. The first time she had come across an item that had been wrongly catalogued, she felt a thrill go through her. It was a lost copy of an Agatha Christie play. Ginny had found it while looking through the same storage unit for something else and had been filled with genuine delight when she took the manuscript to her supervisor. The play had never been performed, and very quickly a theatre in Canada had begun to prepare a showing of it.

She was also very happy in her living arrangements. David was a brilliant flatmate, and although they endured the usual problems that two people in such close circumstances suffered, they were great friends. He was a considerate man, and she never felt uncomfortable in her home. He kept his love life to himself, and that suited her. She tried to do the same. Not that she succeeded.

What am I going to do? Ginny asked herself. She was surprised to discover that she was disappointed in herself. She ought to have known better than to get pregnant. Knowledge of how babies were made was hardly unknown, and her mother had given her "the talk" many years ago. Her mother would be disappointed too, she realised. She knew that her mother's disappointment would melt into happiness though, should Ginny decide to continue her pregnancy. Unless she let slip who the father was.

There was no way that she would be able to explain to her family why she had let herself become involved with Draco Malfoy. How could she look her father in the eyes and say that she had felt so attracted to Draco that she couldn't stay away? Lust had conquered reason, and Ginny had given in to his advances. How could she explain that she had wanted him? Purely and simply *wanted him*.

Ginny could hardly glean any comfort from the fact that she could tell her father that he would have been right. Draco had been wrong for her. He had been an atrocious boyfriend, concerned primarily with his own happiness. When she had spoken to him about ending their relationship, she wounded his pride deeper than his heart. She knew that his biggest problem with it was that a *Weasley* was dumping *him*.

He would not be pleased to learn that he had a baby growing in her belly. How would he react? Disbelief? Shock? Would he be at all happy, or would he consider it his last revenge? Some revenge: dare to dump a Malfoy, be stuck with one for life. Would he try to force her into an abortion? Would he refuse to let her have one? Would he *want* this baby?

Questions of whether she could handle the situation, how she would deal with it, how her life would change were less important, but seemed to pervade her mind. Perhaps the most important matter she should be thinking about eluded her. Did *she* want this baby? Without thoroughly considering it, Ginny already knew the answer.

The Princess Diana Memorial loomed in front of her. A painful jolt shot through her, and Ginny stopped running, momentum carrying her for a few steps. She stood stock still and stared at the fountain in front of her. She had forgotten about Harry.

Fresh tears sprang to her eyes as she slid her hand to her belly again. Her hand ran easily over the flat of her stomach, and Ginny wondered how something that could be causing her so much trouble could be so invisible. Just as Harry had come back into her life, Fate dealt a monstrous blow. She had found herself immersed in his life again, instantly, and that had thrilled her.

For ten years she had longed for him. For ten years she had followed his career through the newspapers, happy to watch his success from the sidelines. On the rare occasion she found herself with a little Wizarding money, gifts from aunts and uncles at Christmas mostly, she had spent it on tickets to watch his Quidditch matches. She had known that he had seen her in the crowd, but still had not sought out his attention. She had also known that he sent free tickets for some of his matches to Ron, and she knew that she could have used them if she had wanted to. She had held back, more than content to watch from a distance until he was ready to seek her out again.

However, it was hardly as though Ginny had sat on the sidelines of Harry's life waiting for him, refusing to live her own. In the ten years since he had left Hogwarts, Ginny had loved and lost. She had only been in one major relationship, although there had been a few flings along the way. His name had been Will, and he had been a loving partner for three years.

She had met him when she had just turned twenty, and had loved him for every moment of the following three years, one month and six days. One morning, she had woken up, and she realised that she had outgrown him. No one ever quite believed her when she explained it like that, that she had simply stopped loving him. People assumed that she had found interest elsewhere and had decided to turn her back on Will. Those who knew her well didn't think so, but couldn't quite understand the immediate change in her either.

Realisation had struck her suddenly. She had changed and morphed into a woman over their three years together. Will had remained the young lad he had been when they met. She was still attracted to him and still found him charming enough; he just wasn't what she wanted anymore.

It had hurt her to break his heart, and she had agonised for weeks over her decision. He had felt the distance that had grown between them and had approached her. She had to be honest with him. He deserved better than reassurance through lies. Her life had changed drastically in that moment.

Things were going to change now. Everything was going to change. Her fingers rustled over the envelope tucked into her waistband. Ginny pulled it out and opened it up. She had forgotten about it. Shaking the loss of hope for Harry out of her head, she turned her back on the Princess Diana Memorial and ran until her legs ached.

