

# Love's Battle Revisited

*by jmlane57*

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## Return to England

*Chapter 1 of 16*

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### **Chapter 1 Return to England**

*Beta'd by Lisa Foulke (Lisa725) from Perfect Imagination*

Ten years after their flight from England, Harry Potter and his wife of ten years, Hermione Granger-Potter, believed it was time for them to return home. Of course, they couldn't be sure what kind of reception to expect, especially considering the way they had left; they could only hope for the best. In retrospect, Harry was sure they could have gone about it differently, but at the time, he was too eager to get away and be alone with her to consider the possible ramifications of their impulsive actions. Unfortunately, these same ten years had changed both of them...and not for the better.

The feelings between them, feelings they had been certain would last through eternity, had been gradually dying during the last six months of their sojourn in America, but they were too stubborn to admit it at the time. Besides, splitting up wouldn't be good for their girls, nine-year-old twins Lily and Helen; it could be even worse for children to grow up in a broken home. But there would be time to deal with their domestic problems once they were settled back in England.

They had each recently received owls from Hogwarts Headmistress Minerva McGonagall asking them to return and teach at the school...Harry as Defence Against the Dark Arts instructor since that was what he knew best after all his years dealing with Voldemort and Dark magic and Hermione, who was qualified for most any subject save Divination, as Transfiguration professor since McGonagall couldn't both teach and head the school. Really, they couldn't have made a better choice for Transfiguration; as McGonagall had said, Hermione was second only to her in Transfiguration expertise. Too bad she wasn't as good a wife as she was a teacher, Harry thought wryly.

Hermione's sharp voice brought him back to reality. "Harry! Come help me! Helen's got herself stuck in a tree again!"

"Be right there," he called back, knowing Hermione disliked flying on brooms every bit as much as he loved it...one of the many things they disagreed on. They also disagreed on her penchant for following rules and Harry's penchant for disregarding them whenever it suited his purpose, just as his father, James, had. Although, when it came right down to it, Harry knew that he loved to learn, he just wasn't fond of having to go to school to do it. He preferred to learn by doing, not in a classroom setting. His nightmare of a fifth year had taught him that lesson well.

It took roughly an hour to get Helen out of the tree and calmed down, and in the midst of it, Hermione had left for her job as Transfiguration instructor at the Boston Institute of Magic. It was an all-girls school, but strangely enough, had a male principal, as they were called in America. And a fairly young and good-looking one at that...so much so that it gave Harry cause for concern, especially since Hermione's hours seemed to have increased dramatically since this man had been hired. Harry couldn't be sure, but he suspected that she just might be having an affair with the man, and if that was indeed the case, it might be a good idea to go back to England, if only to break up their relationship.

It wouldn't be easy to work with her or any of their former classmates who had been taken on as instructors in the intervening years, but he would simply have to make the best of it. And he could only hope that Ginny hadn't been one of them. Harry really hadn't been fond of the idea of her ending up with Draco, his lifelong nemesis, but at the same time, he had noticed the blond Slytherin's growing attraction to her, so when Hermione suggested they do some matchmaking before starting their own new life, Harry hadn't argued too strongly with her.

Nor had he been happy to see Ginny throw her arms around Draco and kiss him, but there wasn't anything he could have done about it at the time, even had he wanted to. He had been too much in the throes of new-found raging hormones for it to matter very much; just as long as Ginny was taken care of and had someone to look after her, especially should anything happen to her parents or brothers. But even so, there had been many times he had suffered nightmares concerning those two involving her truly falling in love with Draco and even turning Harry himself down in order to remain with him.

Of course, considering the rumour he and Hermione had spread about being dead, for them to suddenly show up again after ten years would be a shock and probably infuriate her...especially if she learned just why it had been done. At the time, though, Harry hadn't considered it of much concern to him; all that had really mattered was, in essence, burning bridges behind them so he and Hermione could go on with their lives in a new country. Granted, they had changed their names and appearances to a degree in order to maintain their anonymity, but with both of them being magically gifted, Hermione particularly so, that wasn't too hard to do.

In fact, it had gotten so that they were only completely themselves when at home. Otherwise, Harry wore coloured contacts which changed his eye colour from green to brown, and Hermione had figured something to hide his scar, at least temporarily.

Not even their American friends and co-workers knew that Harry's eyes were really green or about his scar. He had grown a mustache and short beard, but his hair was as messy as ever. But tomorrow was the day they would be leaving that home, and it was unlikely they would ever return, especially if things worked out and they were able to take up where they had left off.

They had written McGonagall back right away, accepting the posts, then began making arrangements to get their affairs in order and move back to the UK. Teachers had their own quarters at Hogwarts, as he well knew, but they were in another wing from the student dormitories for the four Houses, although Harry wasn't sure just what kind of living arrangements he and Hermione would have once there, having been essentially estranged the last six months. The only real ties between them were a rapidly unraveling legal one and their girls.

With luck, he would be able to enroll the girls in a school near the Burrow for a couple of years and they might be able to stay with the Weasleys until they were old enough to attend Hogwarts. Of course, this was assuming that the Weasleys were still on speaking terms with him. It had been their understanding that he had planned to marry Ginny, and if they learned the details of his flight from England with Hermione...especially of his marriage and children with her...he'd be lucky to get away with his bits intact, much less anything else. Particularly if Ginny's six brothers had learned of his perfidy and took revenge on him for breaking their sister's heart and running off with her heretofore best friend after spreading the rumour that the two of them had been killed in the Final Battle.

But that was a chance he'd have to take, especially since there was no guarantee he would be able to come up with an explanation that they (or Ginny) were likely to buy. Harry was especially apprehensive about facing Ron again, since he knew all too well how much his best mate had fancied Hermione, yet Harry had allowed himself to fall in love with her as well, or so he had believed at the time. It had been hormones, pure and simple ... yet he had let those hormones overwhelm his common sense and make him go off half-cocked, throwing away everything and everyone he had ever loved, simply for the chance to shag Hermione. He could only hope that Ron had managed to find someone to at least more-or-less replace her. If not Lavender, perhaps Luna.

The only girl he had ever truly loved was Ginny, Harry knew that now, but how would he ever be able to convince anyone of it after what he had done? The elder Weasleys were very protective of their children, and what hurt one usually hurt the whole family, so they weren't about to allow perpetrators of any wrongs done to them to go unpunished. Especially when they were done to Ginny. For his sins, Harry fully expected to get hexed into the middle of next year at the very least, if not have Fred and George cast their nastiest spells on him; provided they even let him anywhere near the Burrow, that was. But as he'd already decided before, they could deal with all that once they were back in England. Right now, they needed to get ready to return.

The following morning, after magically packing up everything most important to them, they had Portkeyed themselves and their belongings back to England. He and Hermione had actually agreed, which was a rarity these days, that it wasn't a good idea to try to fly all the way back on their brooms, especially not across the blustery Atlantic and particularly not with two children and all their belongings.

Upon reaching Hogsmeade, they got a room for the night at the local branch of the Leaky Cauldron, which they learned had been built five years earlier. Both Harry and Hermione prepared to meet with McGonagall the following day and make all the necessary arrangements to become the Defence and Transfiguration teachers at Hogwarts. It still seemed like only yesterday to Harry since he had been there; the school had always seemed more like home to him than anywhere else he knew, other than the Burrow. It would be like coming home again...at least as far as he could tell at this point. The problem was, Harry had never heard of the old saying, "You can't go home again ..."

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Leaving their girls sleeping in their hotel room, Harry and Hermione decided to drop by the white tomb holding the mortal remains of the greatest wizard who had ever lived and the best headmaster Hogwarts had ever had, in Harry's opinion. Albus Dumbledore had been killed in Harry's sixth year by the very man he had always steadfastly trusted despite everyone's (including Harry) warnings, a trust that had gotten him killed. Harry had never bought Snape's claim that he had acted on Dumbledore's orders, that the old wizard was dying anyway and wanted his death to do some good. To Harry, this simply proved that Snape had never truly been part of the Light but had worked for Lord Voldemort the whole time.

They knelt before the carved words spelling out Dumbledore's name, his birth and death dates, and his greatest accomplishments, conjuring up a bouquet of flowers and placing it directly beneath the name. Harry even reached out and traced the letters carved in the white marble, tears filling his eyes even now. Ten years Dumbledore had been gone, and it still seemed like he had only died yesterday. The loss left a hole in Harry's heart which he doubted would ever heal. Despite their differences, he had always looked up to the gentle and wise old wizard, who at the same time was the only person Voldemort had ever feared. Although, ten years ago, the Dark Lord had had *another* wizard to fear ...

Which led him to the most painful decision of his life, to break up with Ginny. Not because he didn't love her anymore; he did, more than anything, but he couldn't risk her life, and anyone close to him was a prime target for Voldemort's wrath. The deaths of his parents, Sirius, and Dumbledore had proved it; the last thing Harry wanted was to add her name to that list. He would have far rather had his heart cut out than to have walked away from her. It was the hardest thing he had ever done, but it was for the best ... to keep her safe.

They had shared several tenderly passionate nights together before his departure; she had looked so beautiful in her sleep as he held her that it was hard for Harry not to cry. He loved her so much! Why did things have to be this way? Why did *he* have to be the Chosen One...the one who always sacrificed, the one who always did without, the one who always lost the people he loved most? But most importantly, why did he have to be the only one who was capable of destroying Voldemort?

Why couldn't he have been just a normal teenager whose biggest worry was whether or not he could get his girlfriend to shag him? The answer was simple ... he was Harry Potter. From the day he was born, he had never been what one would call normal. Instead, he had been a marked man from the time he was fifteen months old and had somehow survived the Killing Curse which had claimed the lives of his parents.

Voldemort himself had said that what had nearly killed him that day was the power of love: the bond between mother and child, Lily's blood sacrifice for her son, the oldest magic known to wizardkind. Even Dumbledore had said that love was "the power the Dark Lord knows not," the kind which would vanquish him for all time. A power that Harry had in abundance...or so it was claimed then. Now, Harry couldn't help wondering.

"Harry? Are you all right?" Hermione's voice was laced with the most concern Harry had heard directed toward him in a long time.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just got ... sentimental for a minute." He pushed himself to his feet. "We'd better get to Minerva's office. She's no doubt waiting for us."

"No doubt," Hermione agreed.

With that, they turned and made their way up to the castle. They both knew it so well that even after ten years, they could have walked to the Headmistress's office blindfolded. After giving the password, "cinnamon roll," that Minerva had provided them in her last owl post and watching the gargoyle leap aside, they walked up the winding stairs to her office. Upon their knock, McGonagall's voice came back, "Come in."

Harry opened the door and they walked in. McGonagall smiled and greeted each of them with a handshake. "Harry. Hermione. So good to see you again. Merlin, have you two ever changed!"

She was one of the few who had known that they did not really die ten years ago. Dumbledore's portrait had told her of their plans shortly after his death, and the Final Battle took place six months later, roughly two months into what would have been the Trio's seventh year, which they had naturally chosen not to finish, having considered vanquishing Voldemort far more important ... at least at first.

It was shortly after this that they supposedly realised they were in love and decided to let the world believe they were dead, having been killed in the Final Battle, in order that they be able to start new lives elsewhere. They had also left a letter with McGonagall suggesting that she and Dumbledore recommend a discussion with Draco, since both Harry and Hermione had noticed his growing attraction for Ginny, suggesting that he approach her just after she had been told of Harry and Hermione's deaths.

Dumbledore had not agreed with them, warning of potentially dire consequences, but both young people were strong-willed and determined; nothing he said could persuade them otherwise. All he could do then was wish them the best of luck and hope they didn't end up regretting their rash actions. Likewise, Minerva had not agreed with their decision, but there had been no way for her to stop them. Like Dumbledore, she could only hope for the best.

"Ten years will do that to you," Harry replied with a smile. "Now, I believe you said you had jobs for us?"

"Yes. You know why the Defence position is open, just as to why the Transfiguration position is open. Since Voldemort has been defeated, the curse upon it for more than fifty years is gone and you may hold the position as long as you like. Same for the Transfiguration position. Just the same, you know that I'm here if you need any advice on either one. When will you be available to start?"

They had been told in one of the owl posts that "Mad-Eye" Moody...the real one this time...had been teaching Defence and Wilhelmina Grubbly-Plank had taken on Transfiguration, but after they retired just after the previous term ended in June, the two posts were left open.

"How about next week?" Hermione suggested. "We need to get settled in and see about the care and education of our daughters, as well as prepare lesson plans."

"Which reminds me," McGonagall said. "Harry, you said you wanted them to attend Hogwarts when they were old enough."

"That's right," he confirmed. "May I assume that they can expect letters at the proper time?"

"Of course," she assured him.

"Are there any other new teachers this year?" Harry inquired, unconsciously holding his breath.

"Two others beside yourselves. Neville Longbottom in Herbology and Ginevra Weasley in Charms."

The impact of this last name hit Harry like the proverbial ton of bricks, but he couldn't allow himself to show it, particularly not in front of present company. "What happened with the original professors, Sprout and Flitwick?"

"Retired last year, both of them," McGonagall replied. "Though I'm sure you'll do us proud, just as Mr. Longbottom and Ms. Weasley have."

And to their dismay, Harry's heart took an unexpected leap upon suddenly hearing a sweet, musical voice he had not heard in ten years ... Ginny! How would she react when she saw them?

"Minerva, this schedule you gave me is far too heavy. I'd have to almost literally be in two places at once to be able to pull this off!" Ginny dashed in, not noticing Harry and Hermione at first, her gaze fixed on McGonagall.

"Well, don't worry, Ms. Weasley. We have two new professors who will take at least some of the burden off of you." McGonagall gestured to Harry and Hermione; he was unable to help swallowing hard when Ginny's head turned to look at them. She was stunned speechless at first, then her eyes widened in astonishment. When she regained her voice, it was a shadow of its former exuberance.

"Harry? Hermione? Oh, Merlin, it can't be ... *it can't be!*" The next thing any of them knew, Ginny had crumpled to the floor, unconscious, the depth of her shock at seeing two people she believed to be dead sitting before her alive and well having proved too much for her.

Harry was the first to reach her side, although he hadn't made it quickly enough to have caught her before she hit the floor. Once he did, he picked her up and placed her in the nearest chair. McGonagall conjured up some water to help revive her and passed it to Hermione, who gave it to her. When Ginny finally regained consciousness, she looked up and stared intently at Harry and Hermione, both of whom were looking at her worriedly.

"Are you okay? We didn't mean to shock you like that," Hermione apologised. "But our decision to come back was so sudden that we never had a chance to let anyone know."

"But how can you possibly be here? Dumbledore said you had both been killed! We held a memorial for you and everything!"

"I'm afraid there are a few things you don't know, Gin," Harry returned with an apologetic air to his voice. "Things you're not going to find easy to hear, to put it mildly. All I ask is that you reserve judgment until you've heard us out...and try not to judge us too harshly, although I wouldn't blame you if you did. What we did was foolish and thoughtless, but at the time we thought it was for the best, and no matter how it may seem, we never meant to hurt anyone, least of all you. Minerva, if you'd close the door, please, and put a Silencing Charm on it?"

McGonagall did as Harry asked before the three of them turned back to the still-stunned Ginny, who now wore a mixed look of expectancy, apprehension, and wariness. "All right, I accept the fact that Harry and Hermione are alive. Now will somebody please tell me just what the bloody hell is going on here?"

"Clearly, we never died," Harry made himself confess. "At some point during the Final Battle, Hermione and I realised that we had ... fallen in love. *Or at least we believed we had*, he added silently. "It was for that reason I could not ... return to you, Gin, and honour my promise to marry you. For that I am very sorry. I can only pray that someday you will find it in your heart to forgive me. It was then that we decided it was best if you and the others thought we died so that we ... Hermione and I ... could depart from England in order to start a new life for ourselves in another country. We have been living quietly these past ten years in America. Only when Minerva owed us and told us of the open teaching positions did we decide to come back."

Ginny looked just as stunned as before but managed to stay conscious this time. "I see. Did you ... get married?"

Hermione raised her left hand to show the diamond solitaire Harry had given her. "Does that answer your question?"

Ginny nodded. "Do you have ... children?"

"Two daughters, fraternal twins, age nine. Lily and Helen, named for their grandmothers."

"What kind of work have you been doing?"

"I worked in the Department of Mysteries in the American Department of Magic; Mione has been a Transfiguration teacher in an all-girls magical school in Boston, Massachusetts, where we ended up settling."

"Where are your daughters while you're here?"

"Still sleeping in our hotel room in Hogsmeade," Harry informed her. "They've told us they want to go here when they're old enough."

"Well, if they're anything like you two, they'll excel, I'm sure," Ginny made herself say, forcing a smile even as the realisation of what had actually happened ten years ago finally sunk in. "But why couldn't you have come to us...Ron, me, and the family...the Order...and told us your change of heart? Why the cover-up?"

"As I said, we thought it best for everyone concerned at the time," Harry returned lamely, knowing it was a weak defence at best, but also knowing it was the only one he had. "Gin, I'm very sorry to have led you on, then let you down. Nonetheless, I hope you've been ... doing all right these last ten years."

"Oh, yes. I got married to Draco, as it seemed that you two must have wanted. Why else would he have been close by just after I'd been told that you'd died?"

"I knew he was attracted to you, too, and our deaths would leave you and Ron free to find people who truly deserved your love and devotion."

"And you thought Draco ... deserved me? You always hated him. How could you possibly want me to be with him?"

"I didn't, really, but time and options were limited. That's all I can say right now. Now tell me, how did things ... work out between you?"

"As I said, we got married about six months after the Final Battle and had three children, one girl and twin boys. Incidentally, Lucius died last year in Azkaban, and Draco is now CEO of the company he founded."

"What about Ron?" Hermione finally said. "Did he ... ever find anyone?"

"He and Luna got together about the same time Draco and I did," Ginny explained. "They have two children, a boy, Ron Jr., now five, and a girl, Molly, now three." All at once, the magnitude of what had happened hit her, and she needed to get away from them to think things through. "Sorry, but I've got to go ...."

Harry and Hermione nodded, allowing her to leave, then turned back apprehensively to McGonagall, questioning her with their eyes. What was going to happen now that Ginny knew they were back and the reason why they had spread the rumour of their deaths and left for America so suddenly? They naturally hoped for the best but couldn't count on it...nor would they blame her if she and all the others ended up hating them for all they had put everyone through over the last ten years. However, neither of them could say for sure until they saw her again and surmised what her attitude was at that point in time.

## The Repercussions Begin

### Chapter 2 of 16

The repercussions of Harry and Hermione's impulsive actions begin to manifest themselves upon Ginny's reporting their return to the *Daily Prophet*.

### Chapter 2 The Repercussions Begin

They found out sooner than they'd expected...in the very next day's edition of the *Daily Prophet*, in fact. From what Harry understood, it was the first sold-out run of a mainstream Wizarding newspaper since *The Quibbler* had run his first-hand account of Voldemort's rebirth. The only one he could think of who might have contacted them was Ginny, and he was thankful to see that she had gone to Kingsley Shacklebolt, who was always fair and up-front in his reporting. But a screaming headline was still a screaming headline, no matter how he looked at it, even though the article itself was short:

#### *HARRY POTTER AND HERMIONE GRANGER SEEN ALIVE*

*By Kingsley Shacklebolt, Staff Writer*

*Harry Potter and Hermione Granger are not dead, as has long been assumed. The two recently showed up alive at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to meet with Headmistress Minerva McGonagall regarding teaching positions, reports Potter's ex-fiancée, Ginevra Weasley, Charms professor at the school. It turns out that Potter and Granger married shortly after their purported deaths, had two daughters, and have been quietly living in America for the last ten years. The pair purposely spread the rumour that they had been killed in the Final Battle, reportedly in order to start a totally new life away from all they'd ever known.*

A subtitle read *Charms Professor Ginevra Weasley Reportedly Very Upset At Their Return* and yet another article mentioned Draco's reaction to same. *Malfoy Enterprises CEO Former Husband of Hogwarts Charms Professor; Married Six Months After Potter's Supposed Death. Divorce Finalised Last Year.*

Even at that, the poll Kingsley had asked people to take giving their opinion on the matter was most disturbing ... the vast majority were very displeased with Harry and Hermione's actions and believed that they should not be allowed to remain British citizens, arguing that it reflected poorly on all of Wizarding Britain. At the very least, the public believed that they should be openly ostracised when and wherever possible. The idea of either of them teaching at Hogwarts was likewise not well-received, and some parents even threatened to pull their children out of the school, but McGonagall refused to back down, declaring that they were good teachers and she was going to keep them on.

Just the same, none of this boded well for Harry and his adopted family, not to mention the Order, if only for the fact that his friends and some of his adopted family were in it. What had *they* thought of the article? He had been unable to pin down Ginny to find out, so he bravely attempted to visit the Burrow. However, he was not allowed inside ... and the only words he'd heard from Molly were "I'm sorry, Harry, but we have nothing to say to you," before she had closed the door in his face. He then went to the Ministry of Magic, where Arthur Weasley had been promoted to the Head of Magical Law Enforcement, but the reception there wasn't much warmer, although Arthur was at least willing to speak with him, albeit briefly.

"I don't know what more I can tell you than what my wife already has, Harry. We are very hurt, disturbed, and displeased with your and your wife's conduct and no longer wish to be associated with either of you. We also warned you long ago what would happen if you ever hurt our daughter in any way, yet you still lied to her, made a fool of her, left her behind, and spread untrue rumours of your demise in order to run off with Ms. Granger when you had promised marriage to Ginny."

"It is for this reason that I request you no longer attempt to speak with any of us and that includes Ginny and Ron. He has finally managed to get his life straightened out after a tough bout with alcoholism and heartbreak, and I don't want you or Ms. Granger to disturb him. Should either of you attempt to do so, I shall be forced to use every ounce of influence I have to see that you are punished to the fullest extent of wizarding law for criminal harassment. It is hard for us to understand just what changed you, what made you do such a thing to all of us. We loved you like our own, gave you the hospitality of our home, our love and affection...yet you threw it all away ... and for what? Now, if you would please leave, I have work to do. Good day."

"Arthur, please listen to me. We...I...never meant to hurt anyone, least of all any of you," Harry tried to protest. "Why won't you give me a chance to explain?"

"It's 'Mr. Weasley' to you ... and as far as we're concerned, you've already explained yourselves all too clearly. Now, as I said, please leave before I have you forcibly removed."

Harry had never heard Arthur Weasley's voice so cold, and he knew what 'forcibly removed' meant. Reluctantly, he stood up and headed for the door. At the last possible second, Harry turned and spoke. "Even if you don't believe anything else, believe this: I'm not proud of what I've done, and I am deeply and most profoundly sorry for causing you and your family pain. I also intend to do everything in my power to prove that fact to you. But you must allow me to make the attempt. Otherwise, you're no better than you believe I am."

Arthur didn't react, and Harry couldn't be sure he'd gotten through to him but he couldn't stay any longer without risking forced expulsion from the Ministry premises. He was unable to Apparate until he got out of the building, checking at the nearest actual phone box for a listing for Ron and Luna Weasley. Even if he couldn't get to Ron, perhaps Luna would be willing to speak with him. He noted the number and called it immediately, hoping Ron wouldn't be the one to answer, but deciding if he did, Harry would disguise his voice and claim it was a wrong number or something. Fortunately, he heard a female voice on the other end.

"Luna? It's Harry. Can I meet with you somewhere? I need to talk to you."

"I don't know, Harry. I'm here alone with the children. Ron's at work now and gets off within an hour or so. I prefer to be here to greet him."

"Bring them along, then," he suggested. "I need to see you, to try to explain things."

"Tell you what ... how about tomorrow, just after the children go to preschool and Ron goes to work. Say, ten o'clock at the Three Broomsticks?"

"Fine. I'll be there." Hopefully things were looking up, but Harry couldn't count on it. That would depend on the outcome of his meeting with Luna who was virtually the only person who had talked to him in even a remotely friendly way since his return, aside from McGonagall. "Just the same, don't be surprised if you don't recognise me right off. I'm not exactly the most popular person in the Wizarding world right now, so I feel it's safest if I come in disguise."

"Just let me know what to expect," Luna said and Harry told her.

"See you then." With that, they hung up and Harry made tentative plans about what he wanted to discuss with her the following day. Even at that, there was no guarantee anything would come of it, but he had to try, to do his best to prove that he was sincere in his remorse and repentance. Maybe he would even tell Luna about his marital problems over the last six months and tell her to feel free to report it to the papers if she chose, that she had his full knowledge and permission to do so.

Of course, that would likely get him in Dutch with Hermione, but that was a chance he would have to take. Maybe then he could finally get her to sit down with him and discuss their problems and see if there was anything they could do to solve them, but if they couldn't, to make plans for a divorce and custody of the girls. Then he could move out into his own quarters and take the girls with him since leaving them at the Burrow was no longer an option. Maybe Luna would even be willing to look after them while he and Ron were working; he'd have to see what she said on that score tomorrow.

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Harry arrived at the Three Broomsticks half an hour early, commandeering a secluded table for himself and Luna. When she arrived, he was glad to see that her blonde hair was shorter and she had dispensed with the butterbeer cork necklace and radish earrings. Instead, they had been replaced with a dainty little gold and diamond necklace and matching earrings, and her outfit was a chic pale blue pantsuit with a lacy top and matching strappy sandals. He figured it best to approach her first, so as little attention as possible was called to them.

"Luna? It's me," Harry said with a smile. "Come this way. I have a table for us."

"Harry, you've certainly changed," she was unable to help commenting. "I hardly recognised you," she opined when they seated themselves at the table. "Especially with the brown contacts, the beard, and all."

"Ten years will do that to you," he remarked. "I hope you and Ron are doing well."

"We're happy together, if that's what you mean. Or at least as happy as one can be under the circumstances. Ron still hasn't gotten over you running off with Hermione, and I doubt he ever will."

"Then he would be pleased to know that we've been having problems the last six months and I am seriously contemplating divorce. Hermione has already had one affair; that is the main reason I made the decision to return to England, to break up that relationship. I've not been able to persuade her to discuss options, and if necessary, I may have to magically 'pin her down' in order to get her to do so."

In spite of herself, Luna was unable to help feeling nervous at the prospect of Hermione being free. How did she know she wouldn't begin pursuing Ron again, uncaring of the fact that he was married with a family? "Just the same, Harry, I can't understand why you would run out on all of us without a word, leaving everyone who ever loved you behind, much less start a rumour that you'd been killed when you were really still alive. Have you any idea what that did to the Weasleys, to the Order ... but most of all to Ginny and Ron?"

"I'm not proud of my actions, Luna. Be assured of that. I now realise it was the wrong thing to do and we did it for the wrong reasons. But I can't get anyone to listen to me. You're the only person outside of Hogwarts who's bothered to give me the time of day since I got back."

"You've got to try to see it from their perspective," Luna replied after Harry had recounted his experience with Arthur Weasley. "After all they did for you, all the love and family life they gave you, you still basically ran out on them without a word. Not to mention you ran out on Ginny herself. Of all people, you should know how protective they are of her, and it's dangerous to cross any one of the Weasleys, let alone the whole group. You know their tempers, being redheads and all."

"And Ron ... you know how he loved Hermione. Still does, in fact. There have been times that I know he's thinking of her, even in our most intimate moments, but I still love him and am doing the best I can to be a good wife to him as well as a loving mother to our children. It's unrealistic to expect the Weasleys to welcome you back with open arms after the way you left, especially after spreading the story of your deaths. How can you possibly expect them to blithely accept any explanations you decide to give and jump for joy at your return as if no time has gone by and a lot of water hasn't gone under the bridge?"

"Arthur warned me not to try to contact Ron, but I assure you, Luna, I never stopped caring about him. We were best friends for six years; I can't just let that slip away without trying to get it back again. Do you think you could talk to him about it?"

Luna looked troubled. "I don't know, Harry. I'd like to, but, as you may or may not know, he's just come out of a long, tough drying-out at the St. Mungo's Alcoholic Rehab clinic and is frankly still getting counseling for his depression. He even takes antidepressants, which I have to monitor so he doesn't overdose. If I even mention your name, it could likely send him right back to square one, and I don't think you want to be responsible for that, not on top of everything else."

"Well, if nothing else, do you think you could talk to Molly about it? I couldn't get anything out of her. She wouldn't even let me in the house."

"I can try, because she likes me, but can't make any guarantees. You and Hermione are still pretty sensitive subjects around the Burrow, as I think you can well understand. Ginny leaves her children there when she's at work and they're not in school, as I sometimes leave mine, and Molly dotes on all of them."

"I have two girls myself. Which reminds me...I'm going to need someone to look after them while I'm at work, especially if 'Mione and I do split up. Do you think you could do it? They're nine years old, a bit older than your two. You don't have to say they're mine, of course, just that they're children of a friend of yours with no other child care options who asked you to look after them."

"That depends. What do they look like?"

"One looks like me and the other looks like 'Mione."

Luna's frown deepened.

"Don't worry. If necessary, we'll disguise the girls too."

"I don't know, Harry. Even if the girls are disguised, there's still a chance that Ron would make the connection and that could ultimately prove just as devastating."

"Luna, if you don't want to do it, just say so. I won't force you, but I do need help. I can't leave them alone, and their school gets out before I get off work. Even if it's just for a couple of hours, I'd really appreciate it ... and I'd pay you. They're good girls; they won't give you any trouble."