A/N: Thanks to Colores, my wonderful new Beta!

- As for this chapter; surprised? :D

Secrets Shared.

Chapter 6 of 6

In which two close friends share secrets. Many thanks to my wonderful beta, Colores!

Ginny gasped for breath as her legs finally began to give out on her. She was exhausted. Her sides ached. Her vest clung to her back. Sweat trickled down her spine. She heaved in deep breaths as she slowed her pace and began walking towards her destination.

Knowing that she looked dishevelled, Ginny tried to control her panting as she entered the deceptively small building. Two rows of fireplaces lined the walls of a long corridor. In front of her, a long desk with three cashiers barred her way. She joined the short queue and noisily crumpled the letter that she still held in her hand.

"Next!"

Stepping forward to the youngest of the cashiers, Ginny nodded politely to him. "I'd like to make a reverse-charges journey, please."

He shuffled papers importantly. Ginny sighed impatiently, drawing an annoyed glance from the young man. He slipped a pink form in front of her and gestured towards the quill on her side of the desk.

"Fill this in, please."

Ginny looked at the nib of the quill in annoyance. *Why are 'complimentary quills' always so rubbish?* After filling in her destination and contact details, Ginny handed the form back to the young man. He glanced over her form quickly and nodded to her, stepping out from behind his desk and accompanying her to a vacant fireplace. He sprinkled a little Floo powder into the flames and bent down onto his knees. When the flames turned green, he leaned forward into the fire.

"Professor Granger?" she heard him ask. "Will you accept a reverse-charges journey from Ginevra Weasley?" She saw his shoulders move as he nodded and breathed a sigh of relief, glad that Hermione had been in her office. Saturday afternoons were relatively free for her, and she could have been anywhere. Ginny had suspected Hermione would be in her office marking work rather than spending time with her fiancé. Ginny was glad she had been right.

The young wizard stood up and dusted off his knees impatiently. "Go ahead, Miss Weasley." He nodded curtly to her before returning to his station behind the desk.

"What's wrong?" Hermione asked as her guest appeared in a flash of green light.

"I've had a reply from Percy," Ginny said. She stepped out of the flames and thrust the envelope towards her.

"Oh! Heavens, Ginny! I thought there was something wrong!"

Ginny shrugged and brushed the implied question aside, plonking herself down on the sofa. Last time she had sat here...

"Ginny? Are you listening?"

Ginny closed her eyes with a sharp sigh. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I lost myself there. What were you saying?"

"I said that you're looking rather... Well. You can go next door and use my shower if you want, while I look over this letter. You'll feel much better when you get out, I promise. I'm sure you'll smell better too," Hermione teased, wearing a grin.

"Oh, thanks!" Ginny laughed. She stood up and followed Hermione out of the office and into the corridor. They stopped in front of a large painting in a dark wood frame. A tall blonde woman stood proudly, a shining helmet balanced on the top of her spear and a breast plate guarding her body. She nodded to Hermione, evoking a hoot from the owl that rested on her shoulder.

Hermione looked over her shoulders to check that they were alone in the corridor. *Hogwarts: A History*," she whispered to the woman in the picture. Pallas Athene inclined her head again and smiled at Ginny.

The painting swung inwards and Ginny followed Hermione into her personal rooms. Her living room was small, but felt bigger from the inside. A battered looking yellow sofa stretched along one wall and was flanked by two tidy bookcases. A large window let in a lot of light, and the net curtains in front of it fluttered gently in the breeze. Ginny realised that the window must be enchanted; from this position in the castle there was no way Hermione could have a real window in her rooms.

Her bedroom was reached through a door towards the right, and the en suite bathroom was small but also felt very light and airy. Hermione showed Ginny where the towels were kept and gestured towards her wardrobe, telling Ginny to help herself to clean clothes.

When Hermione had left, Ginny stretched her arms up to the ceiling and sighed. Her back and shoulders clicked loudly and she dropped her arms. They suddenly felt very heavy. She began to strip off her clothes and rolled her head around her shoulders. Perhaps running for so long hadn't been the best idea. Nonetheless, Ginny welcomed her exhaustion. She reached into the shower and turned on the hot water. She was too tired to let herself worry anymore. Enough was enough.

The hot water pounded onto her shoulders and began to wash away the stress. Steam rose all around her and dragged her spirits with it. The tension melted away. Ginny braced one arm against the surprisingly cold wall tiles and began to laugh. She threw back her head and let the water dash onto her face. Her eyes were screwed up and her laughter began to gurgle. She thumped her hand against the wall and screamed her exhilaration.