"That's not the issue. I'm just trying to think of my husband's welfare. Let me think it over and get back to you, okay?"

Harry sighed, knowing that this was probably the closest thing to a promise he was going to get under the circumstances. "All right. What does your owl look like?"

"Ron's given me his little one, Pigwidgeon, to use for messages while he's away. Just look for him."

"All right. I'd better go now. I've got a class in half an hour. Send Pig to either Hogwarts or to my home with your answer, okay? And thank you for meeting me."

"Thank you for asking, Harry. And I want you to know that you still have at least one friend here, even if I don't approve of what you did, mainly for Ron's sake. But I've always believed in giving people second chances, just like Dumbledore. And I happen to know that despite their hurt and anger, the Weasleys do still love you. They just need time to come around. But don't pressure them...especially not Ginny."

"I'll try not to. That's all I can promise. And I do hope you're right, because if I lose 'Mione, which is a distinct possibility, they'll be all I have left, aside from my girls." As Luna stood up to take her leave, Harry caught her hand and kissed it. "Thanks again."

"I'll owl you soon, Harry," Luna promised, then turned and was gone. A short time later, Harry left the pub himself and stepped outside to Apparate to the gates of Hogwarts where he would have to show his teaching credentials in order to be admitted. Upon reaching the Defence classroom, he got the shrunken lesson books from his pocket and re-expanded them to normal size. A few minutes after his arrival, students began to file in, and his first full day as a Hogwarts instructor had begun.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following day, after he'd finished his teaching for the day, Harry decided to try and see Draco. The task was not one he was looking forward to, but it was something he felt he had to do, if there was to be any chance whatsoever of his getting through to Ginny in the near future.

Planning the visit reminded him of something Ginny had said, explaining that Draco's dislike of him had escalated to the point where merely seeing his face or hearing his name made him want to cast an Unforgivable Curse, and not just one but all of them, preferably one after the other, working up to the *Avada Kedavra*. And his dislike of Hermione wasn't much better, from what Harry understood.

But Harry had to at least try to tell his side of the story, even if there was no guarantee that Draco would listen. He flew to the Malfoy place of business and announced himself, recalling that Draco was now CEO of the company his father, Lucius, had founded and the profits of which were the basis of the vast Malfoy fortune. Harry had heard that Lucius died in Azkaban a year before, and Draco, as Lucius's only son and heir, had inherited the whole shebang. In spite of himself, Harry had to admit that Draco was showing every bit of his father's business savvy.

The coolly elegant secretary outside the executive offices looked up at Harry disdainfully. "Mr. Malfoy requires an appointment made well in advance. Since his father's death and the breakup of his marriage last year, he has been very busy reorganising the business as well as his personal life, and consequently, has little time for anyone who comes simply to harass him. He has much better things to do."

Harry was tempted to simply Apparate into the office, but didn't put it past Draco to put up anti-Apparition wards preventing unwelcome intruders, which probably included himself, from gaining access to his private office.

"I simply wish to speak privately with him. Renew old acquaintances, you might say. In addition, his former wife was once a ... close friend of mine."

The secretary had just opened her mouth to speak again when the door to the executive suite opened and revealed a tall, handsome, well-built blond man now in his late twenties. Draco Lucius Malfoy was dressed in an impeccably tailored business suit covered by expensive formal robes, looking every bit the corporate executive. His face darkened upon recognising Harry, his grey-blue eyes as cold as ice.

"What the bloody hell are *you* doing here, Potter? I thought you were still living a fairy-tale life with your beloved Mudblood, the one you made a fool of Ginny for. Well, I'm not interested in anything you have to say. Your actions regarding her are beneath contempt. Not even I would stoop so low." Draco seemed to murmur an incantation, then ushered Harry into his office. "However, I know you well enough to know that you won't stop harassing me until I speak to you, so I'll grant you two hours to make your case to me ... but not a moment more!"

"That's all I ask," Harry returned coolly.

"Then come on in."

The door closed behind them. Draco gestured to the single chair in front of his desk, and Harry seated himself as Draco levitated two shot glasses onto the desk, one in front of himself and the other in front of Harry, followed by a bottle of Ogden's Firewhisky, pouring each of them a shot. "Don't worry. It's not spiked with anything, although I can't say I wasn't tempted." Draco took a drink, then sighed and leaned forward in his plush chair to face Harry full-on.

Harry couldn't help staring at pictures of a smiling Ginny dressed in a green velvet gown, sitting on a plush sofa, her arms around two beautiful blond boys about nine years of age who looked to be identical twins...miniatures of Draco, in fact. Draco smiled upon noting this. "I bet you wish they were yours, don't you, Potter? Well, they're not and never will be. You saw to that yourself. Which reminds me ... did you know that Ginny was pregnant when you took off ten years ago?"

"That's why she married me, in fact...to give her daughter a father who would be there for her, not a yellow-bellied coward who didn't even have the decency to face her mum and tell her the truth or admit that shagging the Mudblood was far more important to him than staying with her mum and raising her. In fact, I can't help but wonder how your daughter would feel if she knew that. She'd hate you as you deserve, and you would only have yourself to blame. However, it's me she calls 'Father,' and if I have my way, that's the way it'll stay. You don't deserve this child and you don't deserve Ginny. Not now, not ever."

Harry was effectively rendered speechless for several minutes. Draco correctly read Harry's reaction as confirmation that this was all news to him. "No, I can see you didn't know. And don't you dare confront Ginny about this. You've done enough to her; she deserves some peace in her life. Ginny and I still keep in touch, and if you harass her or the child in any way, she'll tell me and what'll happen to you won't bear repeating in polite company."

"Unfortunately she'll probably give me hell if she ever learns that I told you, especially since I promised her I wouldn't should you ever show up again. Nevertheless, I can't help believing that you deserve the punishment of knowing *about* your child but never truly knowing her. I'll even be generous enough to show you a picture of her ... Here." Draco reached for another framed picture on the opposite side of his desk which Harry had not noticed before and handed it to him.

Harry was stunned once again, even though he could only surmise that the reason Draco was being so open with him was to show him exactly what he had so willingly given up ten years ago. One of the most beautiful little girls he'd ever seen was in the picture before him, with silky black hair down to her shoulders and bright green eyes but Ginny's lips and nose. What's more, the picture was even autographed...by Ginny, no doubt, because Harry recognised her handwriting...but it was as if the child had told her what to write. *To Daddy Draco ... With all my love, Lily Rose Malfoy.*

"Yes, Potter, I gave the girl my name. It's not her fault she has such an arrogant prat for a father, so I'm not holding her heritage against her. As for me, your so-called matchmaking worked...at least at first. However, the marriage started to deteriorate shortly after the boys were born, mainly because that was when I realised that I had been nothing but a rebound for her right from the start, that she'd never stopped loving you, no matter what you've done to her, and this knowledge ultimately drove me back to my old flame, Pansy Parkinson. The divorce was final a year ago this week. Ginny grants me visitation rights to see my boys and we're still friends, after a fashion, but that's it.

"Damn you, Potter. Why did you ever decide to come back? I thought I was finally rid of you...that your flying off into the sunset with your Mudblood was the last I'd ever see of you. Oh yes, I saw you and the Mudblood hovering above us on your broom as I attempted to comfort Ginny, although I never said anything to her about it. Not then, anyway. She had enough pain to deal with without that. What's more, I truly hope that the two of you are very pleased with yourselves, the way you've mucked up everyone's lives, including your own.

"Too bad your friends in America don't know what you're really like. If they did, they'd hate you as much as I do as the entire Wizarding world does and it wouldn't surprise me if Ginny doesn't hit both you and the Mudblood with that Bat-Bogey thing of hers one of these days. It would certainly be more than you deserve ... no, *less* than you deserve, for that matter. Even now, you're lucky that my regard for Ginny and young Lily, not to mention my public image, are the only things preventing me from mopping up Hogsmeade with the likes of you and the Mudblood. But neither of you are worth soiling my hands on!"

"Are you quite finished, Malfoy?" Harry shot back. Draco was stunned into silence, so Harry took the chance to relate the story of the last ten years as he saw it...his marriage to Hermione, the birth of their twin girls, Lily and Helen, his work as an Unspeakable and Hermione's as a Transfiguration professor both in Boston, where they'd settled, and in Salem, not far from where the infamous witch trials had taken place in the 17th century. It was her work, in fact, that had ultimately driven them apart and brought them back to Britain to teach at Hogwarts.

"So the fairy tale's over now, then? And now you've come back, thinking you can worm your way back into everyone's good graces. Well, good luck, Potter. You'll need it! Though if Ginny has any sense, she'll not have anything further to do with you."

Malfoy took a last swallow of Firewhisky, then set his glass down to stare icy grey-blue daggers at his long-time antagonist. "I also wouldn't try to set foot in the Burrow if I were you, Potter. I made some ... discreet inquiries and found out what you'd done, where you'd gone, and once Ginny found out, she told her entire family, and I believe I'm more welcome there now than you or the Mudblood, despite my breakup with her. It's amazing, the positive talent you have for not only alienating the very people who once loved you as their own, but the entire Wizarding world to boot.

"Just the same, I did the best I could to replace you, loving Ginny as best I knew how, but all too often I heard her call your name at the height of our joinings ... not to mention looking at old pictures of the two of you together, particularly one of you snogging that you once autographed. Does this ring a bell, Potter? 'To the only girl I'll ever want to kiss. All my love, Harry.' Or this: 'To My Precious Ginny the only girl I'll ever love. Your Harry.' She has many, by the way; saved every one you ever gave her. I caught her many times crying over them upon coming home from work, if not during the times we were still ... cohabiting, as it were."

As much as he hated showing weakness, Harry couldn't help but close his eyes in pain, a reaction which wasn't lost on Draco, who smiled smugly as he looked up from his glass. Harry couldn't meet his eyes; instead, he simply asked, "May I?" when Draco didn't offer him another shot. Draco nodded, and Harry levitated the bottle over the glass, uncorked it, poured it, set it back down, and re-corked it. In spite of himself, Draco was impressed at this bit of wandless magic and even said as much.

"Impressive, Potter. Too bad you aren't nearly as adept in handling women. You haven't any idea how many times I wanted to tell Ginny that I knew you and the Mudblood were still alive before I finally did, to tell her that I'd seen you both essentially smirking from your aerial perch, thinking you had neatly disposed of two of the three most likely to cramp your style, as Muggles say." Draco's handsome features then twisted, as if he had a bad taste in his mouth or was simply sneering. He then looked up and said, "Your two hours are up, Potter. Now, if you would kindly never darken my door again, it would be very much appreciated. I must get back to work now. You can see yourself out."

Harry stood up, nodded in his reluctant host's direction after finishing his second drink, then walked out the door before turning around to see that which resembled a forcefield across the still-open door. He looked at the secretary and she simply said, "The anti-Apparition wards have gone back up. Good day," before going back to work, ignoring Harry as if he was not there.

Harry then decided to go back home, such as it was. He would ordinarily have gone somewhere else to think things out and mull over what he had learned, but there wasn't time, at least not at the moment. When he walked in, Hermione's eyes were sharp as tacks, stabbing right through him as she stood there, carrying all her Transfiguration gear and lesson books. "Harry! What took you so long? I've got to get to class! The girls are due home from school at almost any moment, and I don't want them to come home to an empty house."

"I had an important errand and it took longer than I expected. Sorry." He didn't elaborate, because he knew how she felt about Draco.

Harry watched Hermione Disapparate and found himself alone...in more ways than one. He also knew that he would be thinking hard about what Draco had said, particularly of the heretofore unknown daughter that he, Harry, had with Ginny and the fact that despite his leaving her, despite his lying, cheating, and making a fool of her, Ginny still loved him and had saved everything he had ever given her. But at this point, he was sure she'd never admit to anything Draco said because she was afraid that Harry would take the girl away if he ever found out about her and that she'd never see her again. It was painful enough to have lost him to her erstwhile best friend without that.

It was too bad that his conscience chose this particular moment to kick in, but it did, and now that it had, Harry felt sure it was never going to leave him alone, not ever again. He didn't like to think that Malfoy could ever be right about anything, but in this case, he was definitely in a position to know ... or rather, he had been. Harry finally had to admit that Draco was closer to the truth about himself and Hermione than Harry had ever been in his life.

But for the moment, at least, Harry was spared dwelling on his immediate problems by the arrival of Lily, who looked like him, and Helen, who looked like her mother in miniature.

"Daddy!" they both called, one of them slamming the door behind them. "Where are you?"

"In here, my pets," Harry replied, opening his arms to receive his girls, who almost literally flew into them and hugged the stuffing out of him until he was breathless. "How was your day?"

"Fine, Daddy." Helen then began to recount the details of the day she and Lily had experienced. "Where's Mummy?"

"She had to go to work. She'll be back as soon as she can."

"Why does she work so much, Daddy? Doesn't she like us anymore?" Lily piped up with a sad note in her little-girl voice.

"Oh, I'm sure she still loves both of you, my darlings. She's just busy." Harry couldn't tell his child the real reason he believed Hermione was doing this, but couldn't help

thinking, *She cheated, and now she can't face us.*

"But why is she avoiding us?"

"Couldn't say, Helen." Even as he said that, Harry was convinced that he knew *precisely* why.

But the ever-perceptive child, seeing the look in her father's eyes, was not fooled. "But that's silly, Daddy! How could she possibly want to leave us?"

Harry truly wished he could answer her, but couldn't, just hugged his beloved girls and kissed the tops of their heads.

"If I was old enough and you weren't my Daddy, I'd marry you in a minute!" Helen declared.

"Thank you, love. Makes me feel a lot better. Now you'd better freshen up. I'm getting ready to start supper. What would you like?"

They dashed upstairs after telling him while Harry headed for the kitchen to fix their supper, wishing he knew just what had happened to his and Hermione's marriage, where their love had gone, how it could have changed to icy indifference almost literally overnight. He hadn't touched her in weeks; she hadn't allowed it, and Harry had never been one to force the issue where sex was concerned, had never needed to, at least not before this.

She had not only allowed her career to come between them, she had welcomed it, since it gave her a perfect excuse to stay away from him although he could still recall times when it would have been all but impossible to pry them apart. What had happened to that once deep, tenderly passionate love he and his wife had once shared...a feeling that they had been sure would last throughout eternity? Unfortunately, eternity had only lasted ten years.

Hermione always lectured him on the evils of procrastination but was now hypocritically avoiding discussing the issue of their rapidly crumbling marriage like the plague. If he couldn't manage to pin her down soon, he would literally have to use magic to keep her in one place long enough to speak to her. And in the event of divorce, he also intended to file for custody of Lily and Helen, since he spent more time with them and did more for them than she did, especially these last six months.

He had considered offering joint custody, but the way Hermione had been lately, it wouldn't be good for the girls, nor would it do Hermione much good. One less burden, she would most likely think, for Harry to take them off her hands. He was still undecided about visitation rights at this point even as he began fixing supper, his hands keeping busy on one thing even as his mind was on other things, including what he had learned earlier today.

His only alternative upon divorcing Hermione was returning to Ginny, if he could. Considering what he had done to her, though, Harry had to consider the distinct possibility that she would sooner hit him with a Bat-Bogey Hex between the eyes than take him back, much less allow him to lay a hand on her again, and he couldn't blame her. All he could ask for was another chance to prove himself sincere, even if he had to take Veritaserum in order to convince her.

He would have to make a visit to Ginny to do his best to plead his case and at least try to make amends for all he'd put everyone through. Then maybe he could attempt to see Moony. For the time being, though, he had to figure a way to get at least one of the Weasleys other than Luna to speak to him again. Meanwhile, it was time to feed his girls.

## Attempts at Reconciliation

### Chapter 3 of 16

Harry approaches Ginny and they have a long talk about the last ten years ... but it doesn't end well. Later on Hermione approaches her and they manage to come to an amicable truce.

### Chapter 3 Attempts at Reconciliation

It was two days later that Harry managed to corner Ginny in her Charms classroom, having almost literally bent over backwards in order to time it so that she wouldn't have anything else to do and, consequently, would have time to talk to him whether she chose to admit it or not. He knocked quietly at her half-open classroom door; her head lifted at the sound.

"Yes?"

"Ginny? It's Harry. Can I speak to you?"

Ginny stiffened upon hearing his voice. If she'd had any idea that Harry would be visiting, she would have placed a Locking Charm on the door. As it was, she was stuck.

"Come on in. I have some time between classes. What's on your mind?"

"The last ten years."

"What about them?"

"Specifically, what happened six months after I supposedly died."

"You married Hermione."

"Besides that."

"What is there besides that?" she asked suspiciously, her eyes narrowing. "Just what are you getting at, Harry?"

"I understand that you were pregnant ... with my child," he blurted out before he could stop himself.

"Who told you that?" she demanded. Before Harry could answer, she spoke again. "Draco. Damn him! I swear, I'm going to hex my boneheaded ex-husband right into the middle of next year! He promised me he wouldn't tell you!"

"Then it's true? You *were* pregnant?"

"I was," Ginny reluctantly admitted. "But what could it possibly matter to you? And even if you had known, it probably wouldn't have made an ounce of difference. You had



more *important* things to worry about, after all...such as running off to America with Hermione. You weren't about to concern yourself with mundane things like fatherhood. And even if I'd been inclined to tell you, you weren't around to tell! I imagine he even showed you a picture of her?"

"Yes," Harry revealed. "She looks just like me. He also made a point of mentioning that he'd given her his name, seeming to think it a perfect way to get back at me, to throw it in my face that my daughter called him 'Father' instead of me. Of course, it shouldn't surprise me. It's just what Draco would do in order to try and get a rise out of me." Harry came up to her desk, placed his hands on it, then leaned down so that their faces were only inches apart. "You *had* intended to tell me you were pregnant if I'd come back, hadn't you?"

"Yes," Ginny reluctantly replied, her heart pounding wildly in spite of herself at Harry's nearness. Damn him! Why did he have to still look so good, still have such a gorgeous physique, beautiful green eyes, and a smile that could melt chocolate at twenty paces, not to mention the sexiest beard and mustache she'd ever seen?

"Of course, being what he is, I don't imagine that Draco would ever allow me to have a relationship with her, if only as a ... friend of her parents."

"Probably not," Ginny admitted. "Not unless I told him otherwise."

Harry's eyes widened. "Since when do you have that much influence over him?"

"Since I bore him twin boys," she stated matter-of-factly. "Of course, considering what you and Hermione have done to me, why should I do you any favours? How do I know you won't try to take her away from me the first chance you get?"

"Because I already have two girls. They're enough of a handful without adding another one."

"Yes, I imagine 'Mione would have something to say about that."

"Not very much, actually. The most she ever did for the girls was give birth to them. I've done the majority of child care. She wouldn't even breast-feed them. I had to feed them with bottles, and let me tell you, that was some trick, trying to feed two hungry, screaming babies with a wife away at work! It was lucky that I had enough money from Mum and Dad to live on without working because I had to devote myself totally to the care of the girls. 'Mione didn't take a real interest in them until they were around two."

The contempt in his voice prompted Ginny to remark, "I take it you didn't like that."

"When she puts work before family life, no, I don't. Besides, shortly before we returned, she was doing ... more than work, actually. More accurately, she was having an affair."

Ginny's eyes widened with a mixture of astonishment and disbelief. "Having an affair? That doesn't sound like the Hermione I know."

"I assure you, it's true. I have no reason to lie to you."

*Oh, don't you?* Ginny couldn't help thinking. *It's a great way to get me to feel sorry for you, then you worm your way into my good graces...and my bed...again. Well, I see through your scheme, Mister. It won't work!*

"Our marriage has been going downhill for the last six months. The main reason I decided to come back was to make her break off her affair."

"Of course, that isn't necessarily going to stop her from having an affair with somebody here if she so chooses," Ginny pointed out.

"I know. But the least she can do is wait until we're divorced before doing it and even then, doing it discreetly so the girls aren't traumatised by it."

Ginny could scarcely believe her ears. "You're ... contemplating divorce?"

"Yes. But I can't seem to pin her down long enough so we can discuss terms. Sometimes I'm tempted to just go ahead and file and let the chips fall where they may. Maybe *that* would get her attention."

"But that might not be good for your girls," Ginny returned.

"No, it wouldn't, but better that than living in a broken home."

"Strange how something supposedly so 'eternal' only lasted ten years. Could it actually be that you threw everything you ever loved away for the wrong reasons, married for the wrong reasons?"

"Quite possible," he reluctantly admitted. "But you know me ... always slow on the uptake."

"Yes, but this time it not only affected you, but me, Ron, our family and the entire wizarding world! And are you now trying to tell me that you're sorry you did it?"

"Would you believe me if I said I was?" Harry's voice was almost a purr, reminiscent of the time he had sweet-talked her just before they had fallen into bed and shagged like rabbits; that night had engendered her precious Lily-flower, who looked so like her father it was painful just to look at her sometimes. But even as much as she wanted him, Ginny wasn't about to allow that to happen. Not before she gave Harry a taste of what it had been like for her without him all these years ... and for Ron, knowing the girl he loved most belonged to someone else, and not just any someone else, but his best friend. Or at least someone who *had been* his best friend.

"Let's say I'd be more inclined to believe it if you'd been up-front about it from the beginning."

"I'm afraid my ... hormones just got the better of me."

"Even though you knew what was waiting for you at home? No. It had to be more than that," Ginny almost scoffed. "You don't generally take such drastic steps unless there's more than hormones at work ... or unless you believe there's more than hormones at work."

"No, I'm afraid it was simply hormones at work. Very strong hormones, I admit, but hormones nonetheless."

"A bout with hormones that lasted ten years. That has to be a record," Ginny mused. She noticed that Harry had moved in closer. A few steps more and he would be able to reach out and touch her, and Ginny wasn't about to go for that. "Oh, no, you don't, Harry! Don't come near me. Don't touch me. Not unless you want me to hex you into next year! You no longer have the right. You willingly threw it away, remember ... and for what? If you expect me to associate with you on anything more than a professional basis, it's going to be on *my* terms. You don't call the shots anymore. *I* will be in charge. *Me*, Ginny Weasley! If you can't handle that, I suggest you leave now."

"We were trying to make it easier on you!" he protested.

"By leading me on, making me believe you wanted to marry me, while all the time you and Hermione planned to run off together after starting a rumour that you'd been killed? By lying, two-timing, and making a fool out of not only me but my entire family, literally throwing away everything we'd ever given you? How is that supposed to make it easier?" Ginny's eyes began to shoot sparks, her anger beginning to rise.

"You make it sound worse than it is."

"Oh, really. I suppose you even think it's something that every young witch and wizard should aspire to!"

"I never said that."

"Oh, of *course* not," Ginny threw back. "But then, you don't have to because your actions positively scream it! Which reminds me ... I assume Draco also told you that we divorced last year. It was fine for a while, then I found out he was seeing someone else. He said he loved her and didn't believe I'd ever truly loved him, no matter what I claimed. So I let him go. It was the kindest thing to do, and he's back with Pansy now. So much for your matchmaking. He loves our boys, though, so I allow him visitation rights. And we're friends, but that's it. I've even dropped his name and gone back to 'Weasley,' although the boys will keep his name."

Harry nodded, freezing in place for the moment.

"He told me as much. And not only that. He also told me that you married him on the rebound because Lily was coming and that you never truly loved him. He said that he'd caught you many times going through pictures of us, including a couple that I'd autographed to you, one of which showed us snogging and another which showed me smiling at you. In essence, he said that you'd never stopped loving me."

"Since when do you believe in 'the gospel according to Draco Malfoy'? You know he's almost congenitally incapable of telling the truth!" she retorted, trying to bluff her way out.

"He wasn't lying," Harry returned quietly but firmly. "I knew it the moment he mentioned those pictures. I remember when I autographed them for you. It was a time when I was so much in love with you that it hurt, and I just couldn't keep quiet about it."

Ginny gave him a hard look. "Are you trying to claim that you still feel that way about me?"

"No ... at least not at this point." *Although that statement is true*, Harry finished in his mind.

"Good thing, because I wouldn't believe you, not after ten years of emotional hell. And problems I would not have had if you two had only done the decent thing and come clean. Problems that *you* caused, Harry! For that matter, I don't know why I'm even speaking to you. And I managed to move on with my life after you left, once I managed to stop crying every night. But I hardly stopped for months. And Ron hardly stopped drinking for months and did his share of crying as well.

"He could have taken out stock in Ogdens, he drank so much of it. It's a wonder we ever managed to dry him out! And now you two have the gall to come crawling back just because your marriage didn't turn out to be all moonlight and roses like you expected and expect us to just drop everything we've been doing for the past decade. To forget the hell you've put us all through and simply take you back into our lives, hearts, and beds as though it never happened!

"And I don't think I need to remind you that although Ron does still love Hermione, after what you two have done, he's not likely to want much to do with either of you, not for a long time to come, especially now that he knows the whole story. I also suggest you not try to meet with him because he's just as likely to hex you into next year as I am. Be proud of yourself because you've basically destroyed your friendship with him by stealing the girl he loved right from under his nose. All he's likely to feel toward either of you right now is bitterness and vengeance."

In the back of Harry's mind that rang a bell; he would have to get home soon in order to intercept Luna's letter. For the moment, though, he had a few more things to say, but Ginny spoke again before he could draw breath for a reply.

"I also suppose the relationship we had meant nothing to you once you got the one you really wanted. I suppose you'd wanted her all along and just amused yourself with me until you could manage to get Ron and me out of the way."

"That's not true," Harry insisted. "I cared deeply for you, you have to know that. You made me happier than I've ever been in my life, allowed me to experience what it was like to truly be loved for myself. How can you possibly expect me...or anyone else...to forget something like that? I can't and I won't."

"All the same, my love wasn't good enough to bring you home to me. How do you think that makes me feel, knowing that the man I loved was such a bloody effing coward? That he'd sooner lie about being dead than face me with the truth?"

"I'm sorry, Gin. Truly I am. I never meant to hurt anyone, least of all you, and never meant to make you feel used. It's just that..."

"Your hormones got the better of you." Ginny held up a hand, biting her lip to keep the tears in her eyes from overflowing. "You know, that's what hurts most of all. You left me, the girl you claimed to love and wanted to marry, threw our whole future away for someone you didn't really love, someone that you simply wanted to shag! No, spare me any further apologies. I hurt enough without them. Now, if you don't mind, I've got a class in fifteen minutes."

"You don't intend to make it easy for me, do you?"

"I'm making it far easier than you deserve. I just simply decided to give you a little taste of your own medicine and see how you like it. Muck things up this time, and you'll bloody well wish you were *really* dead by the time I get through with you! *No one* makes a fool of Ginevra Weasley and gets away with it, not even the great Harry Potter! Now, as I said earlier, get out of my classroom. I'm expecting my sixth-year students."

Harry moved to stand in the doorway, eyes shooting green daggers at her, although Ginny hardly seemed to feel them. "You haven't heard the last of this, Ginny. I don't give up easily!"

"Neither do I. I suggest you keep that in mind. Now get out! I bloody well don't want to lay eyes on you again until dinner, if then."

Harry continued staring at her but didn't say anything; he simply ducked out the door and was gone.

It was fortunate that Ginny actually had half an hour before her class began rather than the fifteen minutes she'd told Harry. After he left, she dashed into her study, locked her door, and threw herself onto the nearest couch, sobbing in anger and pain. "I hate you, Harry bloody Potter! You lying, two-faced bastard! I hate you for thinking all you needed to do was sweet-talk me and I would fall right back into bed with you! Why did you ever come back? Why? *I hate you! I hate you!*"

But what she hated most of all was the fact that he could still affect her like this, still make her want him almost unbearably, even after ten years. Despite all Harry had put her through, however, Ginny knew that she would go through it all yet again if it meant having him at the end of it. And if this last hour was any indication, the rest of her day wasn't going to get much better.

\* \* \* \* \*

Later that day, Ginny went back to her Hogwarts flat for some rest. She had just showered and donned her dressing gown when she heard the knock on her door. Upon opening it, she was strongly tempted to slam it shut again, for a ten-years-old Hermione Granger-Potter stood on her doorstep. Ginny's blood almost literally boiled, she was so angry. How dare Hermione come here and rub her nose in it, show her face after the way she and Harry had lied, cheated, and made a fool of everyone who ever loved them?

"I have nothing to say to you, Hermione. You might as well just turn around and leave."

"Not until you listen to me."

"What makes you think I give a damn about anything you have to say after what you and Harry did to me? You might as well have cut my heart out!"

"Harry warned me you might react this way. I can't blame you, but that was years ago, Ginny. You were my friend once. How can you simply throw that away?"

"I didn't. *You* did." Ginny's eyes were like blocks of brown ice. "You knew how I felt about Harry, not to mention how Ron felt about you, and you still did it. I should hex you into the next century instead of saying another word to you!"

"Ginny, please believe me. Believe *us*. We never meant to hurt you, any of you!"

"You should have thought of that before you ran off with the man I loved and spread the rumour that you were dead in order to cover your tracks!" Ginny smiled bitterly. "Quite a neat trick, actually. The perfect way to get rid of the three albatrosses around your necks ... me, Ron, and Draco ... all in one fell swoop. Everyone that might conceivably cramp your style or get in the way of your shagging each other like rabbits. Well, I certainly hope you've enjoyed yourselves! And incidentally, I divorced Draco last year."

"It wasn't like that, Ginny. I loved Harry, too, or at least I thought I did at the time. Surely you can understand that. We truly thought that what we were doing was best for all concerned."

Ginny was all ready with a bitter retort when something Hermione had said earlier finally registered. "You ... *onlythought* you loved him?"

Hermione reluctantly nodded.

"That's even worse than doing it because you really did love him. You were basically just using him then, and I know Harry well enough to know that *hates* being used or manipulated, being anybody's pawn or puppet! And he's got to realise it by now. Whatever else he is, Harry's not stupid, even though he acts that way sometimes. So you're telling me that your marriage is essentially over?"

"Yes. In fact, I...I had an affair not too long ago. I tried to cover it up, claim it was all extra work, but Harry saw through it. That was the main reason we decided to pull up stakes and come back here. But things have been deteriorating between us for the last six months. For that matter, I fully expect him to ask me for a divorce at some point in the not-too-distant future, and considering the way I've treated him, not to mention our girls, lately, I wouldn't blame him if he did ... and asked for custody of the girls. But I'm so ashamed of what I did...the affair, I mean...that I can't bring myself to face him. I just avoid him at every opportunity, and when I can't, I leave just as soon as I can after that, making sure he doesn't get a chance to speak to me at any length. What's more, I'm sure both he and the girls have noticed."

"You can't keep running forever. It isn't fair to either of you. And it seems totally out of character for you to be so afraid now. Next to Harry, you've always been the bravest person I know. Think about it. I can't say it'll be easy to forgive either of you, but if you have gumption enough to face down Draco at his worst, I feel sure you can face Harry. I know he can be intimidating sometimes ... that bloody temper of his! I swear, he's got to get it from his mum, or at least Sirius always said he did. But neither of you can move on unless you get your present lives ironed out, and for that, you've got to talk with him and take your chances, decide just what you intend to do regarding your marriage and children. Don't wait. Talk to him. Soon. Then let me know what you decide."

Then the two women did something that Ginny could never have imagined them doing, especially not after she'd learned the truth about Hermione and Harry ... they embraced, and what's more, embraced like the friends they once had been, and with luck, would be again.

## Further Repercussions

### Chapter 4 of 16

Even as Luna agrees to look after Harry's girls, he gets a communication from Remus, but is in for a nasty surprise. In the end he returns to Minerva for advice, and both she and Dumbledore's portrait do all they can to help him.

### Chapter 4 Further Repercussions

Once Harry arrived back home, he found the tiny brown-and-white owl Pigwidgeon sitting on his kitchen windowsill, an envelope in his beak. "Hi, Pig. It's Harry. I've missed you. Been a long time. Let me have the letter now, okay?"

The miniscule owl twittered happily as Harry slipped him a treat, patted his head, then sent him on his way. Harry would use his own owl, Hedwig, to send his reply to Luna. She was beginning to show her age, so he didn't send her on long trips anymore, although she did fine otherwise. His heart ached at the thought of losing his beloved owl one day, but he knew it had to happen sooner or later, so he had best be prepared for it and enjoy her while he could. Harry got himself a cold butterbeer from the fridge and sat down at the kitchen table to read Luna's letter.

*Harry,*

*I took a chance and told Ron what you wanted me to do. Didn't mention any names, of course, and I think it'd be a wise precaution to have the girls disguised, but I should be able to take them for at least a couple of hours on weekdays, between one-thirty and three-thirty, until you get off work. I can even pick them up from school if you'd like. Just tell me which school they go to, where they usually wait for you, and tell the girls what I look like so they'll recognise me.*

*I also suggest that you let the school authorities know that you've authorised me to pick them up so they don't think I'm kidnapping them or anything. And yes, it would be appreciated if you could pay me a bit, say a Galleon or two per week, for looking after them, if only to give me a little pin money so I won't have to pester Ron for any. After all, with two children to raise and only one breadwinner in the family, there isn't always a lot of money left over at the end of the month. You understand, I'm sure.*

*If you don't want to take a chance on stopping by to pick them up, I can bring them home myself via Side-Along Apparition or send them home via the Floo Network. Let me know which means you prefer and thank you for your trust in me. I also hope we can manage to bring you and Ron back together as friends again one day. Meanwhile, I'm here if you need me and I'll keep you up-to-date on Ron's doings. How will that be?*

*Your friend always,*

*Luna Lovegood-Weasley*

Harry sighed in relief after taking a long, cold swig of butterbeer. That was one more weight off his shoulders. Now if he could only get Hermione to sit down and talk to him, they might be able to work something out in regards to their marriage. If not, then it was kindest for all concerned if they just called it quits and went their separate ways. With her working, Harry saw no need to offer her any alimony. She made enough to support herself quite nicely, even without his help.

It was also usually the mother who got custody of any children, but Harry was confident he could show the authorities sufficient proof that he had been the primary caregiver for the girls and thus win custody of Lily and Helen, although if Hermione wanted to see them, he could offer her visitation rights on weekends, their birthday, and Christmas, if not certain other special occasions like school functions which parents were encouraged to attend.

After all, whatever her shortcomings, she was still their mother and they loved her. Meanwhile, he would have to sit down with the girls at the first opportunity and tell them where they would be going after school...at least for a couple of hours, anyway...from this point on, until he got off work. Meanwhile, he had best answer Luna's letter, then owl one to Moony after that, to see if he would be willing to meet and speak with him.

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Luna,

*Good to hear from you so promptly, but then, you always were like that. Glad to hear that Ron's okay with your looking after the girls. And don't worry, they'll be in disguise with a change of eye colour and lightening of hair. The Disguising Charm I'm using is supposed to last four hours, so even if Ron should happen to see them, there shouldn't be a problem. I really appreciate you taking them and will be more than happy to compensate you for their care.*

*As for letting the school authorities know that I've authorised you to pick them up, I've already taken care of it and given them a picture of you. I usually have the girls go to the school office and I pick them up there; I've found it's safest for everyone concerned, including me. I also don't place the Disguising Charm on them until after they've left school. However, I give you leave to do so before Ron arrives home. And the girls know who you are now, so there'll be no problem there.*

*I understand the difficulties of raising children with only one breadwinner, so don't worry your head about that. I'm glad to help in any way I can. I've had my quarters connected to the Floo Network so just send the girls home that way after I've let you know I'm home to receive them. As for Ron, I do hope one day that he and I can be close friends again, and yes, feel free to keep me updated on him. Thanks again for your help. I'll be sending the Galleons via owl post at the end of every week.*

All the best,

Harry

Upon finishing the letter, he found Hedwig perched in her cage sleeping, her head tucked under her wing. "Sorry to wake you, girl, but I have a job for you. Take this to my friend, Luna, and then come right back. I'll have another trip for you as soon as you've rested up." Hedwig hooted sleepily and opened her amber eyes, then nipped Harry's finger affectionately as he carefully removed her from her cage, then thrust the edge of the envelope under her beak. With that, she was gone. He decided to allow her at least half an hour each way; that should give him a bit of time to come up with a letter to Moony.

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It was very difficult to write Moony, especially after ten years of silence, but Harry did the best he could...and could only hope it was good enough. He allowed Hedwig to rest for half an hour upon her return from delivering his answer to Luna's letter, making sure she got a treat and some water before he sent her off again. To Harry's surprise, he received a reply within a couple of hours.

*Harry, it was a surprise, to say the least, to receive your owl post. Yes, I'm willing to meet with you. It'll be interesting to find out what all you've been up to all this time. How does Saturday afternoon around two at the Order HQ in Padfoot's old house sound? Is that convenient for you? If not, let me know and we can reschedule.*

Remus

Harry was somewhat encouraged by the tone of Remus's note, even though he seemed a bit more formal than before. But Harry understood; after all, he couldn't expect someone to automatically resume their former relationship after a decade apart. What mattered was that Moony was willing to meet with him. He would ask his own questions when he saw his surrogate godfather again and hoped it would be possible to make amends to the Order and Moony himself.

Harry scribbled the following reply:

*Glad to hear you're willing to meet with me, Moony. It'll be good to see you again, and I'll be glad to bring you up-to-date. Saturday afternoon at two is fine. I'll see you then.*

Harry

Harry usually spent at least part of Saturday with his girls, but this time, he would have to see if Luna could take them that day too, assuring her in another quick note that he would pay her extra for her trouble for looking after them while he was meeting with Remus and would be most grateful for her help. How could she possibly turn down a chance for extra money? He just hoped the meeting with Moony didn't go any longer than four hours; otherwise the Disguising Charm might wear off and Ron might guess who the girls really belonged to. He was taking a risk with a temporary charm, but at the moment, it was the best he could come up with on short notice.

To Harry's surprise, Remus was waiting outside for him when he arrived and they exchanged friendly, if not affectionate, greetings. Remus looked older, certainly, but much better dressed and fed, mainly due to his marriage to Tonks.

"You've certainly changed, Harry," Remus opined. "But then, ten years will do that to you. I can hardly wait to hear all about what you've been up to since I saw you last."

"As I said, I'll be happy to update you, Moony," Harry replied; Remus seemed to stiffen at the familiar nickname coming from someone he had thought dead for the better part of a decade. It was only last week that Minerva had sent word that Harry and Hermione were alive and teaching at Hogwarts as he once had, Harry in the same capacity as Remus, the Defence position.

Remus was so incensed at Harry for what he and Hermione had done that he was hard-pressed to maintain the friendly façade, but he'd managed harder things and it wouldn't be much longer before he had Harry right where he wanted him, and once he did, he intended to get the answers he sought, whatever he had to do ... even if he had to hang his erstwhile godson by his thumbs!

"Here we are, mate. Have a seat right here." Remus gestured to an overstuffed chair, and Harry seated himself. "Comfortable? Good. Now if you would be so kind as to hand over your wand, we can begin."

Harry gave Remus a funny look. "Why do you want me to hand over my wand?"

"I have my reasons," Remus returned enigmatically. "Now give it to me."

Harry's look deepened but he didn't argue. Remus took the wand and pocketed it. "Thank you. Now just sit right there and relax. We'll be starting in a few minutes."

"Starting what?" Harry was starting to become alarmed. This wasn't like Remus at all. What was going on here?

"Your interrogation," Remus replied, then drew his own wand and said, *Incarcerous*," and Harry found himself bound securely to the chair. He looked up at Remus, green fire in his eyes, but Remus never flinched, giving back every bit as good as he got. He'd never seen Remus's eyes so cold, his countenance so forboding.

"What the bloody hell do you think you're doing?" Harry demanded, but it was as if he hadn't spoken at all because Remus never reacted; just simply sat before him, holding his wand on him like a weapon, and daring him to move even an inch...not that he could!

"All in good time," was his casual reply. "But no more questions now. After this, I will be asking the questions and you'll be answering...and truthfully, too, or else I'll use the *Levicorpus* spell on you and suspend you upside down like your father liked to do with Snape! But if there was any justice, you'd get the *Cruciatius* ... or worse!"

Harry now understood what Moony was getting at, but why couldn't he have been more up-front and told him right from the start what kind of information he was after?

"Harry, how could you and Hermione do such a thing? Ginny and Ron loved you. What's more, Ginny was expecting to marry you. She deserved the truth, not lies and cover-ups from a yellow-bellied coward who wasn't even man enough to face her. But instead, you run off with her former best friend in order to shag each other in a whole different country for ten years! And all this after spreading the lie that you'd both been killed!"

"It wasn't like that. We were in love ... or thought we were, anyway. We weren't consciously trying to hurt anybody. We just wanted to be together and we believed what we were doing would make it easier on everybody."

Lupin's face hardened further, not buying a word of it as he continued to point his wand threateningly in Harry's direction. "So that gave you the right to lie, cheat, and make fools of everyone who ever loved you. From what I understand, even Molly, the most forgiving person I know, no longer wishes to speak to either of you unless she is forced to and has forbidden either of you to set foot inside the Burrow again. Takes a lot to alienate her, but you two managed it brilliantly. Which reminds me ... what you did was a most convenient way to eliminate all competition from your lives. With everyone thinking you were dead, no one would be likely to surmise that you'd simply run off together to another country to start a new life under assumed names."

By this time, Harry was getting angry; one, for being treated like a criminal, and two, for being bound and his wand confiscated, as if he couldn't be trusted to control himself. "Damn it, Moony, why all this subterfuge? Why couldn't you just have come out and said what you wanted? Besides, you make it sound like we deliberately set out to hurt everyone and we didn't! For Merlin's sake, why can't anyone understand that? Falling in love isn't a crime, as far as I know, but everyone's sure as bloody hell *acting* like it is!"

"That's not the issue, Harry. It's how you went about it. And by the way, I think your parents, not to mention Hermione's, would be very ashamed of you right now. Even at his worst, James never lied to or cheated on your mother, much less led her on or made a fool of her in order to shag her best friend by throwing her love back in her face as you've done with Ginny and Ron. Nor was James ever a coward, and he would *certainly* never run out on your mum, not under any circumstances!"

Harry shook his head in exasperation. "It's something how everyone seems to have appointed themselves judge, jury, and executioner here. What do you intend to do for an encore, have the entire Order hex me and Hermione?"

"No," Lupin said simply. "Though Merlin knows I should. Maybe offer the wronged ones a chance to do so if they wish. In this case, we may even suspend the penalty for the use of unforgivable curses, or more specifically, the *Cruciatius*, in order to give you both a taste of what you've put us all through by making us think you'd been killed. Don't worry, we'll limit the duration, although you both deserve the full treatment after what you've done."

And don't even try to claim that you two are the injured parties when in fact, it's both of you who've caused a lot of unnecessary pain and heartache for the entire wizarding world, not just those closest to you, by your selfish, thoughtless actions. Most importantly, you've caused immeasurable pain and heartache to everyone who ever cared about you, and worst of all, to those who loved you most! Frankly I wouldn't blame any of them if they never spoke to either of you or associated with you again."

Harry sighed sadly, seeing Moony's point. He did not want to admit that he might be right, but after some hard thinking, he had to agree that everything he'd said was true. Harry wished there was a way to turn back time and erase the last ten years, or at least somehow make it up to the ones who had been so terribly wronged, but there didn't seem to be any way on God's green earth to do so. At least, none that he could think of or that they would be willing to accept at this point. What was worse, he and Hermione had brought it on by their own actions!

Harry had hoped for a happy reunion but instead had received an angry lecture on his and Hermione's conduct, especially their conduct regarding those closest to them. Not that he could totally blame Remus, but there was no way to go back and change things now, even if he'd wanted to. And what was the point of chastising him alone? He hadn't done it by himself.

As if reading his mind, Remus said, "Oh, don't worry. We'll get your erstwhile bride here and punish her as well. It's only a matter of time."

"Moony, why are you doing this? I admit it; I'm not proud of what I've done and am doing all I can to make amends, but it's going to take longer than overnight to do it. Which reminds me, you should be happy to know that we're planning on getting a divorce."

"Well, that's something in your favour, anyway. Too bad the entire wizarding world had to suffer for your perfidy and overactive hormones before you realised your mistake. I'm also given to understand that you have two daughters from your marriage."

"Yes, twin girls. They're nine. I'm their primary caregiver."

"Indeed. Seems that you're a better father than a lover. What do you intend to do to compensate those whom you've wronged?"

"Everything I possibly can, of course. I can't give you specifics right now," Harry reminded him. "What should matter is that I'm trying to do something about it ... and what's more, the 'wronged ones,' as you put it, must give me a fair hearing before making a final judgment instead of assuming me guilty until proven innocent."

"Bloody well took you long enough. And to think I once thought James was slow on the uptake. You've got him beat by a country mile! After this, you'd better keep in touch with us, let us know what you're up to at least once a week. If you don't, we'll send someone out to get your report personally...and if I have to do that, you know what's likely to happen."

"Are you threatening me?"

"Maybe I am, but you've got it coming and then some. Make no mistake about that. We wouldn't have to go through all this if you'd only been honest and up front from the start. This is your own doing, Harry, no one else's. You and Hermione brought it all on yourselves! If you'd just had a little empathy and thought beyond your bloody hormones, you might have asked yourself, 'How would I feel if I were treated as I'm treating people who freely gave me hospitality, gave me love and affection, gave me themselves?' You'd be mad as all hell, wouldn't you? Well, *wouldn't* you?" Remus persisted.

"I ... suppose so," Harry reluctantly admitted.

"You *suppose* so? You *know* so! You'd be bloody furious, vowing revenge at every turn, yet you expect those you've wronged to just automatically take you back as if no time has passed, as if no harm has been done!"

"I get the point, Moony. I assure you, I get the point. Now will you bloody well release me so can I leave?"

"I suppose so, but I suggest you call me 'Lupin' from now on. I only allow friends or family to call me 'Moony,' and at the moment, you are neither. Which reminds me, I think even Padfoot would be ashamed of you. You may have thought what you were doing was right at the time, but look at how many you ended up hurting in the process. How can that possibly be right? I know you can't please everybody and must please yourself, but you still should have had maturity enough to think of others' feelings besides your own and beyond your own immediate needs and desires *before* going off half-cocked. Now get out of here. And incidentally, I'm no longer your surrogate godfather. Good day."

Remus then vanished the ropes binding Harry, who did as instructed upon retrieving his wand. He was sad at heart, the depth and magnitude of the wrongs he and Hermione had done to so many hitting as hard and as suddenly as the proverbial ton of bricks. And worst of all, they'd hurt the ones who had once loved them dearly. Things were in such a terrible mess now; how could he ... they ... ever put them right again? Was it even possible?

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Harry did his best to keep Remus's words out of his mind as he flew home, but they kept coming back to him. Finally he had to admit, if only to himself, that not thinking about it was impossible. *Disowned*. He had been disowned by the only parental figure he had left! But that wasn't the worst of it: the worst of it was that he'd brought this on by his own actions. And then for Moony to have said that even Sirius would have been ashamed of him, much less his own parents...that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

But Remus of all people should know that there was no way for him to go back and undo what he had done; all they could do was deal with the consequences of his actions and go from there. Disowning him wasn't going to change anything. On the other hand, maybe it was meant to shame him into repentance, to encourage him to go back to Ginny. Even as much as he wanted to do just that, though, the bad blood currently between him and the Weasleys made Harry hesitate.

What's more, he wouldn't have just Gin's brothers and parents on his back, he would likely have Draco as well; he had all but promised as much. But he would have to take a chance at some point, otherwise he'd never get her back, nor would he ever get to know his child, Lily ... and he wanted that every bit as much as he wanted Ginny back.

He thought it might help if he talked with Minerva, to see if she would allow him to speak some with Dumbledore's portrait, which was the closest he could come to speaking with the wise old wizard himself. He was in so much of a hurry to get there that he flew all the way on his Firebolt and didn't stop until he was in front of the gargoyle. He could only hope the password hadn't changed because he hadn't had seen the Headmistress lately to ask whether or not there was a new one, so he gave the last one he knew. Fortunately, the gargoyle leapt aside, and Harry made his way up the winding stairs as quickly as he could, then knocked on the door.

"Come in," came McGonagall's voice. "Harry! What's wrong? You look like you just lost your last friend."

"I think I have. I just saw Moony. We had a talk, and he ... disowned me. He also said not to call him 'Moony,' that he only allowed friends or family to call him that, and that I was neither in his eyes anymore."

"You mean you're no longer his godson?"

"Basically, yes," Harry returned glumly.

"Because of what you did ten years ago, I assume."

Harry could only nod slightly in response, too stunned and hurt to speak for a long time. "He even said that Sirius would be ashamed of me ... not to mention my parents. And whether or not I want to admit it, I know deep down that he's right. But what can I do to make amends when everyone's against me, Minerva? I can't blame them for feeling as they do, but I can't even begin to make things right if they don't let me try."

But then a most unexpected voice entered the conversation before McGonagall could reply. "I'm afraid I did warn you that this might happen, Harry."

He looked up to find the portrait of the former headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, smiling sympathetically at him. "I know, Professor, and I'm sorry I didn't listen to you then. I've just mucked up everyone's lives, and mine worst of all. I assume you've heard of my marital troubles with Hermione?"

"I have," came the reply from the portrait. "I suspected that the two of you were far too different in temperament and basic personality to sustain a romantic relationship for long, but you both were so determined to run off together that there wasn't much else I could do except wish you luck. Unfortunately, you're going to need more than luck to even begin to straighten your current life's mess out. It's also going to take a few little things known as miracles."

"Have you been able to sit down and discuss things with Hermione yet, Harry?" Minerva added.

"No; she seems to be consciously avoiding me as well as the issue at hand. I'm beginning to think I'll have to literally pin her down so we can work things out. I've tentatively worked out a few things but need to have her input before I make any final decisions or take any concrete action, and how can I if she won't discuss anything with me?"

"Maybe if I order her to come here and mediate between the two of you ..." the Headmistress suggested.

"That might work...but what do we do about our girls? I can't leave them alone for long ~~and~~ they're alone right now."

"Is there anyone you know that isn't angry with you who might be willing to look after them if you ask them to?" the Headmaster's portrait asked.

"Luna might. She's married to Ron and says she's willing to help me ... but the girls look so much like 'Mione and myself that she's leery of allowing them around him too much without having them disguised. I can put temporary Disguising Charms on them, but they only last four hours. I don't want to cause him any more difficulty than he's already had."

"How long do you think this talk would take, the one between you and Hermione?" McGonagall wondered.

"I have no idea, but probably at least two to four hours, if not longer," Harry estimated.

"I think the best thing to do is take things one case at a time," Dumbledore's portrait said. "We work this divorce and child custody matter out first, then go from there. Perhaps work out the difficulty with Remus next. I know the affection you have for him, Harry, and Minerva and I want to do everything we can to see that you reconcile. Not to mention reconciling with the Weasleys, and the charming Miss Ginevra Weasley in particular, whom I know does still love you, despite any claims you may have heard to the contrary. Maybe we can bring the ones who have the most serious grievances with you here and mediate with them on your behalf. This is probably the safest place to do it, outside of Grimmauld Place, and at the moment, I doubt that Remus would allow you in there."

"Probably not. And any help either of you can give will be appreciated," Harry returned with a sad smile. "Owl me once you've got that meeting arranged, okay, Minerva? That way I can contact Luna and see if she can take the girls."

"Of course, Harry," she promised with an answering smile. "By the way, I know a longer-lasting Disguising Charm, one that will last twelve hours." She scribbled down the incantation on a piece of parchment, handed it to him, and told him to modify it to his own tastes.

"Thank you. I've got to get back home now. See you later." With that, Harry mounted his broom again and was off.

Once he was gone, McGonagall looked at Dumbledore's portrait and they exchanged concerned looks for Harry. "Do you really think we can help him, Albus?"

"We can only try, Minerva. The rest is up to Harry himself."

# Conversations with Minerva & Albus

## Chapter 5 of 16

Harry seeks McGonagall's help in holding a discussion with Hermione regarding the disposition of their marriage and the welfare of their children. Dumbledore's portrait also offers assistance.

### Chapter 5 Discussions with Minerva and Albus

To Harry's surprise, it was only two days later that McGonagall owed him as to the time of his and Hermione's meeting with her to work out their marital and legal problems. He knew 'Mione well enough to be at least fairly certain that she would not refuse a direct order from a superior. Just the same, once she realised the true purpose of the meeting, she might try to make a break for the nearest door, but if he knew McGonagall, she would use a Locking Charm so neither of them could leave.

It wouldn't bother Harry, of course; this was just what he had been after for some time...a chance to actually sit down with his estranged wife and discuss their options regarding their marriage, children, and futures. It would help a lot to have input from Minerva and Dumbledore's portrait as well.

He managed to get Luna to take the girls, assuring her he would pay her extra for doing so and making sure to place the longer-lasting Disguising Charm on them before she picked them up since the scheduling of the aforementioned appointment would mean they'd be there even after Ron returned home from work. Using the longer-lasting charm was the safest thing to do on short notice, especially under the circumstances in question.

He arrived shortly before the scheduled appointment; McGonagall assured him that Hermione was on her way after her last class of the day, which ended at 4 p.m. They had to allow her a little time to get to the office from the Transfiguration classroom. Harry still had a sneaking suspicion that she might try to weasel out yet again, but fortunately, almost as soon as he thought it, she walked in. It was for this reason that Harry exchanged glances with McGonagall, and she refrained from putting a Locking Charm on the door.

"Harry, what are you doing here?" Hermione looked between him and McGonagall and back again, a questioning look on her face for a moment. Then it dawned on her.

"We've got to talk, 'Mione. You've been avoiding me long enough ... and Minerva agreed to help me."

Hermione sighed exasperatedly. "I might have known. Well, I suppose you're right. Let's get to it."

Harry found it surprising that she would give in so easily after the many weeks of doing almost literally anything and everything to avoid having to talk to him. But he was glad that they would finally be able to get things out in the open and make some important, life-changing decisions.

"Would you not agree that it's time for us to go our separate ways, especially after the last six months and your affair?"

Hermione's cheeks burned and she bent her head, unwilling to meet Harry's eyes for long, but she made herself nod in agreement. "I'm sorry about that, Harry."

"I know you are and I forgive you. Now, I'm willing to give you an uncontested divorce as long as you give me custody of the girls. We can work out visitation rights later on if you like. In addition, since you're working and making good money, I feel that there's no need to give you compensation, such as alimony."

He stopped speaking for a while, just allowing her to think this over. After a few minutes, she said, "It might be a good idea for you to have custody of the girls, at least for the moment. As for visitation, how about alternating holidays, the occasional school function, and their birthday? And I agree, I don't think I'll need anything like alimony. When did you want to go and make it official?"

"How about tomorrow when we both get off early? Then after we get back, we can break it to the girls and go from there."

Hermione smiled in agreement and Harry exchanged a relieved glance with McGonagall and Dumbledore's portrait. It had gone much easier than expected, but what mattered was that it was finally out of the way. The breakup probably wouldn't be as hard on the girls as it might have been ordinarily, since they spent most of their time with their father anyway. "Did you want me to give you back the ring now or wait until tomorrow?"

"Might as well wait until tomorrow. One day more or less isn't going to make any difference." Even now, Harry felt like a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. After tomorrow, he would be free to plan his strategy for winning Ginny back, although he fully expected it to take some time before she let him close to her again. He just hoped he had the patience to out-wait her. After all, ten years was a long time to wait to be reunited with one's true soul mate. Even at that, it was no more (or less) than he deserved since he had brought it on himself...or rather, *they* had.

Hermione sighed. "Well, Harry, it was fun while it lasted."

"But the price of that 'fun' turned out to be much too high. I just hope someday we'll be able to live it down," he returned solemnly. They then agreed to meet at 2 p.m. the following day, fly to the Ministry of Magic, and officially dissolve the marriage, while at the same time, make arrangements for their children's future. By the time it was over, Hermione would be "Ms. Granger" again, and Harry would officially be a bachelor once more. Luna would have the girls with her, having picked them up from school, and she would send them back once Harry had checked in with her.

After Hermione had departed, Harry turned back to McGonagall and thanked her for her help.

"Glad to do it ... and I'm pleased it went so well." McGonagall ordinarily wouldn't have been so helpful to one student in particular (or in this case, former student...even one such as Harry). She had always considered it showing favouritism and personally believed in treating everyone equally. But because of Dumbledore's affection for Harry and her own affection for the former headmaster, she figured it was the least she could do to steer the boy in the right direction, if only for Albus's sake.

"Much better than I expected, that's for sure," Harry opined. "Now what do we do about Remus?"

"I'll owl him tomorrow and see if I can't get him to come here so you two can have a real heart-to-heart. Then we'll see if we can't get him to reconsider disowning you. I can't make any guarantees, of course, but we'll do our best."

"What about the Weasleys?"

"I'll owl the ones in question and explain the situation as best I can to see if they wouldn't be willing to come here and sit down with us so we can, eventually, get you back in the fold again. Molly's the toughest nut to crack, though, so we'd better start with her. Agreed?"

"Agreed," Harry concurred. "Meanwhile, I'd better get home to meet my girls. Luna's going to be sending them through any time now. Thanks again for your help, Minerva."

McGonagall smiled and nodded in Harry's direction as he left for his home, his girls, and hopefully, to begin his new life with his one true love as soon as it could be arranged.

\* \* \* \* \*

It took just over two hours for Harry and Hermione to officially dissolve their marriage and make arrangements for the care and education of their girls. After the final paperwork had been taken care of, Hermione handed back the diamond solitaire engagement/wedding set she had worn for ten years, and Harry pocketed it without a word, intending to possibly sell it or give it to one of his girls later on if she said she wanted to use her mother's wedding ring for her own wedding.

The girls seemed to accept their parents' breakup fairly well, and they seemed pleased with the visitation arrangements, at least for the moment. The arrangements could always be modified later if necessary. What mattered was that they would still get to see their mother.

McGonagall owed Harry regarding Remus and informed him that Remus had confessed to her that he still maintained great affection for Harry despite what he had done, but he was very displeased with his actions nonetheless. He also declared that the disowning would stand until and unless Harry could prove to Remus's satisfaction that he had truly repented and turned over a new leaf ... i.e. doing everything he could to win back Ginny's love. Just the same, Minerva had no intention of giving up, knowing well how stubborn Remus was, but also knowing that she was just as stubborn and intended to keep after him until he was willing to fully reconcile with Harry, albeit in an "iron hand in velvet glove" manner.