Not really understanding what was so funny, but cherishing the carefree pleasure she felt, Ginny revelled in her liquid enchantment. When the water began to cool, she gave a quiet moan and turned off the taps. She wrapped a soft, fluffy towel around her body and pressed strong and vigorous footsteps onto the floor.

A trail of damp prints led to Hermione's full wardrobe. Ginny spread a few items around on the bed as she chose what to wear and settled for a knee length navy blue skirt. It was surprisingly girly for Hermione's tastes and had a trim of lace around the bottom. The full skirt flared around her thighs as she pulled on a thin polo-neck jumper. The light blue matched the skirt wonderfully and hugged her closely. After quickly sweeping Hermione's hair brush through her wet locks, she pinned them back haphazardly and slipped her trainers back on. Oh well, she thought. *I almost look good.*

Hermione closed her office door behind her and let out a breath she didn't know she had been holding. She patted her hand against her stomach gently and sat down behind her desk. When that young man had popped his head through the fire, Hermione's heart had leapt into her throat. His terse manner didn't worry her itself, but it wasn't like Ginny to ask for monetary help. She knew that her friend kept little wizarding money on hand, but also knew that Ginny was too proud to ask for help if she didn't really need it.

This letter must have something special in it Hermione thought, sliding the parchment out of the envelope. She read it carefully, slowly taking in everything Percy had said.

Was this all that brought her here? Hermione quickly read the letter again to see if she had missed anything and laid it down on her desk in confusion. It was great that Ginny had some more information. The location of Fletcher was something that had eluded Hermione no matter how much she had researched, no matter where she had looked for her information. *This isn't enough to make her ask for money,* Hermione thought. *She could have told me this by owl*

A bout of laughing radiated through the wall between Ginny and herself, raising a smile to Hermione's lips. She knew how Ginny was feeling *Bless the day I discovered that Perbeatius Charm.* There was nothing quite like coming out of the shower set up for the day, even if it was an induced mood.

Foraging around in the one untidy drawer of her desk, Hermione pulled out her personal notepaper and a quill. She scribbled a quick note and pushed the parchment into an envelope. Her writing took its usual elegant form as she wrote the name on the envelope and strode out of her office.

"Louise?" she asked, catching the attention of a seventh-year Hufflepuff. "Would you take this note to the Owlery for me, please? As quickly as you can."

"Certainly, Professor." The girl nodded as she took the envelope from Hermione's hand. Hermione saw Louise's eyes glance over the name on the front. She suppressed a smile as she began to turn away and noticed the girl's eyes be drawn back to the name for another look. No doubt another round of rumours about her schooldays with Harry would be whirling around the Great Hall before the day was over.

Returning to her office, she stretched her legs out and leaned back in her chair. This was hardly the most scholarly or dignified of repose, but perhaps the most suitable. She was stumped. Other than now knowing a possible location for Mundungus Fletcher, they knew nothing helpful. There had been few sightings of him, mostly due to the fact that he was old news. As long as Fletcher kept himself to himself, people weren't interested in him.

Hermione had methodically gone through all of her contacts to pool as much information about Fletcher as she could. Her problem was that she had been out of the loop for too long. Since the fall of Voldemort, the Order of the Phoenix had gradually become less and less active until Hermione no longer knew where to go to get the information she sought.

Most of her leads brought up dead ends or trails gone cold. It was infinitely frustrating, but she was at a loss as to what else to do. There was no one else to ask. Thankful that Percy had managed to come up with something that could help, she now had some idea of what to do. Watch him. It was as simple as that. What else could they do? Watch him, and wait to see if he slipped up.

Of course, that would put Harry in danger. Holding back and waiting for Fletcher to make a move was hardly going to help him immediately, but Hermione could think of nothing more proactive that they could do. There was always the possibility that Fletcher wasn't the culprit, but she had wracked her brain for days and could think of no one else who could have got into Harry's house and had a reason for wanting to hurt him.

Fletcher was the only person that she could think of that had a motive, and it was tenuous at that. Chasing after Harry ten years after Harry had made a complaint against Fletcher to the authorities? Tenuous seemed too strong a word for it, but who knew what happened to the mind after a decade in Azkaban?

Hermione suppressed a shudder. She had felt the effect that Dementors had. She had felt the happiness and the hope draining out of her. She had heard the rattle of a Dementor's breath and had imagined her happy memories being sucked in with it. After just a few brief exposures to a Dementor, Hermione had suffered from occasional nightmares for years. She couldn't begin to imagine how awful a decade in their presence would be. She didn't want to.