Harry was somewhat encouraged knowing that Remus still cared about him. He couldn't really blame Moony for being upset with him, but it hurt deeply to have been disowned. It felt almost as bad as if one of his own parents had disowned him, and for this reason, Harry intended to do everything he could to prove himself worthy of being reinstated as godson of both Remus and Sirius. He would make them proud of him again, whatever he had to do. Then once he had his surrogate father back, he intended to get his second mother, Molly Weasley, back ... again, by doing whatever he had to do!

It might be too much to ask to actually get Ron back as a friend, much less his best friend as they once were, but it would make him feel better if they could at least be on speaking terms again. Even that would take time, though, and they would have to move carefully, slowly, considering how delicate Ron still was, both physically and emotionally, because of what Harry and Hermione had done. But it was at least a step in the right direction for them to have gone their separate ways.

Not that he really wished for Luna to lose her husband, because Harry sensed that she really did love Ron, but if something did happen and they split up, he hoped that Ron and Hermione would either eventually get together ... or if nothing else, at least be on speaking terms again.

## Things Start Looking Up

*Chapter 6 of 16*

Harry begins to tentatively court Ginny again; she also sits in to help Harry reconcile with Molly, with Minerva acting as mediator.

### Chapter 6 Things Start Looking Up

Harry dropped by Ginny's classroom the next day and asked if he could speak with her again. She would be wary of him for some time to come, he expected that, and couldn't blame her, but he wanted to start making inroads back into her heart as soon as realistically possible ... even if he had to start almost literally from scratch.

"Ginny, I thought you'd like to know that 'Mione and I have officially split up."

"Well, that's good for you," she returned quietly. "So what do you expect of me now?"

"I want us to start over. From scratch, if we have to ... but I want to start spending time with you again outside of class, even if it's just having a talk over butterbeer in the faculty lounge."

"That might work," she returned cautiously, "as long as you don't try to pressure me too soon."

"No pressure," he assured her. "How about tomorrow after classes are over for the day?"

"Hmmm. Let me check my schedule." She opened her 'little black book' and leafed through it. "Yes, I believe I have some free time about then. Would you like me to bring treacle tart? Mum made it and sent it to me. I just got it today."

"That would be great," Harry returned, doing his best to keep his smile simply a friendly one and not give away his newly rekindled love for her, for Ginny knew how much he had always enjoyed treacle tart. It would also be good to have some of Molly's cooking again, even if she didn't know it. "See you tomorrow."

It was all he could do to make it out the door without clicking his heels together, he was so happy. He then mounted his broom and spent the next half hour joyfully flying, using every Quidditch move he could think of, something he hadn't done in years, all the while making sure he was well away from Ginny's earshot before verbally giving vent to his new-found happiness.

Maybe he could get her to go flying with him eventually, each on their own brooms at first, then maybe on his like they used to when they were dating. Merlin knew it wouldn't be easy not to touch her, kiss her, or make love to her, but Gin was worth the wait...and the chance to know his oldest daughter was *certainly* worth the wait!

Harry's hair and clothing were messier and more rumpled than usual by the time he got back to his quarters, but he was too euphoric to care. He found Luna waiting for him with the girls. "Where have you been, Harry? I had to come back and wait with the girls since you weren't here to meet them."

"Sorry, Luna. Just got ... sidetracked. It won't happen again." She gave him a skeptical look, and he said, "Or more accurately, not if I can help it."

"May I ask if it has anything to do with Ginny?" Luna asked quietly as he walked her back to the fireplace, making sure the girls couldn't hear them, knowing how much in love Harry and Ginny had once been ... and with luck, would be again.

Harry's flush and grin told Luna everything she needed to know.

"Well, best of luck to you both."



"Thanks." He pressed more Galleons into her hand after digging into his pocket for them. "Here's more Galleons for your trouble. Take Ron out for a special meal or something; leave your kids with Molly. My treat."

"Oh, Harry, you're too generous," she returned, tears misting her eyes.

"It's the least I can do after the way I've hurt him. And let me know how it goes." He gave her a sly wink.

"Will do. Thanks again." With that, Luna threw the Floo powder into the fireplace and said, "The Ron Weasley residence!" then stepped into the heatless flame and was gone.

"Where were you, Daddy?" Helen demanded. "We missed you. Not that we minded Luna, she's nice and all, but..."

"I just went out for some solo flying. Haven't done it in a long time." Harry had no idea he was still sporting such a silly grin that even his girls could tell he was hiding something, but they didn't say anything.

"Right, Dad," she returned, humouring him. "But you need to get some supper for us now."

"Wait. I've got an idea. Why don't I teach you girls how to cook? That way, if I don't happen to be around, you can still feed yourselves."

"But you cook things just the way we like them," Lily protested.

"If I can do it, you should be able to as well, I think. Now come on, let's go! It's not getting any earlier!" He ushered both girls in the direction of the kitchen, and within half an hour, they were well into the first cooking lesson.

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As far as Harry could tell, Lily was perhaps on her way to being a good cook; she might even end up cooking for both her sister and herself. It would take some time, but at least this way, it was likely that he would be able to free up some time to spend with Ginny. It was astonishing how giddy and light-headed he felt at the mere thought of being with her, looking into her eyes, seeing her smile ... it was as if the last ten years had never been, and he was a lovesick sixteen-year-old again.

It would also be interesting to see how being near him, looking into his eyes, seeing him smile affected Ginny. Fortunately Harry knew her well enough to know what to look for (or believed he did, anyway), actions which would tell him her true feelings, whatever she might say verbally. Just the same, he couldn't start seriously dating again without letting the girls know as soon as possible.

His renewed relationship with Ginny was still too casual for that just yet. Should it reach the point where he wanted to bring her to his quarters to spend the night (and he fully intended that to happen, just as soon as he could manage it), then he would seriously consider sitting the girls down and telling them about Ginny and his feelings for her.

For the time being, when he hadn't even held her hand, he figured it was safe enough not to say anything to them. If either asked or happened to hear Luna talking about it, he would simply say that Ginny was someone he liked very much and wanted to see as often as possible. Helen seemed to be the more perceptive of the two emotionally, so he knew to be prepared for any questions she might come up with such as 'Do you intend to marry Ginny one day, Dad?' In which case, he thought he might come back with, 'Would you mind if I did?'

It would be awkward, to say the least, if the girls demanded to know the full story of both his relationship with Ginny and the one with their mother, but Harry told himself it might be a good idea if he prepared himself for this at the earliest possible time, possibly even with Ginny by his side. No guarantee he would be able to get 'Mione to do the same, so he might suggest they ask her directly, whatever he was unable to tell them.

As for his other problems, Remus had so far proven immovable in regards to reinstating Harry as godson before he'd proven himself. It continued to bother Harry, but there wasn't much he could do to change it, at least not until or if he could manage to show some progress on the romantic front with Ginny. He'd promised not to rush her or pressure her and intended to keep that promise, but because of that, it would take longer to show progress and thus his sincerity regarding Ginny, which would, in turn, convince Moony that he was worthy of once again being his godson.

As for the Weasleys, as he'd acknowledged before, Molly would be the toughest nut to crack, so Harry and company decided to start with her. She was only willing to come, of course, if the grandchildren were in school and Ginny sat in on the discussion, so Harry promised to see if he could get her to join them. When he saw her in the faculty lounge during their mutual break the following day, and they were again sharing a butterbeer, this time with mince pies and treacle tart, he took a deep breath and jumped in with both feet.

"We've been trying to get your family to come by in an attempt to get them to reconcile with me, but I'm told that your mum is only willing to come if you sit in on the discussion." He held his breath while waiting for her answer.

Ginny frowned, and Harry was sure that she intended to refuse. A part of him couldn't blame her if she did, but he doubted the reconciliation could be brought about without her. "I'll understand if you don't want to, after all I've put you and your family through, but I would really appreciate some help. You know that your family is the closest thing I've ever had to one, and if at all possible, I'd like to have it back."

But all she said in response was, "When was she thinking of coming?"

"Tomorrow morning, after the children are in school. You might have to get a sub for at least one, if not two, of your Charms classes. Would that be possible?"

Again there was a long, ominous silence before Ginny broke into a smile. "All right, I'll do it." Harry found it very difficult not to reach out and hug her, but he managed; he simply gave a relieved smile. He even suspected that he knew who the substitute was likely to be. Next to Transfiguration, 'Mione had been best at Charms, if memory served him correctly.

"Thanks. I'll tell Minerva, and we'll meet your mum in her office at ten o'clock."

Harry had gotten up and was heading for the door when Ginny called after him. "This doesn't get you off the hook with me, though. Remember, you've still got to toe the line to *my* satisfaction for me to be willing to spend non-professional time with you."

"I'm aware of that, Ginny. I fully intend to prove myself to you, whatever it takes. See you tomorrow morning." Harry nodded and smiled in her direction before disappearing through the door.

In spite of her best efforts, Ginny's heart began to pound at the sight of Harry's smile and twinkling green eyes. Dear God, how could she still feel so much for him, even after ten years? He had no idea that it had been every bit as hard for her to keep from grabbing him and snogging him senseless as it had been for him to keep from doing it to her.

She was one of the few who knew how warm and sweet his lips were, the ecstasy they could evoke with every kiss, both on her lips and anywhere else on her body he decided to use them. How his large but gentle hands and very talented fingers could caress her like no one else, almost literally transporting her to heaven with one touch, depending on where and how much he happened to touch her.

She also knew how determined Harry could be when he chose to, and she was fairly confident that he would keep his word, especially now, but she was frankly more concerned as to whether or not she would be able to keep hers...particularly if she was around him very much. Even as dangerous as she knew it to be, Ginny was frankly unable to stay away from him, unable to resist any entreaty he might send her way, as long as it meant being with him, even for a little while.

It would take longer than overnight to make up for ten years apart, but she had every intention of having them begin again just as soon as he could satisfy her as to his sincerity, convince her that he didn't intend to ever leave her again, not for anything or anyone. And once that point was reached, if she had anything to say about it, Harry wouldn't know what hit him. In fact, she intended to knock him for the proverbial loop, in more ways than one, when she deemed it the proper time.

But for the time being, she had to start thinking how to wear her mother down so that she would allow Harry back into the family fold again. What Molly said was law in the Weasley household, so if she welcomed Harry back, the rest of the Weasleys would follow suit and not complain, at least not outwardly. Of course, they would still have to treat Ron with kid gloves, but other than that, it should be all right.

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The next day at ten o'clock, Ginny and Harry were called into McGonagall's office to speak with Molly, with Dumbledore's portrait serenely observing the whole time. Molly stiffened upon seeing Harry; it hurt him but he told himself he understood after all he and Hermione had put the Weasleys through the last ten years and what Ron was *still* going through because of them. They sat down facing McGonagall after she conjured up extra chairs, Ginny sitting next to Molly in order to facilitate them talking to each other.

After a time, Molly asked her how Harry had been treating her since his return, seeming to relax as if the weight of the world had just been lifted off her shoulders, then turned her head in Harry's direction before meeting Ginny's eyes again. When she returned to Harry again, her face had softened considerably, and her voice sounded like she was ready to break down crying at almost any minute.

"We never stopped caring about you, Harry, but after what you did to Ron and Ginny, we just couldn't allow you to..."

Harry held up a hand. "I understand, Molly, and I don't blame you for turning me away. I'd have done the same thing in your place. But now all I want to do is make it up to you all as best I can, especially Ginny." He smiled in her direction, then turned back to Molly. "You're the closest thing I've ever known to a mother, and I've missed that. I want to have it back, but only if you feel you can forgive me for my past mistakes and give me the chance to once again prove myself worthy of your love. What do you say? Can I be your son again?"

Harry smiled and held out his arms; Molly hesitated for only a moment before moving to hug Harry as she usually did...so tightly that he could hardly breathe. This time, both began crying and hugged each other even tighter. Molly soon brought Harry's unruly dark head down to her shoulder, stroking his hair and crying even more. "My boy, my boy ... you're back!"

"And I'll never leave again," he assured her. "Because everything I want...everything I need...is right here." His eyes found Ginny again and lingered on her before reaching for her hand. She smiled, took it, and squeezed it...and from that moment on, Harry was back in the fold. Now the two remaining problems of how to re-introduce Hermione and how to handle having both Ron and Harry in the house at the same time had to be addressed very carefully and very gradually. But one thing at a time, as Dumbledore's portrait had said. What mattered right now was that Harry was part of the family again.

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Once they'd said their farewells to Molly, Harry asked Ginny if he could walk her to her next class. She hesitated only a moment before smiling and nodding in assent. As they fell into step, he asked which years she was teaching today. "Second and third. They're a real handful. They've heard of your doing a Patronus in your third year and expect me to teach it to them. I told them they'd have to ask you about that, but it doesn't stop them. In fact, I'm even thinking..."

Harry put a hand on her arm, and they stopped for a moment before he leaned over and kissed her.

Once he pulled back, she gave him a suspicious look. "May I ask what that was all about?"

"Just felt like doing it." He gave her a sly wink as they resumed walking.

"Don't push your luck. You may have been able to sweet-talk Mum, but you're still not out of the woods with me yet. Remember, you promised not to pressure me."

"What pressure?" Harry asked innocently. "I just kissed you, that's all."

"In public. On the lips. That's pressure in my book," Ginny threw back.

"So what? It wouldn't be the first time."

"That's beside the point. I never gave you permission."

"So I need permission to kiss you now?"

"Yes. Mainly because of that little matter of your running off with my best friend ten years ago and marrying her. Not to mention lying to everyone, including me, and saying that you were dead in order to cover your tracks."

"I know what we did was wrong, Gin, but that's over now. All I want to do is put it behind us and move on."

"What about your girls? You can't just put *them* behind you, you know."

"Nor can you just put Lily behind you. After all, she represents the love we once shared. Feelings like that aren't easily forgotten."

"I've not forgotten her ... or you. I couldn't." Ginny's voice was quiet, almost too quiet for Harry to hear. "But that doesn't mean I'm just going to simply forget what you've done and let you back into my bed again as if nothing has happened."

"I don't expect you to. I just want a chance to prove myself to you again." Harry put a hand on Ginny's cheek, effectively stopping them in their tracks once again, looking deeply, earnestly, into her eyes. Ginny moaned softly, closed her eyes in pain and covered his hand with hers.

"Harry, please don't do that. I'm not ready."

"Sorry." He dropped his hand, and they resumed walking. As it turned out, she just barely got to her one o'clock class on time. As he left, he smiled and nodded in her direction, and Ginny fought to control her wildly pounding heart as she entered her classroom and prepared the lesson for her second- and third-year students as best she could.

## Harry and Ginny Reunite

Harry and Ginny resume dating and eventually end up spending the night together after putting the girls with Molly at the Burrow.

## Chapter 7 Harry and Ginny Reunite

*The song herein is "You're the One," sung by the Carpenters.*

When they saw each other again, shortly after she'd seated herself facing him, Harry could tell that Ginny wasn't pleased with his actions of the previous day and made certain that he knew it. "Harry, you mustn't kiss me in public again. Some of my students saw us and teased me all through class. Couldn't teach them anything. They kept asking if we were dating. One even asked, 'Are you going to marry Professor Potter, Miss Weasley?'"

"Then may I kiss you in private?" Harry teased with a cheeky smile.

"Watch it, Potter," Ginny warned. "You're still skating on mighty thin ice."

"All right, all right, I'll be serious. But I still want to keep seeing you," Harry murmured in a stage-whisper.

"You *are* seeing me," Ginny pointed out.

*Not the way I'd like to,* Harry thought lasciviously. *Such as naked in my arms, in my bed, your arms and legs wrapped around me, then your lips and tongue devouring me ...* But outwardly he simply smiled enigmatically and said, "So I am. Don't worry, my lady. I'll be a good boy from now on, I promise."

Ginny didn't trust him for a minute, especially not with *that* look in his eyes. "All right," she conceded. "You're off the hook ... this time. Just don't push your luck. *At least not any more than you already have,* she thought with a cheeky smile of her own.

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What pleased Harry the most, however, was what Ginny told him a few days later. "Draco knows we're seeing each other again...and as you might expect, he's not pleased."

"I suspected that," Harry remarked after taking a few swallows of butterbeer. "You *did* tell him that I'm free now, didn't you?"

"Yes, but he still doesn't trust you."

"No surprise. He never has," Harry retorted before taking a few bites of mince pie, then chewing and swallowing.

"But he especially doesn't now...and I can't blame him, even though I assured him I could handle the situation."

"What did he say to that?"

"He simply frowned and said, 'Just be careful. Potter's tricky.'" She shrugged and continued, "And I said, 'Don't worry. I can deal with him.' Then Draco said, 'That's what I'm afraid of. Oh well, it's your funeral.' Then he threw up his hands and walked off."

Harry couldn't help chuckling as he imagined the look that must have been on Draco's face and it pleased him all the more.

"Gin?"

"Yes?"

"Would you go flying with me?"

"Sounds nice, Harry, but I've got lessons to correct."

"So do I, but it'll only be for an hour. Come on, we haven't done it for a long time." She still looked skeptical. "I assure you, nothing will happen that you don't want to have happen."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"Gin, if you don't want to go, just say so. I'm not trying to force you into anything." *Never needed to,* he finished in his mind, but right now, what mattered was convincing her to accompany him.

"No, it's all right, Harry. I'll go."

"Do you have your mum look after Lily and the boys while you're here?"

"Usually...but as of tomorrow, the boys are supposed to be spending a week with Draco for their birthday. So I'll just have Lily to worry about for that week."

"I can ask Luna to look after her if you like. She already looks after my other girls."

Part of Ginny wanted to meet Harry's other daughters, but overall, she didn't feel brave or secure enough to do so just yet. There was time enough to meet them if matters got serious between her and Harry again, although the way things were going...albeit a bit more rapidly than she would have preferred...it was definitely heading in that direction.

"Thanks, but Lily's pretty self-sufficient for her age. Takes after you on that score."

Harry shrugged. "Fine. Just thought I'd offer."

"Offer received and appreciated. Just not needed right now." Ginny smiled provocatively. "Now I believe you said you wanted to go flying?"

"Oh, yeah. Right. Let's go." As they headed to where his broom was stashed, Harry thought *Minx! She knows how her smile always affects me!* But at the same time, he loved it because he knew that Ginny was slowly but surely being worn down, and once that came to pass, it was only a matter of time until they would be able to pick up where they'd left off. What's more, they would be able to make up for ten years of lost time with a vengeance. For now, though, he would simply enjoy whatever alone time with Ginny he could manage to get.

\* \* \* \* \*

For a long time, Harry simply savoured the feel of Ginny's arms around him again after months of dreaming about them. After roughly half an hour, he decided to land on a high ridge overlooking the school.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Ginny commented as she stood there admiring the view.

"It certainly is," Harry returned absently, although the beauty he was admiring was standing right in front of him. He dismounted his broom and came up behind her, gently sliding his arms around her from behind and pressing against her, relishing the warmth and fragrance of her hair and neck, not to mention the feel of her sweet body. Dear God, how could he ever have given this up for even a moment, much less ten years?

"Harry ..." Ginny whispered, her heart beginning to pound wildly. She softly moaned as his lips found her throat. His body moved sensuously against her own, letting her know how aroused he was even as his hands moved to gently cradle her breasts.

"I've missed you, Gin. I can't tell you how much I've missed you. Please don't deny me. This is all I've dreamed about ever since seeing you again."

She knew she shouldn't have allowed Harry to get her alone with him, but she wanted him so much that she could no longer say no to him. All that mattered was being with him again. "I know you have more classes," he continued, "but once we're through for the day, will you come back to my flat with me? Spend the night?"

"What about your girls? I don't think you should allow them to catch us."

"I can see if Luna can keep them longer, or maybe I should ask Molly, now that we're on better terms. Whatever you think best."

"The latter might be best, if only to minimise the risk of Ron seeing them."

"I can always disguise them, you know," he reminded her.

"What matters is that we get some time alone."

With that, he reluctantly released her, only to turn her around and draw her close as he found her lips in a passionate kiss, gently prying her lips open to find the sweetness of her tongue. This time, his hands found her sweetly rounded bum, and again, he pressed her close to feel his arousal. "I love you, Gin. I love you ... I need you ... I want you ..."

Ginny was overwhelmed by Harry's nearness, the sweetness of his lips, the feel of his body close to hers again. She moaned softly with pleasure, entwining her arms around him as he kissed her. "Don't ever leave me again, Harry. Please don't ever leave me again. I couldn't stand it ..."

"Never. I have no desire to leave you ever again," he crooned, moving his lips to nibble her ear, then gently bite and suck on the junction between her neck and left shoulder. He shivered and moaned as her hands ran through his hair and stroked his neck as she ran one finger down his back. "But we'd better go back soon, or else I'll lay you down and take you right here."

It took sheer strength of will to break free from their embrace; the knowledge that they would be together later that night was all that sustained them. Harry forced himself to only kiss her hand as he left her outside her next class, knowing he had to get to his own right away, but he was sure it was going to be all but impossible to concentrate on anything class-related for the rest of the day. In fact, now that he had finally had Ginny in his arms again, had finally kissed her as he had been longing to do for a seeming eternity, she was all he could think about. She had even agreed to spend the night with him. God, his luck was running so well. Almost too well, especially considering the circumstances ... but he wasn't about to question it. What mattered was that he was finally going to have her again, and what was more, would be unlikely ever to get enough of her, now or at any time in the future.

\* \* \* \* \*

After the girls had been taken care of and deposited at the Burrow, Harry took a shower and laid out his nicest casual clothes to wear, at least for as long as it took to get Ginny into the bedroom anyway. He had told her to come at seven o'clock, which would give them a full night together since he had arranged for his girls to spend the night at the Burrow. They had literally jumped at the chance, which was all the better for his evening plans.

He put on some romantic music and made sure the fanciest dinner he knew how to make would be ready by the time she arrived. He had hustled around his flat, whistling his favourite love song under his breath. It was one of the later ones by the brother/sister group the Carpenters, *You're the One*. And by a strange coincidence, it was the song that he and Ginny had chosen as "their" song because the lyrics could apply to either one of them just as much now as when they'd first chosen it ten years ago. In fact, that was the first song he'd put on, and he intended to ask her to dance after they'd had dinner, playing that song as he held her. Or more accurately, as they held each other.

Once everything else was ready, Harry used a few housecleaning charms to make the flat look nice. As seven o'clock approached, he became progressively more nervous, feeling sure that Ginny would have second thoughts and decide not to come. Almost up to the time she actually arrived, Harry was expecting her owl to show up with a note saying that she'd changed her mind about coming and that she believed it was too soon for them to spend the night together. After all, they'd only been dating a little over two weeks since his divorce from Hermione. But he had been dreaming about Ginny for a hell of a lot longer than two weeks, and Harry wasn't about to wait any longer than he absolutely had to.

When the doorbell finally rang, he almost literally shot straight up. She was here! That was the only thought in his mind once he came back down to earth. He felt breathless and his heart seemed to be literally skipping beats; he hadn't felt like this since he was sixteen. It was truly incredible that he could feel like this at his age but what mattered was that he did. And as long as Ginny was around, he was sure he always would.

Once he finally made it to the door and opened it, he was stunned speechless. She was dressed simply but elegantly in a dress the same emerald colour of his eyes. It hugged her petite but well-built body enough to show that she was a woman, but loosely enough to show that she was a lady, the sleeves also hugging her slender arms, and a scoop neck just low enough to show cleavage. He knew she didn't like high heels, and since he wasn't that tall himself (5'8" or thereabouts), her height of 5'3" suited him just fine.

"Gin. You look lovely." His eyes looked her over appreciatively.

"Thanks, Harry. You're not too hard on the eyes yourself." It was hard to say which one blushed more deeply, but neither really cared; each just tried to point it out at the same time and ended up laughing about it.

"Uh ... would you like some dinner? I've had it heating for the last half hour."

"Yeah, that sounds great," Ginny said. He ushered her inside, closing the front door, then brought her into the next room, the dining room, adjoining the kitchen. She hadn't really had a chance to look around much; maybe she could ask Harry to show her around. But she had noticed pictures of children who must be his daughters, particularly taking note of the one who resembled Harry. He had mentioned that the one named Lily looked a lot like him.

The other, she couldn't help but notice, looked like Hermione. This must be the one he had said was named Helen, for her maternal grandmother, Hermione's mother. Since she had also named the daughter she had had with him Lily, Ginny made a mental note to start calling the girl by her middle name, which was Rose, in order to tell them apart.

They sat down at the table, already set. Once the timer went off, Harry smiled and said, "Dinner's ready. Just give me a chance to levitate it over to the table, then we can tuck in."

Within moments, they were eating and in between bites (not to mention courses), they were again laughing and reminiscing about all the times they had snuck down to the

kitchens at Hogwarts for late-night snacks which Dobby and the other house-elves had been only too happy to provide them. Technically, they could have done that this time, but Harry was too eager to be alone with Ginny. If it meant having sufficient privacy, he would gladly fix the meal himself.

It was close to eight when they declared themselves full and Harry held out a hand to her. "Would you like to dance, my lady?" he asked, pointing a wandless, nonverbal spell at his entertainment center in order to start the music he had chosen earlier. In a moment, she heard the song they had chosen as their own ten years earlier and looked up at him in stunned yet happy surprise as they moved to begin dancing.

"You remembered, Harry," she noted with a smile and misty eyes.

"How could I forget?" he crooned, cradling her cheek in one large, calloused but gentle hand for a moment before moving to draw her close and hold her. They moved together as though they had been born to do so. *And who was to say that we weren't?* Ginny thought. She knew she was in heaven, being held in the gentle strength of Harry's arms and hearing his sweet voice sing along with the tender lyrics.

*Every night, every day,*

*you're the one I always dream of.*

*Every line of your face is sketched so plain inside my heart.*

*You've grown so deep inside of me.*

*You're everything I feel and see,*

*and you're the one, you're the one I love.*

*All my life, all my love,*

*I can feel when you're beside me.*

*all that's right, all that's wrong*

*suddenly becomes so clear.*

*My heart has overtaken me*

*with feelings you awake in me,*

*and you're the one,*

*you're the one I love.*

*Only you could move me enough to believe*

*in love one more time.*

*All I need to know for tomorrow*

*is that you're mine,*

*mine for a lifetime.*

*If our friends all around*

*find it hard to understand us,*

*you and I understand*

*the other one so very well.*

*And that's what I've been looking for,*

*so I keep coming back for more,*

*'cause you're the one,*

*you're the one I love.*

*You're the one,*

*you're the one I love.*

By the time he finished, he could see that her eyes were glowing with a love for him that Harry didn't think he would ever see again after what he'd done to her. "That was beautiful, Harry. I didn't know you could sing like that."

"It sounded good because I was singing from my heart ... singing to you, the only woman I've ever truly loved and the only woman I will ever love." Just looking into his lovely green eyes, Ginny knew every word Harry said was true and that whatever had happened in the past would remain there. Harry would belong to her, and only her, for now and from this moment on, for the rest of their lives. "I love you, Ginny."

"I love you, Harry," she whispered. Then he lifted her face to his and their lips met. The kiss was sweet and chaste at first but rapidly became hot and open-mouthed; within an unbelievably short time, he had her dress off and his own shirt was on the floor. By this time, each was moaning softly in pleasure at the other's every touch, unable to speak for a time, only able to feel. By the time they reached the end of the music he'd put on, he had scooped her up into his arms and began heading for his bedroom.

Upon laying her down on his bed and joining her there, Harry decided he'd better speak while he still could. "Are you sure you want this, Gin? I don't want you to feel that I'm forcing the issue."

"Harry, luv, I assure you, I wouldn't be here if I didn't want to be. I just felt it necessary to hold you off until I could be sure of how you felt about me." She locked her arms around his neck and licked his lips to get him to open his mouth. It was the most incredible thing Harry had ever felt, but he wasn't finished talking yet.

He lifted a finger to stop her, a finger she promptly kissed. "Not yet. There's something else I wanted to say."

"Time for talk later, luv. We've got a long time to make up for." With that, she silenced him with her lips along with her hands wandering down to her favourite spots on his body, thrilling and pleasuring him beyond words. Whatever Harry had intended to say left his head; indeed, all thought did, save the nearness of the wonderful creature in his arms. All that mattered was possessing her once again, both feeling himself moving inside Ginny and her deliciously hot, wet tightness all around him.

He had never felt so randy in his life, not even when he had actually been sixteen, and he and Ginny had shared their first time together. Her body felt even more delicious, more voluptuous than he had ever known it to be, and he could only surmise that it was because she had borne children, but most importantly, she had borne *his* child. Truly, the lovers made up for lost time with a vengeance, but even as many times as they made love that night, Harry hoped it would prove to be only a drop in the bucket. It would take longer than overnight to make up for ten years of separation.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sun shone through the window over Harry's bed the following morning, but it seemed especially warm and happy because he had the one he loved in his arms, the woman he had not only loved all night but would be willing to love for the rest of his life whenever she said the word. Maybe then he would finally be reinstated as godson to his two godfathers, but that wasn't the only reason he was doing this...not by a long shot.

Harry looked down and smiled upon seeing Ginny, hair half covering her face and smiling in her sleep. His body was pleasantly sore in the obvious places, and he was just as sure that hers would be as well. The best kind of soreness in the world, soreness which showed that they had totally and thoroughly loved each other. The ten years seemed like far more, thinking back on it, and Harry knew that he would never allow so much time to pass again. No more than a day, or even a few hours, if he could help it after this.