Perhaps his decade of torture was reason enough for Fletcher to go after Harry. Although he hadn't been sent to Azkaban for stealing from Harry directly, Hermione remembered Harry explaining that he had made a complaint about Fletcher stealing Black family heirlooms.

Charged with impersonating an Inferius during a burglary, Fletcher ought to have no real problem with Harry. It wasn't Harry he had been stealing from when he was caught. It wasn't Harry who pressed charges. While Hermione did wonder who was at the cause of his arrest, she knew that Harry wasn't it. It was possible that Fletcher didn't know that, of course. He knew that he had been caught by Harry, and he had run. Perhaps he had assumed that he was being charged with that theft.

Wouldn't he have been told what he was charged with at his trial, though? I clearly have some more digging to do Hermione thought, tapping her fingers against her desk.

After a brief knock, Ginny let herself into Hermione's office. The young woman sat behind her desk, drumming a tattoo with her fingernails. She looked troubled and was so absorbed in her thoughts that she didn't notice her friend's entrance.

"Are you okay?" Ginny asked.

Hermione's head snapped up to look at her, and her expression lightened considerably when she smiled. "I love that skirt," she said. "I don't wear it often though."

"It's lovely," Ginny said, smoothing her hands down over the soft material.

"Let me fix those for you."

Hermione pointed her wand at Ginny's feet and murmured a quiet spell. Ginny's white trainers were transfigured into low black pumps that flattered her outfit.

"Thanks!" Ginny said, surprised at how comfortable the shoes remained. "Are you okay? You had a pretty pensive look on your face when I came in there."

"I'm just thinking about all this Fletcher stuff. I can't figure it out yet. We're missing something."

"I know the feeling," Ginny said.

"It's getting you down too?"

"Among other things." She nodded and sat down on the comfortable sofa at the back of the room. "Things are just up in the air at the moment, you know?"

"You mean with Harry?"

Ginny opened her mouth to speak, but paused. *Now isn't the right time.* She smiled and nodded shyly. "Yeah. With Harry."

"Just spend time with him. It'll turn out right, just give it time."

"I don't know how it's going to turn out. There are other factors now."

"This Fletcher thing isn't going to last forever, Ginny. We'll get him; it'll stop."

"Yeah." Ginny sighed. She began to fidget uncomfortably as a moment of silence followed. She didn't know how to break it.

"I have some good news for you," Hermione said quietly, moving away from her desk to sit next to Ginny on the sofa. "I think it's good news anyway."

"Have you found out something else?"

"No... Your brother and I... We may be getting married a lot sooner than we had planned."

Ginny laughed happily. "Won the Lottery?"

"Er, no. You're going to be an auntie again."

Ginny's jaw dropped. "You're pregnant?"

"Yes!" Hermione said, tapping her stomach as she grinned. "I'm about seven weeks along, we think. I wasn't supposed to tell anyone, so don't let on to Ron that you know yet."

"I don't know what to say," Ginny said, unsure which one of the myriad emotions that ran through her she should voice.

"Be pleased!" Hermione laughed. "Little Willow will have a cousin to play with as she grows up!"

Ginny blanched. Fred's wife had given birth to their daughter a few days ago. She hadn't been to visit the new family yet, but knew that Hermione had. Little Willow may have two cousins to play with as she grew up.

Ginny paled. *Oh god, Hermione thought, she's not happy.*

Hermione's face clouded over. "What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing," Ginny said, pushing a smile onto her face.

"No, what's wrong, Ginny?"

"It's nothing," Ginny said. "Really. I'm so happy for you, Hermione!"

The young red-haired woman leaned forward to hug her friend.

That look wasn't for nothing, Hermione realised as she wrapped her arms around her friend and gave a relieved laugh. *At least Ginny isn't upset about my pregnancy* she thought, although Hermione knew that 'nothing' wasn't what had worried her friend. *Something is wrong.*

"We ought to celebrate! I guess champagne and Butterbeer are out of the question now!"

Hermione laughed. "They certainly are! Are you sure you're okay with this, Ginny?"

Ginny nodded, her smile finally reaching her eyes. She was thrilled for Ron and Hermione. She knew that they wanted this, even if it was slightly earlier than they had planned. *Our children are going to be in the same year at Hogwarts* she realised, giving a quiet laugh. *They're going to be in the same House. Oh, god. What if it's a Slytherin?*

Ginny's eyes filled with tears. "I'm happy for you, Hermione. But... I could use a friend."

A hot tear raced down Ginny's cheek when she closed her eyes. She could feel her teeth beginning to chatter with the intensity of her emotion, and she struggled to contain the outburst that hovered unwelcome behind her defences.

"Ginny?" Hermione's voice was flooded with concern. When Ginny leaned forward and rested her head in her hands, Hermione laid a hand gently on her friend's back. "What is it?"

Racked with sobs, Ginny drew in a slow breath, calming herself down. She lifted her head from her hands and looked at Hermione, making eye contact. She saw distress and worry in Hermione's eyes. *No backing out now.*

"Hermione," Ginny said, "I'm pregnant."

Ginny saw the shock in Hermione's eyes. Her eyebrows lifted fractionally and her lips parted. Tears trickled down Ginny's face as she waited for a spoken reaction. Her stomach churned. She felt sick.

"Ginny..." Hermione said. "Are you okay?"

"No," Ginny said, giving a tight and bitter laugh. "No, I'm not."

"Is this...? I mean, are you...?" Hermione struggled to find the right words. "Merlin!"

"Yeah. That's how I feel."

"When did you find out?"

"A few hours ago. I've been sick for a while, my period is late. I just didn't put two and two together."

"I'm surprised David didn't say anything to you," Hermione said. "He's usually pretty on the ball."

"He did," Ginny said, smiling faintly. "Otherwise I'd still be in ignorant bliss."

Hermione nodded. "And this is definitely... Malfoy?"

"Definitely Draco."

"Poor Ginny," Hermione said, leaning forward to hug her friend. Ginny relaxed against Hermione slightly, letting the woman take some of stress out of herself. "I don't really know what to say."

"I feel the same way myself," Ginny said, smiling a little. She sat back up and wiped her eyes on her wrists. "I don't know what to say, I don't know what to feel. I'm a mess."

"I take it this wasn't planned?"

Ginny laughed. "No."

"Just checking," Hermione explained. "And you haven't told Malfoy?"

"No one other than you and David knows."

Hermione nodded. Ginny could see so many emotions written across her face. Hermione was shocked, she was disappointed on Ginny's behalf, and she was full of sympathy for her. "You haven't had long to think about it, Ginny. No one would expect you to have your thoughts in order by now."

"I know," Ginny said. "I just... I never thought that anything like this would be an issue. I didn't think I was stupid enough to get myself pregnant. I don't really know how it happened. I never forget to take my pill."

"Could you have forgotten it even once?" Hermione asked.

"I never forget," Ginny said with a shake of her head.

"Well, it doesn't always work, I suppose. Only ninety-eight percent effective, isn't it?"

Ginny nodded minutely. She knew all of this. She knew that it was possible to get pregnant while taking the Pill, but had never prepared herself for it to happen. Ginny was convinced she hadn't forgotten to take it.

"I'll be here for you," Hermione said kindly. "I'll do everything for you that I can. Do you know how pregnant you are?"

"Five weeks," Ginny said flatly. "At least."

"Well, you have time to make up your mind."

Ginny nodded, surprised to feel herself beginning to numb. A few moments ago emotion had raged around her body. She had been shivering and sobbing. Now, her breathing had calmed, and she began to stare off into space. Ginny had reached her emotional limit for now. She couldn't cry anymore.

Hermione laughed gently. "You've had enough, haven't you? Your eyes just glazed over a bit."

Ginny smiled. "I just can't think about it anymore. Everything changes now."

"Yeah," Hermione returned Ginny's smile warmly, lightly touching her own stomach. "Tell me about it. I know it's not quite the same... We're in very different positions. But at least we're in it together."

Ginny nodded, not knowing what to say. "You won't tell Ron, will you?"

Hermione smiled. "Yeah, that's likely. He'd take the news so well."

"Don't remind me," Ginny said with a groan. "If you can't keep it from him without lying or something, that's fine. Saves me the trouble of telling him, I suppose. But just do your best to make sure he doesn't tell anyone else. I'd better get off home. I'm pretty exhausted now. Although that shower doesn't half pep you up!"

"Perbeatus Charm," Hermione explained. "I'll show you how to do it if you like, another time."

Ginny stood up and moved towards the fireplace, taking a handful of Floo powder. "Thanks, Hermione." She smiled.

"You can come to me anytime, Ginny. Reverse the charges. If you can't get hold of me, try Minerva. She's in her office quite a lot these days."

Ginny hugged Hermione closely. "Thanks. I will. You're a great friend, Hermione."

"Anytime." Hermione smiled as Ginny threw the Floo powder into the fireplace and disappeared in a green whirl.

A/N: Hope you're still enjoying reading, there's more to come!