Once she finally awakened, he smiled and leaned down to kiss her good morning. "Good morning, Sleeping Beauty. Sleep well?"

"I always sleep well when I'm with you," she replied dreamily. "That is, if we sleep." She smiled when he was unable to help blushing. "Whoever thought you of all people would still blush after all this time?" She moved to kiss him sweetly but deeply, almost making Harry forget what he'd intended to say upon awakening. "What time is it?"

"Nine. Not that I particularly care, since it's Saturday and we can sleep however long we like. I gave the girls the option of staying the weekend at the Burrow if they liked and warned Molly to use the long-lasting Disguising Charm to be on the safe side, especially if there was any chance of Ron dropping by and bringing his own children."

"I also told Mum to feel free to pick up Lily so I won't have to worry about her while I'm here," Ginny told him. "The boys should be with Draco by now and they'll be gone a week, so maybe we can stay at my flat tomorrow if you like."

"Sounds great," Harry opined, unwilling to leave Ginny's side any sooner than absolutely necessary.

"Can you imagine how it's going to be once we finally get back to work, though? The kids will probably never leave us alone once they learn we're really together, seriously dating."

"I can think of worse things," Ginny returned. "But right now, all that matters is that we're together again."

"Yes ... and what's more, we're never going to be apart again ... or at least no longer than a day, if I can help it."

"You said it," Ginny agreed. "And now, since we finally have time enough to be together, what do you say we have a rematch ... first here, then in the shower, like we used to? That is, if you're game."

A telltale fire appeared and grew in Harry's green eyes. "You need to ask, you gorgeous wench? I'm not only 'game,' as you put it, I fully intend to shag you until you beg for mercy!"

"In that case, let's get on with it." Ginny's smile was wicked as she pulled on Harry's nearest arm so that he was on top of her once again ... and intended to see that he stayed there just as long as they both wanted.

\* \* \* \* \*

The lovers woke to each other's sleepy eyes and beautifully mussed hair. Harry was unable to help smiling at Ginny's heavy-lidded yet still soft brown eyes, soft with love for him. "Good afternoon, luv."

"Good afternoon." They shared a sweetly lingering kiss, then Ginny cradled her head on her lover's shoulder.

"I don't think I've ever been so happy, not even when we first realised we were in love," Harry crooned, tightening his arms around his partner's warm, bare body.

"I know I haven't," Ginny returned. "I just wish it hadn't taken ten years for us to experience it again."

"What matters is that we are and we have," Harry pointed out, resting his cheek on top of her head. "Which reminds me ... when did you want to shower?"

Ginny frowned. "I suppose we should, but ..."

"But what?"

"I don't want to move. I'm too comfortable, too content."

Harry smiled and kissed her hair. "I know what you mean, but we've got to do it. Look at it this way ... we can have a rematch in the shower, then come back to bed."

Ginny gave him a mock scolding look. "I declare, my love, you're insatiable!"

"No more than you. Besides, we've got a lot of time to make up for," he reminded her with a sly grin and accompanying wink. "Now what do you say?"

Her smile was her answer.

Harry got out of bed then lifted Ginny into his arms and carried her into the bathroom, her arms locked around his neck. A short time later, he lowered her to her feet, drew her close, and kissed her deeply as the door closed behind them and their next interlude began.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was when they came out that they heard unexpected noises. *The girls are back?* Harry thought. *But how could that be? They were supposed to stay at the Burrow for the weekend!* Harry and Ginny exchanged panicked, questioning glances and he directed her to stay in the bedroom while he dressed quickly in sweatpants and T-shirt, then padded out barefoot to investigate. He found Luna and Molly with the girls in their bedroom, packing up more clothing. It was Luna who spotted him, fortunately, discreetly excusing herself.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Harry, but the girls needed more clothes, and Molly was too tired to do any more cleaning charms. We shouldn't be much longer, then you'll have the flat to yourself again. Had a pleasant night?"

Harry was hard-pressed not to blush as he nodded; Luna could tell that he'd just gotten out of the shower and assumed that Ginny was likely waiting in his bedroom. "Glad to hear it. Ron's doing better; he's even starting to get friendly with the girls. As far as I can tell, he hasn't recognised them yet, but I'm still keeping an eye out. Don't worry, I also know that Disguising Charm so I can renew it if necessary. Better go now so Molly and I can take the girls back to the Burrow. Just the same, I'll be bringing them back Sunday night, so you'd better have your escapade finished by then," Luna gently warned with a knowing smile. "Oh yes, before I forget ... give my best to Ginny." Harry made sure to stay out of sight as Luna rejoined the others, who finished packing, before they all Portkeyed out after taking hold of what seemed to be an old jumper.

After they had gone, Harry returned to the bedroom and explained the situation. "That's good," Ginny opined. "I was sure they were going to catch us."

"That reminds me ... we'd better go to your place, just to be on the safe side. Luna said she was bringing the girls back tomorrow night, so I've got to be here to greet them by then." Because of this, Ginny reluctantly decided to dress; all Harry did was slip some shoes on and grab a fresh set of clothes and undergarments. Not that he had worn any when alone with Ginny, either now or in the past, but with his girls in the picture, he had to be as circumspect and proper as possible, if only to set a good example for them.

Ginny turned an old book, luckily one that Harry never read anymore, into a Portkey which would take them to her flat since one could not Apparate or Disapparate within Hogwarts or anywhere on the grounds and they soon found themselves in her living room. Harry made sure to look around and take in all he could. His eyes landed and particularly lingered upon a recent picture of his and Ginny's daughter, Lily Rose, which she had told him she intended to start calling Rose so as to tell his Lily and their Lily apart.

"Where is she?" he asked, nodding towards her photograph, after she'd told him they were alone here as well.

"At a friend's house. Mum dropped her off. She's also due back tomorrow night. But until then, we have the place to ourselves."

"Oh, I was meaning to ask you ... I'd like a picture of our Lily ... or should I say Rose?"

Since they were together now, Ginny didn't see that it would hurt. All the same, it wasn't quite time to introduce Harry to Lily or Ginny to his girls just yet. They ended up agreeing that they wouldn't do that unless they decided to get married. For the time being, they would simply revel in each other and their love. It was as if they were teenagers again.

"Sure. Take this one," Ginny said, handing him the photo. "I can get another one made."

"Are you sure? I don't want to take your only copy."

"Don't worry, I have the negative. Take it."

"All right, if you say so. Thanks." His returning smile and the softness in his lovely green eyes inspired such love in Ginny's heart that she wasn't sure if she would be able to contain it all.

"Not at all. Now don't you think it's time we got back to what we were doing earlier?" She smiled wickedly and stroked his lips.

Harry returned her wicked smile and scooped her into his arms again. "Thought you'd never ask."

## A Day in the Life of Harry James Potter

### *Chapter 8 of 16*

A given day in Harry's life about a month after his reunion with Ginny.

#### **Chapter 8 – A Day in the Life of Harry James Potter**

Of course, all good things must come to an end, or at least a temporary one. When Harry least expected it, he saw Hermione approach him, a suspicious look on her face. "Harry, I'd like to speak to you."

"What about?"

"I hear you're seeing Ginny again."

"So? What business is that of yours? We're not together anymore. Haven't been for six months."

"That's not the issue. I'm just concerned about the girls. What if they saw something inappropriate going on between you?"

"Don't worry about that. I make sure the girls are elsewhere before anything happens. Whatever else I am, I'm not an exhibitionist and have no intention of doing anything 'inappropriate,' as you call it ... especially not in front of them! Frankly I'd be more worried about my own conduct if I were you."

Hermione's eyes became hard. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean. If you find yourself wanting to shag someone, kindly make sure our girls are nowhere around. I don't want them to catch you with a lover again, nor do I care to have to re-explain to them later on just what you were doing and who you were doing it with. In fact, aren't they due to visit you next weekend?"

"I believe so. But for your information, I'm not seeing anyone at the moment."

"I never claimed you were. I just want you to make sure to take the proper precautions where the girls are concerned once you start," he returned calmly. "Now, if you don't mind, I'm hungry and don't have a lot of time to eat." Hermione glared at him but couldn't argue the point any longer, and she took her leave to sit down at another table halfway across the staff room from Harry.

Harry was glad she was gone. He was expecting Ginny and was glad she hadn't walked in on his confrontation with his ex-wife. By this time, it didn't make much difference whether or not he and Ginny kissed in public, so once she arrived they did just that, and Harry frankly hoped 'Mione had seen them. They were too engrossed in each other to notice afterwards, but Hermione had indeed seen Harry snog Ginny, then cuddle with her at the other table, their heads together and their hands intricately intertwined. They even, to her great displeasure, occasionally kissed in between bites of food.

For Harry's sake, Hermione hoped he was happy with Ginny again; she just wished he didn't have to be so bloody obvious about it. In fact, she couldn't help envying his newfound happiness and told herself it didn't matter that she was alone, although deep down she knew it really did. But she had no time to dwell on it at the moment. There would be time enough to take care of that problem later. She had to figure how to entertain the girls next weekend.

\* \* \* \* \*

And just when Harry least expected it (fortunately, Ginny wasn't around at this point; she had a class), he saw his least favourite person approaching him as he was heading back to his own classroom. "What are you doing here, Malfoy?" he demanded as the blond man fell into step beside him.

"I warned you what would happen if you harassed Ginny, Potter."

"I'm *not* harassing her. She's seeing me of her own free will. We're very happy together. You can ask her if you don't believe me. And what do you care what she does or who she's with? You're not married to her anymore."

"She's still the mother of my sons, Potter, so watch your step. The last thing I or my business needs is unsavoury publicity because of you," Draco shot back.

Harry thought of a sharp retort but really didn't feel like getting into a long harangue with Malfoy just now, so he refrained.

"Harassment goes both ways, Malfoy; I suggest you remember that," he returned coolly, although he was anything but cool on the inside. "Now, if you don't mind, I have a class in a few minutes and need to prepare for it. Good day." They were standing at the door of the Defence classroom, and Harry was getting ready to close it.

Draco glared at Harry but couldn't think of anything else to say, so he simply gave a curt nod and departed, which suited Harry just fine. It not only gave him time to prepare today's lesson, but he could also think about Ginny and their upcoming night together. He would be free because Hermione was due to take the girls for her regularly scheduled visit. He could fix dinner, then he and Ginny could make love, which they had been doing fairly regularly several times a week since they had reconciled roughly a month ago. He could just imagine how she would react once he told her about Draco's confronting him again but preferred not to dwell on it too much; there were much better, nicer things for him to think about.

Just then, a brown owl swooped in the open window and headed for his desk, quickly dropping an envelope on it before flying off again. He was both surprised and pleased to see that it was from Remus. Had Minerva contacted him again? He had no idea if that had been the case or not, but what mattered was that he had heard from Moony again at last. He opened the envelope and was even more pleased to learn that Remus had learned that he was seeing Ginny steadily again.

*... I'm very pleased to learn this, Harry, and hope it continues. However, my earlier statement still stands until and unless you actually make your relationship with Ginny permanent. Let me know once you propose to her again, then perhaps we can get together and really catch up on things. I also promise that I won't confiscate your wand again, nor will I forcibly restrain you. I have been speaking with the other members of the Order and they have agreed to admit you both as regular members once you actually marry her. The main reason she is not already a member is as I think you can surmise: she was not allowed to join for the duration of her marriage to Draco. After all, how would it look for the son of a Death Eater to be married to a member of the Order of the Phoenix?*

*I hope you understand that due to what you did last time, we require actual marriage as proof of your feelings for her, not simply an engagement. We have also been exchanging regular owls with Hermione and intend to meet with her at the earliest opportunity, as I mentioned to you last time. She will not be admitted as an Order member until she has proved to us that she has shown proper remorse for her wrongdoing where you're concerned, which includes refraining from harassing you and your renewed love with Ginny in any way. I know how this must sound to you, but at this point I'm not speaking as Head of the Order but simply as someone who cares about you.*

*I look forward to spending time with you and being brought up to date again, particularly about your teaching, and will be glad to give you advice on the subject at that point if you so desire. I also believe that both your parents and Padfoot would be pleased with you for the effort you have shown in making amends to everyone for the wrongs you have done them. I've missed you and want very much to renew my relationship with you, but you need to prove your sincerity first. Once you've done that to my satisfaction, I will be happy to reinstate you as both Padfoot's and my godson. You will also be allowed to call me Moony again.*

*Keep up the good work!*

*Remus*

*PS – I also understand that you've been able to reconcile with Molly. Congratulations on being back in the fold; I hope you stay there this time.*

This was the best news Harry had had from Remus in a long time, and it made him feel like a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. It was now only a matter of time until he was back as part of the Order as well as godson to Padfoot and Moony again. He entertained these thoughts for a moment before setting the letter aside; he had best finish his lesson plan because his next students were due in just a few minutes and he wanted to have at least some idea of how to proceed with the current class before they arrived.

## Ron's Discovery

Chapter 9 of 16

Ron discovers that Harry and Hermione have returned when the Disguising Charm put on their children wears off while Luna is babysitting. He reacts predictably, prompting Luna to contact Harry and the other Weasleys for help. Ginny even offers to look after Harry's girls while he's away.

### Chapter 9 Ron's Discovery

Of course, with Harry being Harry, his good luck couldn't last forever. It was basically a minor thing which made Ron Weasley more than peripherally aware that his erstwhile best friend and his mate were back, but the fact of it was a major thing for him, especially considering everything he had endured on their account. And what was worse, Luna had aided and abetted him. He didn't blame the children, of course; they weren't responsible for their parents' perfidy, but that didn't make it any easier for him to endure their presence. Wasn't it enough that Harry and Hermione had lied, covered up, and made fools of not only him and Ginny, but their whole family and everyone who ever loved them? And now to learn that Luna had, in essence, been harbouring the children of that ill-fated relationship in his very own home!

He watched, silently seething the whole time, as Luna played with the girls and their eye colour, not to mention their hair colour, gradually changed. Luna had been too



occupied with her playtime with the children to notice that the Disguising Charm was wearing off.

"Luna!" he called to her in a voice which summoned her immediately to his side.

"Yes?"

"Are my suspicions correct? Have Harry and Hermione returned?"

"What makes you say that?"

"I just saw the girls' hair and eye colour change. They're Harry and Hermione's children, aren't they? *Aren't they?*" he demanded, hands ready to shake the truth out of her if she didn't answer immediately...and be damned the fact that his own children were within earshot.

"Ron, don't blame the children for what their parents did. Harry needed someone to look after them. He and Hermione split up recently and he got custody of their children. What did you expect him to do with two nine-year-old girls, leave them home alone while he's working? Whatever else Harry Potter is, he's a good father and loves his children!"

"May I remind you that we have two children of our own that need your attention just as much?" Ron retorted.

"I've never neglected our children, not for a moment. You should know that," Luna threw back. "Besides, Harry's paying me to look after his girls so that I don't have to pester you for spending money."

"And I suppose you think that makes it perfectly all right to harbour them in our home? Bloody hell! Didn't he take enough away from me without putting living reminders right before my eyes?"

"Didn't you hear what I said earlier? Harry and Hermionesplit up. *They're divorced. As in not together anymore.* In fact, he's begun seeing Ginny again." Luna knew she was taking a risk telling Ron this in his present emotional state, but she had to at least try to get the fact of Harry and Hermione's marriage breaking up through her husband's thick head.

"*What?!* That effing bloody bastard! I'll hex him into next year! He's put her through enough without trying to worm his way back into her good graces again!"

"It's *all right*, Ron. He's reconciled with your folks and they're okay with the relationship. If they can accept it, you can, too. Besides, he was your best friend for six years. Do you intend to throw all that away because of one mistake?"

"*Was* is right," Ron almost spat, ignoring everything else Luna said. "What about Hermione? Has*she* been welcomed back into the fold, too?"

Luna had never heard such a mixture of pain and bitterness in anyone's voice but had to tell him the truth. It would only be worse if she didn't and he found out by accident later, just as he had this time.

"From what I understand, yes ... at least to a degree."

"What do you mean, 'to a degree'? Either she has or she hasn't."

"She doesn't have free run of the Burrow. Neither does Harry. They have to call ahead, make sure it's safe to come and bring their children."

"Safe?" Ron shot back.

"That you're not around. It's done for your sake."

"You mean, it's done to keep me from killing them both!"

"Nothing you do now can change what's happened, Ron," Luna entreated. "No one knows what you've been through better than I do, and Harry knows how I feel about the whole matter. That's why I didn't name names to you when I originally accepted the responsibility of looking after his children, because I knew you'd go ballistic."

"So you just expect me to forget all the hell they've put me through, all their lying and cheating? I spent years in an alcoholic rehab clinic because of what they did and had to have just as many years of counseling for depression. Even now, I take antidepressants!"

"I know, my love, and I don't blame you one bit for feeling as you do, but you've got to at least try to forgive them and put the last ten years behind you. If you won't even try, you're no better than you believe they are."

"Bloody effing hell!" Ron swore. "Has everyone around here gone stark raving mental? These people have lied to us, made fools of us all ... and you expect me to*forgive*? For that matter, how could Mum and Dad possibly forgive what they've done to us? And you ... it's obvious you've been just as brainwashed as the others. What can I expect next? Are you going to leave me and run off with Harry, too?"

"Don't be ridiculous! I love *you*, Ron ... *only* you!" Luna insisted. "Not even Harry could make me feel any less for you!"

"Mione claimed to love me too, and look what she did," he reminded her bitterly. "That does it. You're going to tell Harry tomorrow that you can no longer look after his children. I have no intention of being used any further!"

"He's not 'using' me. I'm doing this willingly."

"You're my wife. What's done to you is done to me. And the children of that*mésalliance* have had the hospitality of my home for the past month without my knowledge. If you don't end this fiasco *now*, I will...and if I have to step in, it won't be pleasant, to put it mildly!"

"But Harry's got no other child care option," Luna protested. "And if I stop now, I lose the money he's been paying me."

"Damn it, woman, what do I have to do to get through to you? I don't want those children in my house anymore!"

"Beloved, I can understand your grievances with Harry and Hermione but don't take it out on the children. It's not their fault they're here. If you don't want them in the house, I can take them elsewhere for a couple of hours. The only problem with that is that our son has taken a liking to them. If he can't see them anymore, he's going to raise holy hell, and he's got the same kind of temper that you do. And I can't leave little Molly alone, so she'll have to go with us."

"All right, all right! If it's that important to you, keep doing it. Just do it where I don't have to see them!"

"Gladly," Luna returned. "Now, if you'll allow me to owl Harry and explain the situation ..."

"Go ahead," Ron sighed. With that, he threw up his hands and whirled around to head in the direction of the kitchen, yanked open the door of the refrigerator, and grabbed a bottle of Ogden's, charming it open and beginning to drink. Luna didn't keep any more than a few bottles around at any one time and kept them under a Locking Charm, but he knew how to unlock it. Besides, it was enough for him to get good and sloshed, because Ogden's, being 100 proof, had a high alcohol content. With any luck, he'd pass out and forget this waking nightmare, at least for a while.

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Luna immediately sat down at her desk upon leaving the room and told Harry everything, particularly the changes that had to be made, not to mention her fears that this could provoke a renewal of Ron's heavy drinking. When she finished writing, she thrust the envelope under Pig's beak and almost literally threw him into the air to send him off.

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Harry had had a bad feeling all day during his classes despite his sweetly memorable interlude with Ginny on their mutual break. When Pig showed up as he was teaching the sixth-year Defence class, he felt his fears were confirmed, and when he read Luna's letter after class let out, he was sure of it. He should have known things were going too well to last. He could only hope that this wouldn't make Ron start drinking again; he had enough on his conscience without that. He could even tell that some tears had fallen onto the parchment since there were wet splotches mussing various words here and there, but despite the smudges, Harry was able to get the gist of what it said.

Harry,

*Ron found out about your children. We argued, and he made me promise not to have the girls in the house anymore after I insisted that I intended to continue my care of them. I know you need my help, Harry. Just the same, I don't like the risk I took in not coming clean with my husband to begin with. Ron didn't take the news at all well in regards to your and Hermione's return, not to mention your dating Ginny, and I'm afraid he might have a relapse of his heavy drinking.*

*I make sure not to have too many bottles of Ogden's around and keep them under a Locking Charm, but that wouldn't necessarily stop him. You know how determined he is when he really wants something. If he has any money and sufficient motivation, he's likely to Apparate to the Three Broomsticks and start drinking there. If he does that, I don't know what I'm going to do, because I need to stay here with the children. I love him, Harry; I don't want to lose him. If worst comes to worst, can I call on you for help? If only for the sake of possibly renewing your friendship with him, I hope your answer is yes.*

Your friend always,

Luna Lovegood-Weasley

Harry sighed heavily and laid down Luna's letter. Merlin, if that didn't lay a heavy guilt trip on him, nothing would. If Ron had a relapse of his alcoholism, Harry knew he would only have himself to blame for it. All the same, he knew he would be glad to help if Luna needed him, if only for the chance to reconcile with Ron. He scribbled a quick reply and sent it back with Pig after giving him a treat, deciding to give Hedwig a chance to rest. Harry thought it best to be prepared for the worst, so he sought out Ginny and told her to contact the elder Weasleys in order to have as much help available for Luna as possible.

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Luna stood up from her desk, wiping her eyes with her plain white, violet-scented handkerchief, intending to apologise to her husband for snapping at him, even though he had started it. Ron was under a lot of pressure and didn't deserve her defying him. What he needed was her loyalty and support; Merlin only knew what he must think of her now. She headed back to the living room, unaware of the nasty surprise awaiting her there.

"Ron? I'm sorry for snapping at you. How about we go out to eat, then come back for a romantic evening together after leaving the kids with your mum?" At the doorway leading into the living room, Luna stopped, frozen in her tracks with horror. Ron was sprawled on the couch, unconscious, mouth open and snoring...and reeking of liquor. The six bottles of Ogden's she generally kept under a Locking Charm were scattered on the floor next to him.

Nothing she did roused him, not even the *Ennervate* incantation. Just the same, she felt for his pulse and knew he was alive, but he was far too heavy for her to maneuver alone. She needed help and fast. The last thing she needed was for the children to see him like this. She did all she could, cleaning up the floor near him and covering him with a blanket, stating a quick Scent-Masking Charm before heading to the fireplace to Floo Harry, first in his classroom, then if he wasn't there, at his home.

Her head popped into his classroom fire, but she didn't see him anywhere and there was no response to her repeated calls, so she backed out and tried to Floo him at his home. "Harry! Harry!" she called frantically.

However, it was one of the girls who responded. "Luna, what's wrong?" Helen asked.

"Is your daddy home, honey? I need his help," Luna told her.

"He just got here. I'll go get him. Be right back." The girl smiled reassuringly and left the room.

Moments later, to Luna's relief, Harry came running in, Helen on his heels, his forehead creased with concern when he saw the look on Luna's face and the tears on her cheeks. "Harry! Thank Merlin! I need your help! Ron ... he's ..."

"What's wrong, Luna?" Harry asked.

"I had just sent my letter to you and intended to suggest to him that we go out so he could forget his troubles, and I found him passed out on the couch, dead drunk. I did what I could, but I can't move him alone, and we need to get him to St. Mungo's right away."

"I'll be right there, Luna. Meanwhile, see if you can get Fred and George to come help." Harry then turned to his daughter. "I don't like leaving you and your sister here alone, love, but Luna needs me. Do you think you'll be all right until I get back?"

"Of course, Daddy. We'll be fine. Just put a Locking Charm on the door."

A short time later, Harry was ready to Floo to Ron's after a quick kiss and hug for both his girls and admonishments not to answer the door under any circumstances or approach the fireplace unless it was him or someone else they knew well. "Take care, darlings. I'll be back as quick as I can." Then Harry was gone after throwing Floo powder into the fireplace, stepping into it and calling out his destination.

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Once he arrived, he found Luna standing over her unconscious husband in tears; when he stepped up beside her, she threw herself into his arms. "Oh, Harry, I'm so glad you're here! This is just what I was afraid would happen. You've got to help me!"

Harry held and comforted her, patting her on the back. "Easy, Luna. I'm sure everything's going to be fine."

Just then, Fred and George popped in, taking in the scene before them with frowns and shaking of their heads. "Stupid git. He should have known better," the former remarked as he and George each took one end of their unconscious sibling and prepared to Disapparate with him to St. Mungo's. They smiled and acknowledged Harry, who was still trying to comfort a distraught Luna. "Mum and Dad are on their way; they'll meet us at the hospital, Harry. So glad you came. We're going to be busy and Luna's going to need a shoulder."

With that, all of them Disapparated, appearing seconds later in front of the hospital, where a concerned Arthur and Molly were waiting alongside a mediwizard and witch with a stretcher. All followed the medical team into the Alcoholic Rehab clinic upon entering the hospital, Harry and Luna following the elder Weasleys and the twins. To Harry's shock and pleasant surprise, Ginny came running up and threw herself into his arms upon their arrival at the clinic.

"Harry! Is Ron all right?" she asked with concern upon releasing him.

"He's alive. Just dead drunk and out cold," he assured her, one arm around her and the other around Luna as the medical team went to work on Ron to get him sobered up again.

"What about your girls? Aren't they alone?" Ginny asked with concern. "Do you really think that's a good idea?"

"I put a Locking Charm on the door. That's the best I could do."

The next thing out of Ginny's mouth was something neither of them expected, but Harry appreciated it very much, nonetheless. "Would you like me to go and stay with them?" She ordinarily would have stayed with Ron and the others, but with Mum and Dad, Fred and George, and various Healers there, he would be fine. Besides, she knew that Harry would tell her all the details when he got back. All of this gave her a perfect excuse to go, meet Harry's girls, and get to know them as she had been meaning to suggest to Harry anyway. She also knew that Harry would feel a moral obligation to stay, if only because of his belief that he had driven Ron to this, even if unintentionally, in order to make sure he would come through it all right.

Harry frowned with concern for all the ladies he loved. "I don't know. You've not officially met them yet."

"Maybe it's time I did. It wouldn't be any trouble. There's just one condition."

"Name it."

"Kiss me goodbye and spend the night with me tomorrow night. It'll be Saturday. We can take your girls to Mum."

"You've got things all planned out, don't you?" Harry teased with a sly wink as he slid an arm around her waist before whispering to Luna that he'd be right back. Once they were out of sight, the two lovers melted into each other's arms for a lingering kiss, each moaning softly at the intimate contact. "Oh my God, Gin, don't tease me. Saturday's far enough away as it is."

"Sorry. Just impatient. Let's get back to the fireplace and call your girls now," she purred, nuzzling his ear and smiling when he shivered.

In moments, they were there; again, Helen seemed to be the one pulling sentry duty. "Helen?" Harry called.

"Daddy? Is everything all right?" she asked.

"I think it will be. I have a friend who wants to look after you until I get home. Not that you can't take care of yourselves, but it'd make me feel better for her to be there. Is it okay?"

"I suppose so," Helen agreed, somewhat unenthusiastically but she didn't argue. "Is the lady next to you your friend?"

Harry nodded and smiled. "Yes. Her name is Ginny, and she's Luna's sister-in-law. I'm sure you'll get along fine." At the other end, Harry whispered to her, "Let me know how it goes."

Then Ginny called, "Harry Potter's quarters!" after throwing some Floo powder into the fireplace and stepping into it, the heatless flame instantaneously transporting her to Harry's quarters and his daughters. Even as she left, she wasn't sure she was doing the right thing, but better sooner than later to meet them. She also made a mental note to do all she could to see that Harry met their Lily at the earliest opportunity, especially if this meeting with his and 'Mione's girls went well. Draco probably wouldn't be too pleased at her wanting Harry to meet their Lily, but she could deal with him. What mattered was that they each got to know their children from their other relationships.

## Ginny Meets Harry's Girls

*Chapter 10 of 16*

Ginny agrees to babysit Harry's daughters and she and they end up getting to know each other while waiting for him to contact them about Ron.

### Chapter 10 Ginny Meets Harry's Girls

Once Ginny got to her feet, she straightened and dusted off her clothing, then looked over the two nine-year-olds who stood before her. So these were Harry and Hermione's daughters. Beautiful, naturally; that was to be expected, but she smiled to herself at the thought of her own daughter with Harry, young Rose, just a few months older than these two. Just as beautiful, if not more so, and the result of love, not simply strong hormones.

"Daddy's told us about you. He said you were once close friends," Helen said by way of starting a conversation.

"Before he and your mum got together, yes, that's true; we dated for a time. But now that he's split from her, we're back together," Ginny told the child. "We...he and I...have been meaning to bring the two of you to meet me; we've just been too busy to do so, at least so far."

"Are you saying that you and Daddy are dating again?" Helen asked as Lily simply stood by, listening and taking it all in. "Is that why we seem to be spending so much time at the Burrow these days?"

"Part of the reason," Ginny confessed. "When a couple really likes each other, like your father and me, they like to spend as much time as they can alone." Ginny wasn't sure how much these girls could grasp of the concepts of romance, she simply hoped that what she said wasn't too far over their heads. Harry wouldn't be pleased if they bombarded him with questions about her later. But even now, she was convinced that young Helen was far more perceptive than her years might indicate, so she had to watch her step around her.

"I hope you don't mind my being here. I offered to look after you only to make your father feel better. He has to be with a friend of his, my brother Ron, right now, and he can't have the two of you there at the moment. I'm sure he'll tell you ... us ... what happened when he comes back. For now, though, it's best if he just has one thing at a time to concentrate on and doesn't have your safety to worry about."

"Is it true that you have six brothers? Daddy said you did," Lily finally piped up.

"I do. Bill, Charlie, Percy, Fred and George...they're identical twins...and Ron, who is Harry's friend. They met when they were eleven years old on the way to Hogwarts."

"Daddy said we'll probably be getting letters inviting us to attend Hogwarts in a couple of years, and that he had already put in our names and birthday with the

Headmistress there," the child continued.

"As far as I know, that's true. I think my daughter and sons will be going, too. They're about the same age as you two."

"You have two sons and a daughter? Who did you marry?" Helen inquired as the girls followed Ginny to the living room and the three sat down together.

"Have you heard of Malfoy Enterprises?" The girls nodded. "I married the young man who is now head of that company, Draco Malfoy. I married him about six months after your father married your mum, and we had twin boys, David and Daryl. Draco and I divorced last year, but we still keep in touch because of our boys, and I allow him to visit them periodically. After all, he's still their father, and they love him."

"What about your daughter?"

Ginny hesitated. How would the girls react once they realised that her daughter was actually their half-sister and that Harry was just as much Rose's father as he was theirs? She would simply have to explain as best she could and hope they understood. "As I said, before your father married your mum, he and I dated, but it wasn't simply ... dating. We were engaged and had planned to be married when he returned from fighting Voldemort. However, it wasn't long before we heard that he had decided to marry your mum instead and moved to America. Even at that, he and I had been together several times before that, and I found that I was pregnant not long after he left. That's part of the reason I married Draco, to give her a father, since yours...and hers...wasn't around."

"Does Daddy know that you were pregnant?" Helen wondered. "And will we get to meet our sister one day?"

"He does now. And it's a *half*-sister, actually, but yes, your father and I are seriously considering bringing you together one day soon. Draco gave your ... half-sibling his name, and they have affection for each other, but I recently gave your father a picture of her, so when you feel you're ready, you may ask him about her."

"We have a half-sister?" Lily broke in again.

"Yes. Her name is Rose, and she's just a few months older than you." Ginny smiled. "Which reminds me, I think I remember where your father put the picture I gave him. Would you like to see her?"

The girls nodded, and the three went into Harry's bedroom, where the picture she had given him of Rose was sitting on his nightstand alongside a picture of Lily and Helen. Ginny picked up the one of Rose and handed it to the nearest of the girls, who showed it to her sister. "She looks just like me," Lily opined.

"Yes, she does," Ginny had to agree. "You could almost be twins. The boys, on the other hand, look like miniatures of their father, even though they are also Rose's half-siblings. Half-siblings happen when parents have children with different partners as your father and I did. The two of you and Rose share a father, as she and the boys share a mother...me." Ginny checked her watch and said, "I think we'd better get back to the living room. Your father said he'd give me updates on Ron's condition, and we need to be there to catch him when he Floos me."

They left Harry's room after Ginny replaced the picture of Rose on the bedside table, unable to help recalling all the tenderly passionate interludes she and Harry had shared, both here in this bed and in her own, and in spite of herself, she couldn't help blushing at the prospect of the upcoming one the following night, most likely here again. With luck, they would actually get married this time, and she would be able to share Harry's bed for the rest of her life and perhaps even have more children ... but that was getting a bit ahead of herself. If it was meant to be, it would happen. For the time being, it was best that she get to know his daughters as best she could in the time they had.

"But enough about me. Tell me about yourselves. What do you like to do, both by yourselves and with your parents?" That was when both Lily and Helen began talking at once, and Ginny had to hold up a hand to stop them. "One at a time! How about you go first, Lily?" Ginny suggested, and Lily smiled and did so. Ginny spending the next couple of hours learning all she could about Harry's younger daughter. They periodically checked the fire but hadn't seen Harry's head there yet, so she continued her talks, this time with Helen.

By the time the talks wound down, Ginny looked at her watch. Eleven o'clock and still no word from Harry. She began to get worried seeing how late it was, and if he didn't call soon, she would have to owl the hospital to find out what was going on. Lily was already curled up next to her, asleep. Even as Ginny was struck at how much Lily resembled her own daughter, she noted that Helen had been nodding off more and more often.

Even at that, Ginny was reluctant to leave the room for fear of missing Harry, so she remained on the sofa with the girls, and eventually, Helen fell asleep as well. It wasn't until eleven-thirty that a faint crackle and pop indicated that someone had entered the fire. Ginny looked up through sleepy eyes to see Harry's concerned yet tired face looking back at her.

"Sorry to take so long, Gin, but it was touch-and-go with Ron for a while. He's definitely going to be okay, but the Healers say he's going to have to spend more time in Rehab again ... probably about three months or so, at least, so we're going to have to help Luna out for a while."

"That's good that Ron's going to be all right, but it's not going to be easy to balance our work, home life, and helping Luna out. By the way, can you come home yet? I've been waiting here by the fire for hours, afraid to leave or even put the girls down for fear of missing you," Ginny informed him.

"I noticed," Harry returned dryly. "Thanks for waiting, luv, but feel free to put the girls down. I'll wait." Harry smiled warmly, his gaze full of both love and desire. "Don't worry; I'll be back as soon as I can."

"I know," Ginny assured him. "It's just not easy to have to wait for news."

"I know what you mean. As I said, I'll give you all the details when I get back. Go on, put the girls down now."

"All right." With that, Ginny gently awakened the girls long enough to take them to their room, and not knowing where their pajamas were, just removed their shoes and put them into their beds, smoothing their hair back and kissing their foreheads, then waving her hand to turn out the light and closing the door before returning to Harry in the living room.

"Good to see you again, Gin. Missed you. Girls asleep?"

Ginny smiled, nodded, and curled up near the fire, wishing she could touch Harry but having to settle for talking to him. "I wish I could touch you, luv."

"I know. I wish I could touch you, too," he confessed. "Don't worry. We'll be together tomorrow."

"An eternity," she groused.

"Tell me about it. Which reminds me...how did you and the girls get along?"

"Okay. We've spent the last several hours getting to know each other. It's incredible how much your Lily looks like ours. They could almost be twins."

"That's the Potter genes for you." Harry chuckled softly. "Dominant as all hell. Watch out for my Lily's temper, though ... Remus says it reminds him of my mum's."

"Are you reconciled with Remus yet?"

"We're corresponding, and it looks promising, but he's still adamant about not reinstating me as his and Sirius's godson until I've ... proven myself. But I've been telling him about my girls, and that's what he said about Lily in his last letter."

"I can imagine how his disowning you must have hurt," Ginny remarked sympathetically when she saw the pain in her beloved's eyes even through the fire.

"It did, very much," Harry assured her. "It was almost as though one of my own parents had done it."

"By the way, how are you supposed to prove yourself?"

"He says I've got to marry you before he'll consider reinstating me," Harry quietly confessed. "I haven't asked because I don't think you're quite ready yet ... but I want you to know that I would still like very much to marry you."

Ginny was speechless for a long time, then said, "I still want that very much too, Harry, but I also don't want to have to worry about you dumping me for someone else again."

"No chance," Harry assured her. "For one thing, the circumstances are different."

"Not to mention the fact that we're both ten years older ... and hopefully wiser," she added quietly, hoping Harry hadn't heard, but his next statement proved that he had.

"I think I've definitely learned my lesson," Harry remarked softly. "Mione was good for short stretches, but couldn't go the distance ... at least not with me. I should never have left you, Gin, and if you'll give me the chance, I promise I'll spend the rest of my life making it up to you."

His sincerity and love for her was so obvious that Ginny couldn't help but be warmed by it. Unfortunately, he was too far away at the moment to warm her as she truly wanted. Tomorrow just wasn't quickly enough for her taste, and she was sure it wasn't Harry's, either, but they would have to make the best of it.

"I love you," Harry crooned. "And I intend to make sure that you never doubt that fact again."

"I love you too, Harry, and I intend to show you just how much tomorrow night," Ginny crooned back.

"I look forward to it," he returned with a sly smile.

"And once we have the time, I intend to introduce you to our daughter," Ginny informed him.

"Draco's not going to like it," Harry reminded her.

"He's just going to have to not like it, then. I appreciate what he's done for Rose and always will, but you're her father, and you two deserve a chance to know each other."

Harry was effectively stunned speechless for a while, then said, "Thank you, Gin. I can't tell you how much I appreciate it."

"Show me, then ... tomorrow," she purred. "Meanwhile, tell me about Ron."

However, just then, Harry said, "Somebody's coming. Be right back." His head pulled out of the fire, and Ginny waited anxiously for the next ten minutes or so until his head popped back in. "Sorry, luv. One of the orderlies came to tell me that Ron's had a combination Sleeping/Sober-Up Potion which should also help him avoid a bad hangover. Arthur and Molly are coming back in the morning, and we can come visit him later in the day if you like. Fred and George have gone back to their flat, and I've been assured that Ron will be watched closely all night, so I should be able to come home soon. I just need to say goodnight to Luna and your parents, and then I'll be right there. See you soon, luv." With that, Harry popped out of the fire again.

Five minutes later, Harry stepped out of the fireplace, and Ginny almost literally leapt to meet him. She flung herself into his arms, holding him tightly as they kissed ... and kissed ... and kissed. They didn't come up for air for a long time, and it seemed that neither ever had any intention of doing so again before he finally released her.

"Sorry, luv, I just couldn't resist," he told her as they reluctantly stepped apart.

"Don't apologise. I wanted it as much as you did."

"Thanks for looking after the girls," he returned with a smile.

"It was a pleasure. I wouldn't mind doing it again, although I don't think Helen was very enthusiastic at first."

"Not surprising. As I've said, she's always been self-sufficient for her age."

Ginny sighed and looked at her watch again. Midnight. Even as much as she wanted to stay, she knew she had to get home. Rose was there alone, having returned from her friend's house shortly before Ginny had learned about Ron's predicament. She was okay for a while, but Ginny didn't want to leave her alone any longer than absolutely necessary. "I'd better get home now. Lily--I mean, Rose--came back from her friend's house a few hours ago, and I don't want to leave her alone any longer than I have to."

"I understand," Harry returned quietly, although it was obvious just from the look in his eyes that he didn't want her to go.

Ginny placed a hand on his cheek, and Harry covered it with his nearest one. "Don't worry, luv; you'll meet her very soon. It's just too late right now."

A short time later, Harry grasped her hand and brought it to his lips, his green eyes dark with yearning. "Sleep well. I'll see you tomorrow. Love you."

"Love you. Good night."

With that, Ginny threw a handful of Floo powder into the fireplace and stepped into the fire. "The Ginevra Weasley residence!" She blew Harry a quick kiss, then was gone.

## Talks with Rose

### Chapter 11 of 16

Upon her return home, Ginny has a talk with her and Harry's daughter, Rose, and later on a discussion with him which leads to father and daughter meeting for the first time.

Her own daughter, Lily Rose (or Rose, for short), was waiting for her when Ginny stepped out. She looked as though she'd been standing by the fireplace for hours, and was tapping her foot impatiently. "Sorry to make you wait, love. I had to help a friend of mine with something."

The girl's expression didn't change, but she nodded in acknowledgment. "I'd like to eat now, Mummy."

"Of course, darling." Ginny turned for the kitchen, sure that Rose knew what 'friend' her mother referred to but unsure that she was ready for questions just yet. It was for that reason that she made sure to busy herself with preparing supper for herself and her daughter (the boys were visiting Draco for the weekend). Once they got to the table and were eating, Ginny still found herself unable to meet her child's eyes, which seemed to literally read her mind.

"Have you heard from your brothers today?" Ginny made herself ask conversationally.

"No, Mummy, but that's to be expected when they're with Daddy Draco." Rose was silent for a time, and then she looked up from her plate and stared intently at her mother...for long enough to make her look up.

"Something on your mind, love?"

"You've been quite ... happy lately."

This time it was Ginny who looked intently at her daughter. "I have. Is there something wrong with that?"

"No. I was just wondering if there might be a reason for it."

Ginny couldn't help thinking, *The best reason in the world. Your father and I are back together*, but said, "Do you have a specific reason in mind that you want to talk about?"

"No, Mummy. It's just that I heard..." Rose broke off, as if she were afraid of saying too much and getting her mother upset with her ... and even the nine-year-old knew better than to rile a redhead.

"What did you hear?"

"That you're dating again. What's more, that you're dating the bloke you used to be engaged to, Professor Potter, the DADA teacher at Hogwarts."

"I am. What of it? That doesn't mean I love you any less."

"I was told ... he's my father," the girl finally blurted.

"Who told you that?" Ginny demanded, although she suspected she already knew. Draco was definitely overdue for a Bat-Bogey Hex, that was for sure!

"David. He said Daddy Draco told him and Daryl during their week together for their birthday."

"Just because Draco says it doesn't necessarily make it true. He and Professor Potter dislike each other, and they have for years. It sounds to me like he's just trying to start a rumour."

"But you did date Professor Potter, didn't you?"

"Of course, and yes, we were engaged at one time, but it doesn't necessarily follow that he's your father."

"You *would* tell me if he was, wouldn't you?" the girl entreated, her green eyes pleading with her mother. "Especially since Daddy Draco even once said that you were in love with Professor Potter."

"When we were engaged, yes, that was true, but that doesn't mean it's true now."

"But you *do* like him. Otherwise you wouldn't be dating him," the girl persisted.

"Yes. I ... like him very much, and I intend to continue dating him. In fact, we're supposed to see each other tomorrow night."

"In that case, will you be gone all night again? I've noticed that's what usually happens when you're on a date with him."

"Quite possibly. Why?"

"I just wanted to make sure not to wait up for you, that's all." Rose was already mentally figuring her next day's dinner menu even as she decided to finish both her non-magical homework, such as math, and her magical homework, such as the Summoning Charm she and her mother had been working on. She wanted to get as much use out of the wand her mum had recently bought her as she could.

Ginny was hard-pressed not to look suspiciously back at her child as she returned to her meal, certain that the statement had been a veiled confession that she suspected Ginny's relationship with Harry had once again become an intimate one. Sometimes it was positively scary just how perceptive Rose was. In fact, Ginny was all but convinced that she was a Legilimens, if not a Seer, and she told herself to have her checked at the earliest opportunity. She also intended to discuss this conversation with Harry the first chance she got.

Mother and daughter didn't speak on the subject after that; however, Ginny was sure that it was still very much on Rose's mind. She would have to get her together with Harry as soon as possible to see how they got along. Ginny prepared for bed herself, feeling it keenly that Harry could not be here with her, that they could not be together as a family as they should be.

With luck, they would be one day; but for the time being, she supposed she would just have to make the best of it and enjoy what time she and Harry could spend alone rediscovering each other. What mattered was that they were together again ... and if Ginny had her way, they would remain together as long as they lived.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fortunately her dreams took her away into a world of tender love, sweet contentment and fiery passion, so Ginny didn't think about the conversation with Rose again until she joined Harry outside under a tree next to the Black Lake the following day. Once they finally stopped snogging, however reluctantly, Ginny knew she'd better get things out in the open before he heard it from somewhere else...such as from Draco.

"Harry?"

"Yes, luv?" His arms gently tightened around her, his cheek resting on her hair for a time before moving to nuzzle her neck. "Mmmm. I swear, you're delicious enough to eat. I can hardly wait for tonight."

Ginny moaned involuntarily and squirmed. "Harry, I can't think straight when you do that...and I need to talk to you. It's important." The tone of her voice told her companion as much, so he refrained from any further physical demonstrations of his feelings ... at least for the present.

"What's on your mind?"

"I had a very disturbing conversation with Rose last night."

"Disturbing in what way?"

"She says she was told that you were her father."

That made Harry sit up and take notice. "Who told her that?" Before Ginny could reply, however, he answered his own question. "Draco. It has to be."

"More accurately, she said she heard it from one of the boys, who said that Draco told him."

"That big-mouth git. He's going to spoil everything." After an interval of silence, Harry remarked, "What did you tell her?"

"I tried to throw her off, but she wasn't easily persuaded. I suspect that she knows we're sleeping together again, especially since she also said that she knew of our previous engagement ten years ago, not to mention the fact that when we go out, I usually stay out all night. I had to admit to that much, but since I wasn't ready to admit to anything more, at least not at that point, I tried to convince her that Draco was just trying to make trouble for you, since you've always disliked each other."

"Did she buy it?"

"I can't be sure. We didn't talk any further about it. That reminds me: It might be a good idea if we get you two together soon, so Rose can see the truth for herself. Would you be willing to do that after our date tomorrow?"

"Sure, if you think it'll help. But can we get back to snogging now?" Ginny looked up into her beloved's eyes. The hunger in them was palpable as he all but devoured her lips with his hot gaze.

"Of course. I just needed to talk to you about this before we could go any further." With that, she reached up to pull him down to her, and they resumed their extremely pleasurable interlude. This eventually led to their moving to Harry's flat for the remainder of the night...or at least until it was time for him to go meet his oldest daughter for the first time.

\* \* \* \* \*

It definitely was not easy for the lovers to stop what they were doing and move to Ginny's flat, but Harry was determined to keep every promise he made to her...or at least as many as he possibly could. They showered together (but all they did was wash each other), dressed in fresh clothes, and made their way to her flat as quickly as they could. When Ginny arrived, the flat was quiet, so she thought she'd better check Rose's room to make sure she was all right.

"Rose? Honey, I'm back," she called softly after knocking on the door.

The child answered with a sleepy smile. "Sorry, Mummy. I meant to be up, but after finishing my homework, I got tired and decided to lie down." Ginny looked at her and saw that she was wearing her favourite nightie, a miniature version of Ginny's own favourite. Not what she'd expected to introduce Harry to her in, but it would likely take too long for her to change, and besides, it was late enough that it wouldn't be practical anyway.

"Well, put your nice robe and slippers on. We have company, and there's no time for you to change." Rose nodded and turned back to retrieve said items while Ginny headed back to the living room.

When she caught Harry's eye, he looked around questioningly upon realising she was alone. Ginny answered his unspoken question. "Don't worry; she's coming. It's just that she'd already changed into her nightclothes. I told her to simply put her robe and slippers on and come out."

Harry smiled in spite of himself. If the picture he had was any indication, her hair was likely to be just as messy as his after sleep. He was even considering grabbing a quick kiss from Ginny when he heard a childlike, albeit feminine, voice. "Mummy, I'm here. Where's the company?"

"Right here," Ginny said, gesturing in Harry's direction. "Harry, this is Rose. Rose, this is Harry. And to answer your earlier question, you were right. He is ... your father."

The two smiled at each other and shook hands, unsure of what to say after that. "Hi," Rose finally said.

"Hi. You're very pretty. Every bit as pretty as your mum."

"Thanks. Mummy tells me you look very much like your father."

"That's true...but I have my mum's eyes. Enough about me, though. Tell me about yourself." With that, Harry managed to break the ice, even as he moved to place a tentative hand on his daughter's shoulder and led her to the nearby couch. As they sat down together, Ginny offered to get them all something to drink. By the time she returned with three glasses of pumpkin juice, Harry and Rose were laughing about something he had told her that had happened to him while playing Quidditch, even though Ginny knew he hadn't played in years. However, Rose didn't know that. What mattered was that father and daughter were finally getting to know each other.

"Mummy says that you and Daddy Draco don't like each other," Rose remarked.

Harry's face hardened. "We ... tolerate each other, but that's about it. Mainly for your and your mum's sake."

"Did Mummy also tell you that Daddy Draco gave me his name?"

"She did ... but you don't have to take mine if you don't want to. It's your choice." Harry also recalled the writing on the picture of Rose in Draco's office sitting on his desk. He was frankly hoping Rose would choose to take his name anyway, or if nothing else, hyphenate her present name to "Malfoy-Potter" to please both fathers.

"I was thinking of hyphenating the name at some point, but not right now. Maybe once I start at Hogwarts," Rose speculated. She couldn't help noting that Harry's face had taken on a disappointed look. "Don't worry. What matters is that we've met and are getting to know each other. Oh yes, something else I meant to ask you ..."

"Yes?" Harry prompted.

"Do you intend to marry Mummy this time? She said you married her friend instead last time."

"I did, but that's over now. And yes, I'd like to marry your mum someday, as soon as she's...and you are...ready."

"I also understand that I have two half-sisters from your other...relationship."

"Right. They're just a little younger than you. If you like, you can meet them one day, but I think it would be better for us to get to know each other better first," Harry suggested.

Rose nodded and frowned thoughtfully. "Do you think you could come here again?"

"If you like, but owing to my work and my seeing your mum, I won't be able to do it all the time," Harry warned gently.

"As long as we can spend some time together with Mummy once in a while," the girl replied, punctuating her statement with a deep yawn. The adults looked at each other, suspecting that the child wasn't going to be able to stay awake much longer...and it was all the better for them.

"I think that could be arranged," Harry returned with a smile. "Meanwhile, I think it's time you went back to bed, young lady. It was nice to meet you."

"You, too," the girl smiled. She hugged and kissed her mother, then simply held out her hand and Harry, somewhat disappointed, shook it...then she giggled and threw herself into his arms for a big hug. "Just teasing. Good night ... Daddy Harry." With that, Rose took her leave.

Harry gave Ginny a funny look once Rose had gone. "I'd almost swear she did that on purpose."

"She does things like that on occasion to throw people off balance," Ginny admitted. "She's usually just teasing them, though. If she didn't like you already, she wouldn't have bothered, just said goodnight and that would be it."

"Then may I assume I met with her approval?" Harry asked questioningly as he reached out to intricately entwine Ginny's nearest hand with his.

"I'd say that's a safe bet. After all, she's already called you 'Daddy'." Ginny winked provocatively. "Of course, if you actually marry me this time, we could have more like her."

"Are you trying to scare me off, wench?" Harry threw back playfully, smiling reassuringly at the look he got back. "Don't worry, luv. You couldn't lose me this time if you tried ... and incidentally, I'd love to have more like her...of both genders this time."

"I believe that could be arranged," Ginny returned saucily, reaching to stroke the back of her companion's neck lightly enough to make him shiver. "But as I said, you've got to marry me this time."

"Oh, that reminds me ... I heard from the hospital. They said Ron's settling in nicely, and they don't think he'll have to be there nearly as long this time. Just the same, they've warned Luna not to keep any Ogden's around at all if she can help it, and even to start lobbying the Ministry for anti-Apparition wards on all Wizarding bars."

"Has she told her kids anything of what happened yet?"

"Only that he needs to be away for a while, but that they can visit him whenever they want...within reason."

"What about his work?"

"Luna's made arrangements for him to have a job he can do at home. It may even require him to learn to use a Muggle computer, even if it has to be charmed to work with magic rather than electricity. I've already told her to suggest that he talk to your father about that, since he's a nutter about those kinds of things."

"That's good. But what about your relationship with him? Does he know that you were there, that you helped when Luna needed you?"

"I think he does, but Luna says he hasn't mentioned anything about me one way or the other, so I can't be sure of anything at this point."

"If you can win Mum over again, it should only be a matter of time before you get Ron back."

"I hope so," Harry opined wistfully. "Until then, I'd rather further my relationship with you. Come here, minx." The pair began to kiss, at first sweetly, then the kisses became hot and open-mouthed. Within a fairly short time, though, Harry's caresses turned into merciless tickling, making Ginny laugh and squirm, especially when his wandering hands found some intimate (and very sensitive) spots.

"Har-ree!" she squealed. "Stop that! Stop it, I say! If you don't, we're going to wake up Rose, and I don't think you want her to come out and catch us like this."

"I bloody well don't give a damn who catches us," came the husky retort as he nuzzled her neck. "But if it'll make you feel better, we can move into your bedroom."

"As long as you make sure to put a Silencing and Locking Charm on the door."

"No sooner said than done." With that, Harry deftly scooped Ginny up into his arms and carried her down the hall to her room, which was across the hall from Rose's. Once behind the door, he kept his word, and the lovers resumed what would turn out to be the longest, loveliest night they had ever spent together.

## Reconciliation

### *Chapter 12 of 16*

Harry and Ron manage to reconcile; everyone learns of Luna's new pregnancy, and Harry officially proposes to Ginny...again. But this time, he intends to go through with the wedding!

### **12 Reconciliation**

It was late the next morning that Harry and Ginny decided to go visit Ron at the rehab clinic. Of course, neither could be sure Ron would consent to see him, especially now that he knew that Harry was seeing Ginny again, but Harry cared too much about him to stay away. When they reached his room, they looked through the window in the door and saw that Luna was there with the children. She was holding one of his hands while Ron was holding his little daughter Molly with the other. Their five-year-old son, Ron Jr., stood beside his mother trying to get his father's attention.

Ginny recalled that there was a limit as to how many visitors patients could have, so she thought she'd better go in alone, at least at first, promising Harry she would invite him in if she could manage to get Ron to agree to see him. Meanwhile, the best he could do was observe through the door.

She knocked on the door, and Luna invited her in.

"Good to see you, Gin. Oh, guess what I just found out!"

Their eyes met, Luna's asking an unspoken question as to whether or not Harry was with her, and Ginny nodded. Luna looked at the door and saw him looking through, smiling and waving. Harry smiled and nodded back.

"What did you find out, Luna?"

"I'm pregnant again! The Healer says it happened just recently, around two weeks ago. That's just about the time Harry gave me some money and told me to take Ron out



for a nice dinner, then come home and have a bit of fun and games." Luna looked at her husband, smiled and blushed, then returned to finish speaking to Ginny. "Who would have thought I would have him to thank for a new child?"

"Harry should be pleased to hear that. Do you think Ron would mind him coming in?"

Luna looked troubled, wanting to bring the two estranged friends back together but not knowing just how to go about it. She loved Ron to distraction, but he was one of the most stubborn men she had ever known, bordering on pig-headed. Until and if he decided otherwise, he wasn't about to give in...especially if he thought he was in the right. It wasn't fair to Harry to shut him out when he cared just as much for Ron as any of them, but the question was how to convince Ron of that.

"I think as long as the two of us are here, and Ron neither has his wand or his hands free, it might be safe enough," Ginny opined, smiling and gesturing to Harry to come in.

His face lit up as he opened the door and began approaching them. When he reached Ginny on the right side of Ron's bed, he slid an arm around her and nuzzled her nearest ear, then squeezed her before kissing her deeply. He kept his hands in discreet places since he was taking enough of a chance doing what he was doing, especially in front of Ron. He wasn't as good with wandless, nonverbal spells as Harry was, but there was no sense taking unnecessary chances.

Finally Ron handed Molly to Luna and said, "Cut it out, Harry! The last thing I need is to watch you and Ginny snogging in front of me like a couple of bloody rabbits!" Even with his lingering anger and hurt, Ron could see that Harry truly loved Ginny, and his heart softened, if only a little, toward him.

Harry reluctantly dropped his hands and simply stood next to Ginny for the next few minutes. "Sorry, mate. I forgot how much it bothers you." He did his best to make his tone properly apologetic. "Hope you didn't have too bad a hangover. I know what swilling six bottles of Ogdens can do to a bloke."

"Why would you need to drink? I thought you and 'Mione had a fairytale marriage!"

"Not nearly as much as you might think. She ... even cheated on me. I also had to basically take care of our girls by myself. Drinking was the only way I could forget Gin, even for a little while...but I did my best to make sure the girls never saw me drunk."

"Sorry that things didn't work out for you...but you have to admit both of you had it coming. Even at that, Luna's been telling me that Gin has even met the girls, not to mention the fact that you've met the daughter you had with her. I can imagine how Draco feels about that!" The laughter prompted by that was music to Harry's ears; he had never imagined he would ever hear his friend laugh again.

"What matters is that things are being straightened out little by little. Mum always did say that life was too short and uncertain to hold grudges, right, Gin?" Ron exchanged a knowing glance with his sister, as she nodded in agreement, having taken Harry's nearest hand and entwined her fingers with his.

"Can't say it'll be easy to be around you for a while ... 'Mione, either, but I guess reconciliation has to start somewhere. It's going to be pretty hard to stay mad at you since I have you to thank for my new child. Let's just say that forgiveness is far easier than forgetting. Have you any idea whether or not 'Mione intends to come see me, Harry?"

"I have no idea, though I suppose I could have Gin ask her. She sees her more than I do nowadays."

"Might be a good idea," Ron agreed. "Just the same, I'm afraid my declaration regarding your girls will have to stand, at least for the time being, because it's just too hard for me to look at them and know that they could so easily have been mine."

"I understand, mate," Harry returned solemnly. "As I've said, neither of us ever truly meant to hurt anyone, and I hope we can eventually become friends again. I've never stopped caring about you, and I never will."

Even as much as Ron didn't want to, he had to admit that despite his pain, anger and bitterness, that he still loved Harry like another brother. Just the same, it would take longer than overnight for them to get back to what they were. For the time being, though, what would it hurt to at least be on speaking terms again, as long as they stuck to subjects of mutual interest, like Quidditch, their work, their wives and families, things like that.

"I've missed you, too, Harry." Ron's voice was almost too quiet for those in the room to hear, but Harry heard it. The next moment found them locked in a fierce, albeit brotherly, hug; the girls found their eyes filled with happy tears at the heartwarming sight.

"I'm also sorry to have driven you to drink again, mate," Harry murmured into his friend's red hair, unable to keep from crying with a mixture of happiness and relief himself. "I should have remembered how much you disliked having things kept from you."

"That just proves that I left rehab too soon last time," Ron assured him. "But I assure you, I don't intend to let it happen again. After all, I've got a new baby coming, and a wife and family to think about."

"Maybe one of these days our respective families can even get together, Gin's and my three and your three," Harry remarked carefully, waiting with bated breath for Ron's reaction. "Or maybe Gin's and my *five*, depending on whether or not we can get Draco to let the boys join us."

"Maybe. Let's get my third born first, though," Ron joked, lifting his hand so he could share a high-five with Harry, both of the newly reunited friends laughing with sheer delight.

"I'd also prefer to actually get married to Gin this time," Harry remarked, more confidently this time.

"You'd better be, mate," Ron warned. "Otherwise I'll get Fred and George to put their nastiest joke on you!" That was when everyone knew that the worst was behind them. Now it was only a matter of time before Harry and Ron were back where they once had been. Even at that, who could be sure just how things would go between Hermione and Ron when they saw each other one-on-one again? All they could do was keep their fingers crossed, as it were, and hope for the best.

\* \* \* \* \*

This time it was only a month before Ron was back on his feet, emotionally and physically, although he had to keep taking antidepressants and have counseling. Luna had also been admonished to not keep Ogdens around anymore, that the most potent drink he should imbibe was an occasional butterbeer, and even then, only under strictly controlled conditions. That meant that any others associating with him would have to toe the line as well, if only for his sake.

Once Luna told everyone that Ron was due to come out of rehab, Harry suggested that they have a home-coming party for him...but all made it their business to keep an eye on him, see to it that the most potent drink he had was butterbeer or pumpkin juice. And naturally the older Weasleys were thrilled to hear of Harry and Ron's reconciliation. Now if he could manage to do the same with Hermione, their little circle would once again be complete.

Of course, considering Ron's newly rekindled love for Luna, which had resulted in their new child, it was unlikely that she and Ron would split up and he and Hermione get together. Of course, one could never tell about the future, but there was no sense tempting fate. What mattered was that life was finally settling down again and that the majority of, if not all, the people concerned were happy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Within another month after this, Hermione had managed to meet with Ron. They reconciled, at least after a fashion, and were able to be in each other's company and be civil to each other, if nothing else. As said before, Ron might have finally managed to forgive his friends, but forgetting was another matter...especially considering the fact the children looked so much like their parents ... almost painfully so.

Ron also finally acknowledged that while he would probably always have feelings for Hermione, Luna was the one he had married and had children with, and therefore she

was the one he intended to *stay* married to. Hermione was somewhat disappointed at this, for she had been hoping that she and Ron could eventually rekindle their romance, but she had to accept his decision and be thankful that they were at least friends again, even if they could never be more.

Harry and Ginny's relationship escalated almost geometrically. It was scarcely another month later that he officially proposed to her again ... and this time, he intended to go through with the wedding. They decided to have their two oldest daughters as dual flower girls and one of Draco and Ginny's sons, David, as ring-bearer. Of course, for Draco to agree to the boy's participating, they had been obliged to invite him, but as long as Draco behaved himself and didn't shoot off his mouth too much, they didn't think there would be any problem.

Hermione even offered to come to the wedding, if only to act as sentry and keep an eye on Draco. While he still wasn't overly fond of her, he did respect her magical abilities. What's more, upon learning that she was to be present at the wedding of Harry and Ginny, Draco told himself it would be prudent to put on his company manners, if only to keep from embarrassing himself or his company in the eyes of the wizarding world. They even gave him leave to invite one guest, which they surmised would be Pansy ... and all would be in for a surprise once they renewed acquaintances...but they wouldn't learn it until the wedding actually took place.

## Harry and Ginny's Wedding

### Chapter 13 of 16

Harry and Ginny finally get married; Ron acts as best man and Hermione keeps an eye on Draco in order that he not disrupt the ceremony, since Draco and Ginny's son David is ring-bearer and they were obliged to invite him (Draco).

### Chapter 13 Harry and Ginny's Wedding

It took about six weeks to get everything planned out to everyone's satisfaction, but even with magic on their side, all concerned were convinced that they'd manage to forget something crucial at the worst possible time. Of course, it usually happens that the anticipation is far worse than the reality, so hopefully they were worrying for nothing.

Just the same, with all the myriad details to sort out, it would truly be a miracle if they managed to pull it off without at least one thing going wrong ... and as the Muggle saying known as Murphy's Law went: "If something is going to go wrong, it will...and at the worst possible time!" Of course, all participants intended to do everything they could to see that that didn't happen, but even at that, could make no guarantees as to how the wedding and reception were going to turn out.

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As it turned out, the main problem involved getting the children organised enough so that they managed to follow instructions at the proper time. Harry knew his girls were at least fairly well-behaved, but couldn't be sure about the boy David, considering he was Draco's son. He liked to think that Ginny's genes would be dominant as far as his behaviour was concerned, but again, couldn't be sure ... simply hope for the best.

He wanted to say something to her, see if there was anything she could do, even talk to Draco, in order to see to it that things went as smoothly as possible...but he didn't have a chance to do so for days, and when he did, it was the wedding day, and he wouldn't see her until the wedding ... and that was if all went well.

Whoever would have thought he and Gin would actually manage to reach today, their wedding day? Not that he regretted his girls' birth for a moment, but couldn't help thinking now that if he'd truly been smart, they'd have belonged to him and Ginny instead of him and Hermione. Even with the former's temper and all, Harry sensed that of the two, she was the better mother...not to mention more of a disciplinarian, having grown up around the loving but strict Arthur and Molly Weasley.

Also, by this time, Luna was showing her current pregnancy, and you couldn't have found a happier father-to-be than Ron. He was almost extreme in his solicitousness and care for her and the baby's health and safety...so much so that there were times, Luna later confessed, that she was hard-pressed not to take a page out of Ginny's book and send a Bat-Bogey Hex between her husband's eyes.

"Look at it this way, Luna," he told her as he waited with her for the other bridesmaids. "Wouldn't you rather he care a little too much than not enough?"

"You have a point there, Harry," she had to admit. "Which reminds me...do you and Ginny intend to have more children once you're married?"

"I certainly wouldn't mind, but that's really up to Gin," he reminded her. "After all, she may decide that three children are enough for any one woman to have."

"She may also decide to do a Molly Weasley and have as many as her mum did. I suggest you be prepared for that as well," Luna countered.

"Well, if she is, she's almost halfway there already...but I'd keep in mind that only one of the three children she has is mine. For us to have seven children together, she'd have to have a total of nine ... and I can't be sure that Gin will want that many, even with me."

"And I'm convinced that she'll want just as many as she can possibly carry once she finally manages to marry you. After all, she's got ten years of lost time to make up for!" Luna's knowing smile prompted an involuntary blush from her former classmate and long-time friend. "Whoever thought that you of all people could still blush, Harry? Ten years ago I could have seen it, but not now."

"Oh, it can still happen...if someone happens to say something like you just said and I'm not expecting it."

Harry looked up at the sound of a nearby door opening and saw that it was the other bridesmaids, some other friends of Ginny's by the name of Susan Bones, who had married Dean Thomas, and Hannah Abbott, who had married Ernie MacMillan. They smiled and beckoned to the two of them; he and Luna exchanged glances and joined them.

"It's almost time for the wedding, you two. We'd better get inside before the others go ballistic. 'Mione and Molly are keeping Ginny under wraps until everyone's in the church, not to mention keeping an eye on the kids."

The group ducked into the church vestibule; Ron was already at the front, waiting with the wizard from the Ministry's Division of Marriage and Children who was there to join Harry and Ginny in marriage. When Harry finally reached him, Ron all but hissed in a stage-whisper, "Where the bloody hell have you been, mate? I thought you were going to be late!"

"Just chatting with Luna. She's gone now with the other bridesmaids," Harry explained.

"What are you doing being so friendly with my wife?" his friend teased. "Remember, you shouldn't be looking around. You're getting married in less than fifteen minutes, you know."

Harry was all ready with a cheeky retort when he heard the Wedding March start. In spite of himself, his heart began to pound with a mixture of nervousness and anticipation. It had taken ten years for he and Ginny to reach this moment, but what mattered was that it was finally here...and once they were married, he had no intention of ever letting her go.

The next thing he knew, his Lily and their Lily (or more accurately, Rose) began walking down the aisle, scattering rose petals the whole time, their hair up and wreathed in blue silk flowers, matching their long, lacy blue dresses; a short while later David came along, carrying the small blue satin pillow with the rings tied to them, dressed in a miniature tux covered by blue dress robes.

Harry was pleased to see that he was on his best behaviour and could only hope that Gin had managed to have a talk with Draco and make sure David behaved himself, if only for his mum's sake. He wasn't fond of the fact that Draco and their other son, Daryl, were seated on Ginny's side, a few rows back from the Weasley family, but eventually had to admit he couldn't have been anywhere else, considering his and Draco's life-long animosity.

He was also pleased to see that most of his old friends from school were on his side, including Neville, who was sitting arm-in-arm with someone Harry had never imagined him ever fancying...Lavender Brown, Ron's old flame. Of course, stranger things had happened, but still, it wasn't something that one saw every day. He was also pleased to see that Remus and Tonks had managed to make it, also sitting on his side. The latter was showing her second pregnancy, and Remus was holding the hand of their first child, a five-year-old son named Sirius James, named for his two closest friends.

Harry frankly hoped that Remus's presence meant what he thought it did...that he was ready to reinstate him as godson to both himself and Sirius now that he was actually marrying Ginny. They had continued to correspond, and Harry had eventually brought Remus up to date on his life so far, but Remus still wouldn't allow him to call him Moony yet. He got the distinct feeling that Remus wasn't about to give in any sooner than he deemed proper, even though the tone of their letters had gotten increasingly affectionate, albeit in a fraternal, familial manner.

Harry was brought back to reality when Ron whispered, "Mate, she's coming! Look!"

Once Harry lifted his head and gazed down the aisle, he was instantly enchanted by the vision in white lace topped with red-gold hair almost down to her waist and a fingertip-length veil, her dainty hands carrying a bouquet of blue roses (Hermione had charmed them) and white lilies held together with blue and white ribbons which dangled almost all the way to the floor. He was certain that nothing and no one could have been more beautiful than his bride; in fact, she seemed almost too beautiful to be real, much less belong to him.

The next thing he knew, Arthur was relinquishing his daughter to Harry and whispered, "Take good care of my baby girl, Harry. I don't want to ever see her anything but happy."

Harry smiled and whispered back, "I'll do everything in my power, Arthur, you may be sure of that." Then Arthur moved off to join Molly even as Harry and Ginny turned to face the Ministry wizard with the power to perform wizarding marriages.

Once everyone was properly situated, the ceremony began.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next memory Harry had was of everyone at the reception; as for the wedding, the only thing that seemed real to him was his vision of Ginny and the kiss they had shared after taking their vows...such a long, passionate kiss that everyone watching wasn't sure if they would ever come up for air again. Definitely reminiscent of their first kiss back in his sixth year and her fifth when they snogged in front of everyone in Gryffindor House after the winning of the Quidditch Cup.

Colin Creevey had been chosen to take pictures at the wedding and had, in fact, taken one of him and Ginny's kiss there; other than that, the majority were taken at the reception. Their first dance as husband and wife, the sharing of the wedding cake, things like that. Ginny had even thrown her bouquet, and it had landed in Hermione's arms. There had even been a picture of Hermione taken holding it. Harry was frankly convinced that that had been by design, but even if the old tradition held, he couldn't be sure just who she would eventually marry.

Just then Harry heard Remus's distinctive voice. "Well, Harry, looks like you've proven yourself worthy of being mine and Padfoot's godson again."

The younger man could scarcely believe he'd heard right. "Does that mean I'm reinstated?"

Remus smiled. "You can even call me Moony again."

With that, the two hugged fiercely, tears in both men's eyes, not to mention those of their women. "Thank you, Moony. You have no idea what that means to me."

"Oh, I think I have some idea," Remus countered with a laugh as he released Harry. "And before I forget...this is my son." As he beckoned Tonks forward, the boy was holding his mother's hand, but released it to shake Harry's when his father said, "Sirius, this is Harry, my and Padfoot's godson. He teaches the same thing at Hogwarts I used to...Defence Against the Dark Arts. If you're lucky, you might even have him as your teacher when you're old enough. He really knows his stuff." He again met Harry's eyes and said, "That is, assuming you intend to stay on here even after your marriage to Ginny."

"As long as they'll have me," Harry confirmed; just then, Minerva McGonagall came up to him and gave him a kiss on the cheek, something the very reserved Headmistress had rarely been known to do. Dumbledore had frankly been more demonstrative than she, but this day she had obviously decided to make an exception.

"Albus's portrait said to give you his best wishes for you and Ginny to have a long, happy life together, Harry. Be sure to take good care of her now."

"Thanks, Minerva. We can use all the good wishes we can get. I assume the same goes for you."

"I assure you, it does. I wouldn't kiss just anyone, you know." Harry laughed at the almost regal tone of McGonagall's voice, even as he knew she meant every word she said.

His smile widened when she moved over to hug Ginny and repeat her kiss, then whisper, "Congratulations, dear. Take good care of Harry, now...and never forget that you're also welcome here as long as you're willing to stay and teach."

Ginny returned the hug, her own eyes misty. "Thank you, Minerva. And don't worry, I'll take the best possible care I can of Harry. He's pretty special to me, you know ... not to mention to our children." With that, the three girls came up to their father and hugged him, and the boys did the same for their mother.

Ginny caught a glimpse of Draco as he approached; he was now Head of Slytherin House, although he had mellowed over time, and she couldn't help but notice how handsome he looked in his dress robes.

"Congratulations, Gin. Best of luck to you," Draco murmured as he kissed his ex-wife on the cheek and hugged her. "This is one time I agree with McGonagall, Potter. Take good care of Ginny now, or you'll have me to answer to. Remember, she's still the mother of my boys."

"Don't worry, Draco, I don't intend for anything to ever happen to her."

"It had better not. Keep in mind, my earlier threat still stands if you ever fall down on the job."

Hermione had noted Draco's approach and stood nearby, wand in hand, albeit unobtrusively, but still ready to use it if she deemed it necessary to protect Harry. "Is everything all right, Harry?" she asked of her ex-husband, who now belonged to her best friend.

"Fine, Mione. I don't think Draco intends to do anything harmful."

Just the same, she kept a wary eye on him until he moved away from Harry, Ginny and McGonagall. "Sorry to spoil your fun, Granger, but not even I'm low enough to attack Potter on his wedding day."

With that, Draco took his leave, the boys in tow, after they had said goodbye to their mother.

Hermione approached them after Draco had disappeared into the crowd, giving the newlyweds both a hug and kiss on the cheek. "Congratulations to you both. Every happiness. Have you any idea where you're going on your honeymoon, Gin?"

"Not really. All Harry's told me is that it's someplace that he believes his parents went on theirs. If you like, I can tell you about it when we get back."

Harry gave his wife a scandalised look, which wasn't lost on her. "Don't worry, luv, not any of the gory details, just a general idea of what the area looks like."

Harry breathed a sigh of relief in spite of himself. "Which reminds me, we'd better say goodbye to your family and get on with it," he told his wife. "Mione, can you take care of the gifts until we get back? We're not going to have time to open them until then."

"Sure, Harry. Glad to." With that, the couple swung around on their heels and went to find the elder Weasleys and their other sons, including Ron and Luna, to bid them farewell.

## Honeymoon

*Chapter 14 of 16*

Basically, what happens on Harry and Ginny's honeymoon.

### Chapter 14 - Honeymoon

While on the way there on Harry's broom, Ginny engaged him in conversation for what was likely to be one of the few times they would wish to do so during their honeymoon. "Did you see Pansy at the wedding?"

"No. Why?"

"You wouldn't believe how pregnant she was. Maybe that was the surprise Draco mentioned. I don't remember being that big when I was carrying the boys, much less Rose."

"If so, why didn't he show her off? Usually that's the first thing he does if he wants to brag about something he did."

"Maybe he thought it would be too stressful for her to have too much attention. After all, she's got to be at least six months pregnant, and he doesn't want to jeopardise his new child in any way."

"As big as she is, I'll be surprised if she doesn't have twins at least. Did you happen to see any fancy ring on her finger, like a ten-carat diamond or something?"

"No, but I wouldn't be surprised if Draco has one all ready for her."

"I also can't help wondering if the boys have met her yet, and if they have, if they know that she's pregnant."

"Depends on how long it's been since they've seen her. And with Draco's ego, it wouldn't surprise me a bit if he wants to build himself up as much as possible in the eyes of his sons. After all, he can't let half-bloods and blood traitors like us beat him. He needs to have at least three children himself to feel equal, at least on that score."

"Huh! We're more than equal to him, even without children!" Ginny huffed, squeezing her husband's slender waist to prove her point. "You're certainly better in bed, that's for sure. At least when we shag, you don't act like you've got to prove something to me every time. When you've got it, you don't have to prove it...and you've got it, luv ... in spades!"

"Glad that somebody thinks so. Frankly I can't remember the last time Mione praised me on that score. We hadn't shagged for six months before coming back here." That really wasn't something Ginny needed or wanted to know, especially not on her own honeymoon with Harry. But at the same time, she sensed that Harry had a lot of things he had to get off his chest, and this was just one of them. Friend or not, Hermione should never have made Harry feel inadequate, especially not in bed ... and then turn around and cheat on him.

He had more than enough of that kind of treatment from other quarters without getting it from his then-wife. Well, this now-wife would see to it that she praised him to the skies...enough to make him feel like the reincarnation of Casanova and then some.

Of course, there had naturally been times that Ginny technically could have called Harry's bedroom performance less than adequate, but it was generally when he was preoccupied with something or stressed out. Generally, making love was a great stress reliever, but Harry's life had had an overabundance of stress, to put it mildly, and it didn't always work. Just the same, she had always done her best to be there for him when he did desire physical/sexual closeness.

She had always made sure to mix tenderness with passion, told him how handsome his chest was, how beautiful his eyes and hair were, how delicious his tongue and lips tasted, how sweetly rounded his bum was, how wide his shoulders and narrow his waist, and how sexy he was when he ran a hand through his gorgeously messy hair. Most of all, she loved telling him how large and hard he was (and, when she took him in her mouth, delicious), not to mention that it felt like warm velvet over steel. And she definitely liked to think that she had also given *him* incredible ecstasy innumerable times as well, and she fully intended to go on doing it just as long as she possibly could...and she would redouble her efforts, starting today!

She came back to reality once she realised he was descending toward what looked like a thick grove of trees and green grass, dotted here and there with spots of blue, which she surmised to be ponds, lakes or whatever, depending on their size. There had even been one with a waterfall, which looked to be at least twenty feet high, falling into what she was sure was a reflecting pool. It would be great if that was their destination, but Harry hadn't said one way or the other, so she would just have to wait and see.

Within fifteen minutes they were on the ground, right next to the very same reflecting pool with the waterfall. He waited for her to release him and dismount the broom, and then he followed suit. She stretched like a cat and then headed for the pond, knowing he would follow her and frankly hoping he would suggest they go skinny-dipping.

They had done lots of things in the Prefects' bathroom at Hogwarts after renewing their romance, but not that. The showering together in their quarters usually sufficed. Well, with any luck, that would soon change.

She stopped when she was about five feet away from the water, just taking in the natural beauty surrounding her. It was hard to believe that any place this beautiful still existed, untainted by so-called civilisation, and what's more, had actually managed to stay this way for at least thirty years, since the time of James and Lily Potter's own honeymoon.

"Oh, Harry, I can't believe how beautiful this place is! It hardly seems real...and you say you believe your parents came here on their honeymoon?"

"One of the places, anyway," he returned with a smile, loving how happy Ginny was to be surrounded by such incredible natural beauty. Her happiness only made her seem all the more beautiful to him.

"Oh, luv, let's go skinny-dipping. We've never done it before, and this would be a perfect time and place to do it," Ginny enthused.

"Oh, I fully intend for us to do that eventually. But first, I have something else in mind ... and it's also something we've never done before," he crooned.

She turned around at the tender passion in his voice and the mixture of softness and fire in his beautiful eyes as they gazed upon her. "Just what sort of debauchery have you got in mind this time, Mr. Potter?"

She had to laugh at the innocently aggrieved expression on his face.

"Debauchery? I declare, dear wife of my heart, I'm shocked! How can you possibly think I would ever have such a low, base thing on my mind as that? Our love is sacred, and I intend to treat it as such, whatever I have to do!"

"Come on, Harry, I know you better than that. You're a sex maniac*extraordinaire*! Now, tell me...what have you got in mind?"

It was then Harry finally reverted to his usual expression whenever she caught him in a moment of pretense...a sheepish grin. "All right, lady, you've got me. I was simply thinking that we undress and make love in the grass, in the sunshine under the blue sky, while the cool breeze blows and the birds sing!"

"Why, dear husband of my heart, whoever thought you could be so poetic?" Ginny teased. "But it sounds great nonetheless. Let's get to it."

"Thought you'd never ask," Harry returned with a sly wink and a sexy purr to his voice as he approached her, then drew her close and kissed her passionately. With that first kiss began a literally indescribably wonderful, thoroughly memorable experience. Of course, he made sure to have a blanket they could lie on, but otherwise they would be touched only by the sunshine, followed by their lips, hands and bodies. They had always loved to undress each other, kissing and caressing from one end of the body to the other, starting at the top of the head and going down to the soles of the feet...and there had been many times that each had declared that that the other had made them come "right down to their toes!" Well, if she had anything to say about it, this moment would end in the same manner.

However, there was also one thing both had forgotten (and conveniently or not was a matter for debate), which was a Contraceptive Charm...until it was too late to do anything about it.

"You realise something, don't you?" Ginny remarked as she cuddled close to Harry, her head on his shoulder and one hand stroking the light fur on his bare chest, their legs intricately entwined. They had only recently finished making love on the grass, in the sunshine, yet again ... and this after the skinny-dipping Ginny had mentioned earlier.

"No, I'm afraid I don't, luv. What should I realise?" Harry replied, one hand running through his wife's silky red-gold hair, the other on her slender, bare waist. However, if what Ginny suspected came to pass, it wouldn't be slender for too much longer.

"We didn't use any contraception. You know what that means," she threw back.

"Of course I know what it means. You could get pregnant," Harry countered with affectionate exasperation.

"Nice to see you taking it so well," she retorted dryly. "Am I to assume that this means you're okay with our having another child?"

"Of course I am. You know I've still got plenty of money from Mum and Dad, not to mention Sirius, and to a lesser extent, Dumbledore. We could handle a large amount of children...seven, for instance, like your Mum and Dad."

"I hadn't planned on getting pregnant again this soon," she informed him.

"So what do you intend to do? Abort? Give it up for adoption? Can you imagine the headlines if that happened? 'Wife of Boy-Who-Lived Gives His Baby Up for Adoption' or something like that?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Harry. You know I'd never give up any child of yours. I'm simply saying that..."

Harry then put a finger to his wife's lips, which promptly kissed it. "You hadn't intended on getting pregnant again, I know. Well, whether you intended it or not, it's probably happened, so we'd better just accept the idea now and make the best of it ... check when we get home and go from there. You ought to know that sooner or later, no matter how careful we are initially, that there'll come a time when we'll forget the contraception and another little miracle begins."

"Oh, you! I swear, if it was possible, I'd make you carry the baby, if only to make you see that pregnancy is nothing to sneeze at. It's morning sickness, bloating, backaches, your belly swelling until you look like a baby whale, strange food cravings, labour pains. Do you realise that when I carried Rose, I had insatiable cravings for Chocolate Frogs and treacle tart for three solid months?"

This prompted Harry to squeeze his wife and kiss her hair. "Come on, luv, you should know I was just teasing, not trying to make fun of you. Remember, I experienced a pregnancy, too. Vicariously, perhaps, but I know every aspect of them. In fact, almost from the time Mione became pregnant, she started reading books on the subject and began reciting them to me day and night, chapter and verse, until I wanted to scream. I'm thankful for it now, but at the time, all I wanted to do was vanish all those bloody books into thin air. Either that or set them on fire! I had enough of books while attending Hogwarts to last me a lifetime."

"And now you're...we're...back at Hogwarts to subject a whole new generation to the same thing."

"Well, that's a teacher's duty...to drive the students crazy while at the same time, making sure they learn what they most need to learn. And it's for sure that Snape perfected the duty to a fine art!"

Ginny couldn't argue with that, but she still maintained her own personal viewpoint as to all the myriad difficulties of pregnancy. Harry knew it was useless to try to change her mind, so he suggested they have a rematch in the pond. However, Ginny shook her head. "As lovely as that sounds, luv, I'd rather sleep right now, and it's best to sleep in the shade so we're not as likely to get sunburned in the wrong places. Maybe after we wake up from our nap."

However, just after they'd awakened from said nap and were intending to head for the pond and another interlude there, Ginny called out, "An owl's heading this way! A brown owl!"

And what's more, the brown owl headed straight for Harry and landed on his outstretched right hand, an envelope in its beak with very familiar writing ... Remus! Only Remus could have tracked them down here. Well, he'd better see what Moony wanted as long as the letter had arrived. Harry conjured up some treats for the owl and sent it on its way, then opened the letter and scanned it. Ginny watched him read, wondering what he could possibly be thinking until he looked up and smiled.

"It's from Remus. He wanted to let me know when the next Order meeting is so he can induct us into it."

"But how did he possibly find us? We told no one where we were going."

"Probably his heightened senses. He's a werewolf, you know. They can find and sense things and people that most others can't."

"Do you know whether or not 'Mione has been inducted yet?"

"No...and I feel sure that she'd say so if she was. But maybe Remus owed her too and told her the same thing he told us about the Order meeting."

"Maybe. We'll just have to wait and see. Meanwhile, we have better things to do than talk shop." With that, Harry gave his wife a sly wink, pulled her close, and began passionately snogging her ... which naturally progressed to equally passionate caresses and lovemaking. But this time, Ginny had no arguments with him whatsoever for doing it ... and lack of contraception be damned!

## New Lives

### *Chapter 15 of 16*

Upon Harry and Ginny's return from their honeymoon, everyone's new lives begin, including Hermione's, who has rekindled her relationship with Viktor Krum. Children are born, including a son for Harry and his new wife, and several families are blended.

### **Chapter 15 New Lives**

Harry and Ginny had to report to the Order meeting for induction two days after the end of their honeymoon. They'd barely had enough time to settle back in and magically enlarge Harry's quarters in order to accommodate Ginny and her belongings. The third nine-year-old girl managed to get a room of her own, to the consternation of her two half-sisters. Ginny hadn't had the chance to warn Harry about their own daughter's temper; it was that of her paternal grandmother all over again.

In fact, it made even the other Lily's temper pale by comparison, since Rose thought nothing of telling off her half-sisters when they complained that she got her own room while they had to share. But after Rose was through with them, they never complained again ... at least not in her hearing. Of course, it wasn't just from Lily Potter that her granddaughter got her temper...it was from her mother's side as well.

Both Ginny Weasley-Potter and Molly Weasley had tempers that could rival Lily Potter's any day of the week and twice on Sunday. Harry was able to manage because he had gotten a healthy share of that temper, too, although one rarely saw it these days unless he was provoked beyond endurance.

Even at that, the three half-sisters ended up very close, which was what mattered. But something happened that bothered Ginny: David and Daryl had approached her with the proposal that they live with their father full-time and give her visitation rights. Ginny was convinced that Draco had to have been the one who put this idea into their heads, but she finally reluctantly acquiesced, since magic could only go so far in accommodating people in a small space.

Even wizard space wasn't limitless, and the boys liked to have their own large room to themselves and lots of expensive toys ... things that working girl Ginny couldn't give them but their rich father could. He had to have bought their love, pure and simple.

Malfoy Manor was far enough away that she'd do better to stay in a hotel nearby when she wanted to visit the boys. It didn't help matters that Draco was preparing to marry Pansy. She was just a few months away from giving birth, so they would not only have a father but a stepmother and a new sibling.

Harry understood Ginny's fears of losing her boys and suggested she get it in writing that she have a designated amount of visitation time with her sons. And if Draco infringed on any of Ginny's rights as a mother, Harry promised to step in and act in her behalf. Malfoy would give in so that neither he nor his business would be subject to the unsavoury publicity that legal proceedings could bring.

But all this was in the future. Right now it was time to get to the Order meeting and their induction. And as before, they were in for a surprise.

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After the official induction, Harry and Ginny were stunned to learn that Remus and Tonks had planned a party to celebrate not only the two new members but their marriage and the success of the Order's international recruiting drive, which had already netted several new members who either kept in touch with them via owl post or Patronus. There was even a rumour that Viktor Krum had joined his local branch of the Order and completed several successful undercover assignments for them. He was still best known for his Quidditch skills, but after age 25 (Viktor was close to 30), one was considered too old to play such a dangerous game, so he had retired and divided his time between teaching Quidditch and working for the Bulgarian Order.

During the party, Ginny kept an eye on Harry and made sure he didn't drink too much, although she was fairly sure that he knew when to stop. She couldn't help noting how reluctant he was to talk about personal things, especially regarding his time with Hermione. Other than his work, he loved talking about his and Ginny's daughters, particularly their intention to have Rose checked for clairvoyance, not to mention their plans for the future and possible further children. But he tended to shy away from anything else.

It was almost as if he preferred not to discuss it unless absolutely necessary...and even then, only with those closest to him. If Order members insisted on details, Harry gave the bare minimum. If they pushed for more, he would say, "I'm trying to put that part of my life behind me, so I would appreciate it if you didn't ask me any further questions on the subject." Usually the ones he said it to didn't argue; they just made a mental note to see if they could get anything out of Hermione regarding their time in America.

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It was several days later that something else strange happened. After their customary kiss of greeting and in the midst of their discussion about their classes and certain students, Ginny came out with the last thing Harry had ever expected.

"When did you learn this, Gin?" he asked between bites of food and swallows of pumpkin juice.

"Just yesterday. 'Mione said she got an owl from Viktor about a week ago and that he intended to come visit her. I personally think he heard that you two broke up, and he wants to try his luck with her again. If it happens, that would be good for both of them. I'm even given to understand that he'd told her he'd never married and that he could never find anyone he wanted to get serious or settle down with. I can't help believing that it's because of her.

"It might even be that he fell in love with her when he first met her. And if what she said yesterday is any indication, it may be starting up with them all over again...especially if she told him that Ron was happily married and that Luna was pregnant again.

"Ten years of marriage isn't something most people give up easily, even if they want to or choose to, as you and Mione did. And Luna's been good for Ron; she loves him and their children dearly. I can hardly wait to see which gender their child is this time. Weasleys generally have sons, but if I can break tradition by having a daughter, so can he. Have another daughter, I mean. Also, once I get pregnant again, I hope we have a son. I love our girls and the boys I had with Draco, of course, but I would really prefer to have at least one son with you, if not more."

"If we're meant to, we will, luv." Harry smiled tenderly and raised her hand to his lips, then placed it on his cheek after kissing it. "For the time being, let's just enjoy being married and being with the children we currently have."

"Oh, I am, I assure you," Ginny crooned, this time raising her husband's hand to her lips and kissing it before placing it on her nearest cheek. "Now we'd better finish our meal before it gets cold."

The look in Harry's eyes told her that it didn't matter to him whether it did or not, but he didn't argue with her.

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Meanwhile, Viktor Krum was arriving at the school...or more accurately, in McGonagall's office. He did his duty by checking in with the Headmistress first, of course, but his main purpose was to meet with Hermione, the girl he had never forgotten. He had, in effect, burned his bridges behind him when he left Bulgaria, resigning from his teaching position and the Bulgarian branch of the Order.

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After unpacking, showering, and changing clothes, Viktor--armed with the knowledge of Hermione's classes for the day--began his campaign to win her. He was oblivious to all the stares of the young witches as he passed by, intent on only one thing ... or more accurately, one person. McGonagall had given him detailed directions to the Transfiguration classroom, and he made his way there like the proverbial homing pigeon, allowing nothing and no one to get in his way. He was polite to anyone who approached him, of course, but that was as far as his courtesy extended.

His trek seemed endless; yet at the same time, Viktor knew it was the shortest he'd ever taken. After thirteen years, he still wasn't ready to face Hermione again, even as much as he wanted to see her. He doubted he ever would be, frankly; but he also knew that if he didn't make himself approach her now, he'd never have the nerve to do it again...and she had haunted his dreams for far too long to just brush her aside.

He made sure to stay in the shadows upon reaching the Transfiguration classroom; even at that, he stayed close enough to hear her sweet, musical voice. What he most wanted to see, however, was how she looked after thirteen years. Did she look like a human butterball, or had she remained slender and beautiful with her hair as brown and curly as ever? Perhaps she was even a combination of the two.

He checked his watch and noted that there were only ten minutes left of her class. His heart began to pound hard and fast at the prospect of seeing her come out that door, and he pictured himself frozen in awe at her beauty, unable to speak or move. But he couldn't allow that to happen if he ever expected to make any headway with her, either now or later...so he had to pull himself together!

The next thing he heard was a gradually increasing volume of student voices. He made sure that the classroom was entirely empty except for Hermione before he dared to look in and saw her busy scratching away on student parchments at her desk at the front of the room.

For a long time...he had no idea just how long...he stood in the doorway, half afraid Hermione would look up and notice him and half afraid she wouldn't. He was reluctant to speak for fear of frightening her; but as the seconds stretched into minutes, Viktor was increasingly tempted to speak to her, whatever the risk. Then, just as he was psyching himself into speaking, she finally lifted her head. "Yes? May I help you?" she asked, seeming to look right through him for a time, until recognition finally crossed her face. "Viktor, is that you?"

"Hermi-own-ninny?" he made himself say, feeling himself blush for the first time since he was ten years old. "It is bery good to see you again. May I haff a butterbeer vith you?"

"If you don't mind my bringing my lesson parchments along. I've got to get these all corrected by tomorrow, then hand them back to my students...and there are at least six classes' worth here."

"As long as ve can be togezzer," he replied with a smile, offering his arm once she had gathered all her things together.

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If Viktor thought he'd gotten stared at before by himself, it was nothing to what happened when he showed up in the staff room with Hermione on his arm. Naturally some students recognised him on the way ... mostly the ones who had older siblings who had attended Hogwarts ten years before and had told them about him and his legendary Quidditch prowess. But he only allowed half an hour of autograph seekers, then politely turned down everyone else who approached him...at least until the following day. He was here to see Hermione, not to sign autographs, and nothing and no one was going to deter him from his sworn mission. "Please, everyvun!" he finally said. "I cannot sign any more autographs today. I am returning tomorrow. I vill do some more then. For now, all I want to do is talk vith my friend Hermi-own-ninny."

However, if the students in question had stuck around a little longer, they would have seen something that was definitely not friendly. Instead, it positively smacked of potential romance. Viktor raised Hermione's hands to his lips and kissed them. "Hermi-own-ninny, it is vonderful to be vith you again. I haff missed you bery much and haff not had a more pleasant day in a bery long time."

"Nor have I, Viktor," Hermione assured him, having blushed at the feelings prompted by the warmth of Viktor's lips on her skin. She was unable to help wondering how they would feel on other places on her body and because of this, her face seemed to grow hotter with every passing moment. How could she feel so strongly for someone she hadn't seen for ten years? Not even Harry had ever made her feel like this.

"May I go vith you back to your flat? Ve must talk. I haff something bery important to say to you."

Hermione was hesitant at first; then she smiled and agreed, even though technically she should have turned him down and concentrated on correcting her students' lessons. The lack of companionship other than her female friends and her children every other weekend had begun to wear on her. She had thought she'd known loneliness in America and during the Final Battle before she and Harry had gotten together, but it was nothing compared to what she was feeling now, with virtually everyone she knew pairing off. And now, to have Viktor show up just when *she* most needed someone ... well, it was as if her prayers had been answered by Someone from Above. And who's to say that they hadn't?

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Upon reaching Hermione's flat, she and Viktor seated themselves on her couch and began to talk, each updating the other on what they'd been up to the last ten years. After a time, she even fixed him a meal. Hermione was a good cook; it was just that she was generally too busy to do more than give herself sustenance. The vast majority of the time they had been in America, Harry had been the cook in the family.

But she put that out of her mind almost as soon as she'd thought it; their life together was in the past, and she intended it to remain there. This was here and now, and if she played her cards right, Viktor would be her future. The only part of her past life she intended to deal with was the children she had borne ... and even then, only when absolutely necessary. It wasn't that she didn't love them, but she loved her career just that much more. Her twice-monthly weekend visits with the girls were sufficient; the

rest of the time, she was quite happy to have Harry look after them. And now that he had married Ginny, who had always been very maternal, they wouldn't lack for a mother figure when she was unable to serve as such.

"You are a very good cook, Hermi-own-ninny. Why did you not cook more often while you were in America?"

"I was too preoccupied with my work, pure and simple," she had to confess. "I was also more concerned with teaching children than raising them. I left that to Harry."

"Was that not hard on him to have to raise your children while still having a career of his own?"

"Not really. He took a leave of absence to raise them. He had a large inheritance left to him from his parents and late godfather, Sirius Black."

"You also said that the reason you and Harry decided to return to England was to break up your affair with the ... principal of your school." Hermione nodded, definitely not proud of her betrayal of her then-husband. "Why did you cheat on him?"

"I don't know. Harry did nothing to deserve it. It was really my fault for being so busy all the time that I was never able to spend sufficient time with him. I had no idea I'd missed male attention so much until I had already begun my affair."

"I hope you do not intend to do that again should you become involved with anyone else."

"I assure you, I don't. And I doubt I'll ever be able to apologise to Harry and my girls enough, because they actually caught me with my lover once. Can you imagine how I felt when they asked him, 'Daddy, who's that with Mummy? Why is she not wearing any clothes?' I just couldn't meet their eyes then ... nor can I now."

"Did you actually love the man you had an affair with?"

"The main thing I wanted from him was attention, but he got the wrong idea. However, I was foolish enough to agree to sleep with him that one day, and that was the day Harry and the girls caught us when they came home early from school and work. He went back to work once the girls became old enough to go to school."

"Did you truly love your husband?"

"I thought I did at the time I married him. But as it turned out, I eventually realised that I only loved him as a friend. I still do and always will...but I ended up apologising for using him. He's always been too nice for his own good, so he ended up forgiving me. But I doubt I'll ever forgive myself for using him and for pretending we had died in order to run off together. I swear, neither of us ever meant to hurt anyone. We believed that it would be best for everyone if they thought we'd died. We know that was wrong now and can only hope those we've wronged eventually forgive us."

"One last question. Why did you stop writing me?"

"Harry, Ron, and I were too busy preparing to go away to fight the Final Battle. Then in the midst of it, Harry and I decided to run away together."

"Where was Ron? I assumed you loved him rather than Harry."

"Strange ... I can't recall. He hadn't been around for some time, likely fighting elsewhere or something. I couldn't say for sure. I don't think Harry really remembers, either."

"That does not sound right at all. I am told the three of you were very close. How could you simply ... misplace him like that?"

"I don't know. I only know he wasn't around...and for a long enough time that Harry and I were inclined to spend romantic times together quite often before Ron made his way back to us. Then after Harry defeated Voldemort, we somehow, inexplicably, got separated again."

"I can well imagine how everyone reacted upon your return."

"Oh, we were ostracised for a long time, that was for sure. Harry was even disowned by his surrogate godfather, Remus Lupin. The Weasleys wouldn't have anything to do with him either. Only Luna, Ron's wife, was anywhere near friendly to either of us for a long

time.

"It made me sick when Harry told me later that Ron had gone through a tough drying-out after becoming an alcoholic. He still has counseling and takes antidepressants. Luna and everyone around him keeps a sharp eye on him to see that he doesn't have a relapse...but I blame myself for his setback. If I'd not left him, it would never have happened."

"You had no idea how he would react," Viktor tried to soothe her.

"I knew him for years. I *should* have known," Hermione berated herself. "Luna once said he'd never stopped loving me. But since her latest pregnancy, Ron has decided to stay with her, because she truly loves him and has always been a good wife and mother. I don't blame him for doing it, but it hurt nonetheless."

"I am sorry you have endured such difficulty...but you must know that it was your own doing." He reached out and caressed her nearest cheek.

Hermione reached up to cover his hand with hers. "I do, Viktor. Believe me, I do...and I feel sure that I'm going to spend the rest of my life attempting to make amends for it. Just the same, there are times I just want to be held, kissed, and loved by someone special who cares for me fully and unconditionally. I may be the smartest witch of my age, but I'm also a woman."

Viktor knew that all too well. Hermione was one of the most beautiful women he'd ever known. He wished that he had the nerve to ask if he was that someone special to her, but knew it was too early in the game for him to ask such a thing and expect an accurate answer. It would take time, but he knew she was worth the wait. He just hoped she would be willing to give them both that time. For the time being, all he wanted to do was be with her.

They had become so engrossed in each other that Hermione totally forgot the lessons she had to grade. She would have a fit once she realised this, but at the moment, all that mattered was being with Viktor. He knew he was taking a chance when he did what he did next, but he just simply could not resist any longer. "I love you, Hermi-own-ninny. I love you." That was the last thing either of them remembered happening that night ... until they woke up together in her bed the following morning.

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He didn't want her to leave, of course, but she had no choice; it was her duty to teach the children, and besides, she couldn't be easily replaced. In a dire emergency, McGonagall could substitute for her, but Hermione seriously doubted that the Headmistress would consider the current situation a dire emergency.

Fortunately she had awoken in time to shower and dress. As she scurried out the door, she promised Viktor she would see him at the end of the day. He didn't want her to leave, of course, but she had no choice; it was her duty to teach the children, and besides, she couldn't be easily replaced. In a dire emergency, McGonagall could substitute for her, but Hermione seriously doubted that the Headmistress would consider the current situation a dire emergency.

As expected, she about had a fit when she realised she hadn't graded any of her students' parchments, but all she could do was make the best of it and correct them during class. She gave her students their current assignment, admonishing them not to disturb her unless absolutely necessary since she would be correcting their parchments from the previous day. And even when the time for break came, she dared not take it; she needed all the time she could get to catch up on the correcting of the students' parchments. Unfortunately, since she generally saw Ginny at least part of the time (that is, provided she wasn't occupied with Harry), her friend was bound to come looking for her if she didn't show up.



And she was right. About ten minutes into the break, she heard Ginny's voice at the door. "Mione, why are you still here? I thought you were going to meet me for lunch."

"I'm behind on correcting yesterday's lessons. I got sidetracked last night and wasn't able to do them as I usually do."

"That's not like you, 'Mione. Could it be you had a guest of the male persuasion?" Ginny gave her friend a sly wink.

Hermione fought not to blush but was unable to stop. "I suppose you could say that."

"May I hazard a guess that Viktor hit town last night? You said he was coming to see you, as I recall."

"He did, and he has," she had to confess. "Do you think you could help me? Otherwise I don't think I'll ever get caught up, especially since I promised Viktor I'd see him again tonight."

"If it wasn't for the fact I'm meeting Harry in half an hour, I would," the younger woman explained, trying to seem apologetic, but Hermione knew her well enough to know that she wasn't. "And you know how he is if you make him wait."

Not that Hermione really blamed Ginny for acting as she was, but she really did need help. In that case, it might be best for her to call her bluff. "In that case, why don't both of you join me? That way we could get it done three times as fast."

"Neither of us are as good at Transfiguration as you are. I don't know how much help we could be to you, constantly asking questions," Ginny pointed out.

"It's either that or you don't see him at all," Hermione returned coolly. "I've got to get the parchments corrected, and I can't delay any longer."

"That's blackmail," Ginny threw back, her brown eyes shooting sparks. "You're lucky I don't have my wand right now, or you'd get Bat-Bogey Hex between the eyes."

"I would think you'd know how to do it without a wand by now," came the reply. "For the moment, I suggest you go get Harry and report back here." Ginny glared at her but turned to leave. "Tell you what. If you cooperate, I'll tell you what happened with Viktor and me last night."

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Of course, neither of the newlyweds were pleased at Hermione's blackmailing them, but there wasn't much they could do. The only good thing they could say for the situation was that they had managed to get their own students' papers corrected, so they wouldn't have to worry about that on top of everything else ... other than the fact that Hermione had promised to tell them about her time with Viktor, that is. And after being blackmailed, they intended to see to it that she kept her promise.

Unfortunately, in the end, Hermione was proven right, and even though Harry and Ginny were both sure they'd made mistakes, Hermione was convinced it hadn't taken her nearly as long to correct the lessons as it would have by herself.

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Both Harry and Ginny hoped to be around when Ron and Luna found out about Hermione and Viktor, since they could well imagine what they would say about the situation. But it had not surprised them when Hermione had confessed that Viktor had told her that he loved her and that he intended to stay around Hogwarts as long as it took to win her completely over. They were firmly convinced that the man had to be very serious if he had willingly burned all his bridges behind him upon leaving Bulgaria. Even at that, only time would tell as to just what would happen between them. For the moment, however, they had their own lives to live and children to raise...not to mention give birth to.

#### FIVE MONTHS LATER

As it turned out, Pansy was the first of them to give birth, then Luna. Ginny, now six months pregnant with her fourth child, had to remain at home with their other three children while the others waited at St. Mungo's. The boys now lived with Draco, but she kept in close touch with them and visited as often as she could. Pansy had given birth to a daughter, Regina Narcissa. The baby, named after her grandmothers, was the image of her mother.

As for Luna, Ginny was anxiously waiting for news and wished that Harry had allowed her to accompany him...but he had insisted that she remain at home to be as safe as possible. She wasn't fond of his mollycoddling; but at the same time, knew he was only showing his love for her and couldn't really object. Again, as it had been with Ron and his drinking scare a few months back, it was quite late before Harry returned. Ginny was awakened by her husband's gentle kiss shortly after one a.m.

"Sorry to be so late, luv, but I was just able to get away a few minutes ago. Girls are asleep, I take it." Harry sat down on the couch after moving her legs aside and gathered his wife into his arms, her head on his shoulder and arms locked around her.

"Two hours ago," Ginny replied after a deep yawn. "How's Luna?"

"She's fine, although she had a rough time about halfway through her labour. It turns out the baby was a breech, and the Healer had to go in and turn him around."

"Him? They had another son?"

"Him," Harry confirmed. "And guess what they're calling him ... Lawrence Arthur. Lawrence after Luna's father and Arthur for yours and Ron's." After a time, Harry stroked his wife's hair, then kissed it and rested his cheek on it. "Which reminds me, I think it's about time we thought about names for *our* child."

"I suppose you're right," Ginny agreed. "And since it's already been determined that it's a son, it wouldn't surprise me one bit if you've already decided what name you want."

"Let's just say I've narrowed it down," Harry amended. "How does Jonathan Harrison Potter grab you?"

"May I ask where that came from? Just curious, mind you," Ginny assured him, since she had assumed Harry would choose from the male names in his circle of family and friends. But "Jonathan" was not among the names in question, unless you counted Remus's middle name, and even then, that was just plain "John."

"I did some research and come up with the top hundred baby names in the UK. After trying hundreds of combinations, I came up with 'Jonathan Harrison'."

"It seems strange that you would go to such trouble," Ginny was unable to help observing.

"It's for our child," Harry returned indignantly. "I wanted something he could live with his entire life."

"Not that it isn't a nice name, luv, but what about 'Robert Harrison'? Isn't Robert the name of your paternal grandfather?"

Harry had to nod affirmatively, but he still said, "I also wanted a name that wasn't obviously chosen out of the fairly narrow pool of male names in my family."

Ginny sighed deeply, knowing Harry had a point, but she was just as convinced that she did, too. "Okay, what about this? Harrison Robert? Either way I suggest, he'll probably end up being called Harry, Jr."

Harry frowned and shook his head after thinking some more. "How about *Jonathan* Robert? We can keep my Christian name for another son to use as a middle name. And maybe this one will end up being called by his initials...J.R."

Ginny still had some reservations, but had to admit that the name Harry had just mentioned was as good a name as any to choose ... and again, he was right. They could always use Harry's Christian name as a middle name for another son. "All right, Jonathan Robert it is."

However, just a short time later, Remus's head popped into the fire and said, "Harry, Ginny! So glad I caught you! Dora's going into labour, and I'm going to need help getting her to St. Mungo's!" This time, Ginny wasn't about to be left behind and nothing Harry said stopped her. They couldn't Apparate in her condition, but Flooing was as safe a mode of transportation as any for a pregnant woman.

"Don't worry, Moony, we'll be right there." After helping Ginny to her feet and throwing some Floo powder into the fire, Harry wrapped himself protectively around her, knowing she would be taken care of at St. Mungo's in the event of an emergency, and called out their destination upon their stepping into the heatless flame. "Number twelve, Grimmauld Place!" With that, they were gone.

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It wasn't until they'd actually gotten to the London branch of St. Mungo's via Muggle taxi (Harry's suggestion; they just told them to come to Grimmauld Place since the customers would be waiting outside) that Harry thought to owl Molly and tell her to go pick up his and Ginny's girls and take them back to the Burrow, then wait for his communication regarding Tonks. He was sure that Ron and Luna's other children were probably there already, so they would have others of their age to play with to pass the time.

Tonks' labour and delivery went like clockwork, even though it lasted nine hours (her first labour and delivery had lasted sixteen). It was quite late by the time Tonks and the new baby, a girl who they named Rebecca Leigh, had been settled into a private room on the birthing floor. Harry insisted on it, in fact, and told the Chief Healer to send him the bill.

Naturally everyone was floored by this, especially Ginny, but he simply smiled and said, "Don't worry, luv. I'll do the same thing when our child is born. Besides, it was the least I could do for Moony."

The tired but happy friends went back home and fell into bed after assuring Moony of their return and leaving a note for Luna with the mediwitch at the desk that they would be back sometime the next day. Of course, once they had gotten some rest, Harry decided that he and Ginny had best have some quality time alone while the girls were away.

There was one position they hadn't tried that would be perfect, especially now that Gin was too big to do it the regular way. Once she had awakened, Harry whispered suggestively into his wife's ear what he wanted to do. It didn't take long to get themselves in the proper position, and they found it every bit as pleasurable as the other pregnancy-related positions they had tried. They would have to keep in mind to try it again after she'd had the baby and see if it was equally pleasurable to a *non*-pregnant woman and her partner.

For the time being, though, they intended to go with a perennial favourite that both he and Ginny found equally pleasurable, whether she was pregnant or not: the simple use of the fingers, lips, and tongue, the use of same being limited only by the imaginations of the partners involved ... and one may be assured that both Harry and Ginny were *most* imaginative!

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Of course, they did still have other things they needed to do, and having Rose checked for clairvoyance was one of them. Even at that, the tests were lengthy and grueling, especially to a child, much less an adult, so they would have to be divided up into several different sections.

From what he understood from Ginny, his ex-wife seemed to be dividing her time between her work and Viktor. It also seemed that Hermione had been making sure to have her work done before having any quality time with her new beau. That certainly suited him just fine, for he had no intention of allowing her to rope him and Ginny into helping her again if he could avoid it. It was fortunate that the girls spent most of their time with him and Ginny since rumour had it that Viktor had all but moved in with Hermione, even though he technically had his own quarters.

He probably only kept them for the sake of variety in shagging spots, if his reputation with the ladies was any indication, Harry thought wryly. But strangely enough, that was one thing he hadn't heard of, at least not recently. Viktor hadn't been seeing anyone other than Hermione for all the time he'd been here, and it was close to a month now. If he didn't get some answers from Ginny soon, he would likely have to ask Viktor what his intentions were regarding Hermione...if only for the sake of the girls. After all, she still did have *some* parental obligations, even if he was their primary caregiver.

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Two weeks later, they were well into the clairvoyance tests, and if the results he had been receiving were any indication, Harry was all but convinced that his oldest daughter would one day be either a Seer or Divination teacher. Certainly they needed a bona fide teacher at Hogwarts after so many years of Trelawney. From what he understood, Rose held the potential for even surpassing the renowned Seer, Cassandra Trelawney, Sybill Trelawney's great-great-grandmother...and that was saying something. They had even had Rose make some tentative predictions. The most noteworthy were the following:

According to her, he and Ginny were likely to have ten children, surpassing even the prolific Arthur and Molly Weasley. In which case, he would have to make sure they eventually had a big house built...that is, if he didn't find that there was actually a family mansion specifically for Potters. And considering the fact that the family wealth was old money, handed down through many generations, it wouldn't surprise Harry one bit. The first chance he got, he intended to investigate this possibility and see what he came up with.

He was also given to understand that Ron and Luna's next child (or more accurately, set of children) were to be identical twins...but not necessarily boys, as generally happened in the Weasley family. That is, if the whole prediction had been known at this point, which it wasn't. The problem was that Rose was unable to see more than a few years ahead ... ten at the most. But her ability was, considering her age, unprecedented, so the Panel made note of her predictions and made sure to tell her parents to keep them informed of which predictions came true and which didn't, at least not immediately.

She even foresaw Hermione and Viktor getting married. That was definite, according to her. It was too early to say for certain if they would have children; but they were still young, so it was a definite possibility.

Harry also intended to encourage Rose to tell him if she happened to see anything else concerning their family, so he could take steps to prepare for virtually any possibility...especially the possibility of his ending up the patriarch of his own large family...and whatever she told him, he would make note of in a special journal that he would keep under lock and key in a special place which only he and Ginny would have access to.

For the moment, though, particularly once the tests had been completed, both Harry and Ginny intended to see that the girls had as normal a childhood as possible. That is, as normal as any childhood could be in the wizarding world, when it came to children with abilities such as Rose's and equally magical parents.

# Two Years Later

## Chapter 16 of 16

It is now two years later, and the older children have begun their academic careers at Hogwarts. Meanwhile, other children have been born, to Harry and Ginny, to Remus and Tonks, to Ron and Luna; Viktor and Hermione have married and are expecting as well.

### Chapter 16 Two Years Later

It hardly seemed possible that two years had already gone by and that it was nearly time for the older children to start Hogwarts...in fact, Rose, Helen, and Lily, as well as the boys David and Daryl, had all received their letters, book lists, and all that. It was on the Saturday, a week before they had to report for their first year, that Harry and Ginny took the girls to get all the necessary accoutrements for their magical schooling (not including wands; they had gotten them the year before).

The new acquisitions included brooms, which they could use for Quidditch if they chose...the newest model, of course, the Nimbus 3000, just as Harry had had a Nimbus 2000. He and Ginny had agreed not to get the girls Firebolts until they were older ... or at least not until they were as old as he had been when he got one, at any rate. He and Ginny had also taught the girls all they possibly could up to this point, magically speaking, up to and including Quidditch.

Upon getting home with all of said accoutrements, Harry and Ginny helped the girls pack their trunks and told them what to expect as first-years, including the Sorting into the various Houses and, most importantly, what to expect of those Sorted into each. The girls found it difficult to believe that the Sorting Hat could possibly be so knowledgeable, but both Harry and Ginny knew that it was. It was near the end of the indoctrination that the girls asked if the boys had been told all this.

Ginny personally wouldn't be at all surprised if they hadn't been told, knowing Draco. She suspected that he would tell them all kinds of derogatory propaganda regarding the other Houses and tout Slytherin House. That was to be expected, but the boys deserved to be able to make their own decisions and have friends from each House if they chose, not limit themselves to one House. Certainly both Harry and Ginny had had friends from two of the other Houses in Hogwarts, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw, as well as their own Gryffindor. Why shouldn't their children be the same?

They had also allowed the girls to pick out their own owls. The very last thing they had told them was how to get to Platform 9¾ at Kings Cross Station to board the Hogwarts Express and what to expect once on board. Just the same, both knew it would not be easy to let them go, because Hogwarts was a boarding school and the girls would be gone for nine months out of every year. The most contact parents would have with their children during that time would be occasional owl posts.

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Of course, since they had had at least some preparation, Harry and Ginny wouldn't find it nearly as difficult to see their girls off as would most wizarding parents. Just the same, when the time arrived, they drove there in a flying car much the same type as the old Ford Anglia the Weasleys had once owned, but a far newer and more sophisticated model, which comfortably accommodated Harry, Ginny and their girls. Fortunately, September 1 fell on a Saturday that year (2007), so they were able to go see them off.

However, shortly after Ginny had become pregnant for the third time (she had had a son that they had named Jonathan Arthur, who had Harry's green eyes but otherwise had the Weasley red hair and freckles), they had bought a house halfway between the Burrow and Hogwarts, and the young parents had lived there with their little son and the girls when they weren't working at their teaching. If it weren't for Ginny's latest pregnancy and little Jon, however, they would have been unable to endure the girls' absence even for a short time, much less for months on end as would be required for the seven years they would attend Hogwarts.

It wasn't until they actually had to say goodbye to their children that Harry and Ginny realised just how difficult it was to let go of them, even for a short time. They now definitely understood why the Weasleys had acted as they did when the younger Weasleys and Harry had been attending the school. The four Houses of Hogwarts had specially painted cars on the Hogwarts Express; Harry soon spotted the red and gold one for Gryffindor, but he could not have said just which House the girls would be Sorted into.

For the time being, they had to all go in a neutral-coloured car that would accommodate all the first-year students for each House. As per tradition, the Sorting would not take place until the first-years had reached Hogwarts and everyone was in place for the Welcoming Feast. Harry had also told the girls about his old friend, the gentle half-giant, Hagrid, the groundskeeper of Hogwarts, who usually greeted first-years and conveyed them across the Black Lake to the school.

Harry couldn't help but smile knowingly at the way Ginny clung to their girls and cried buckets before he almost literally peeled her off each of them and put them onto the train. It was very difficult for him not to do the same, of course, but he had to be strong for his ladies. So he merely gave them loving hugs and kisses on their foreheads and wished them the best of luck, admonishing them to contact him and Ginny immediately if they had any questions, either by owl post or Floo. They all assured him they would do so, but Rose and Helen in particular. Harry had also owled Hermione to tell her that the girls would now be at Hogwarts for most of the year after this. By this time she and Viktor had married, and she was even pregnant again. Harry could only hope that Viktor would not end up raising the child as he himself had been obliged to do with Lily and Helen.

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A week later, Helen wrote her parents to tell them about how the Sorting had gone, not to mention the Welcoming Feast and the first-years' meeting with Hagrid and company. To no real surprise on anyone's part, two of the girls had been Sorted into Gryffindor, and Helen, the child most like Hermione, had been Sorted into Ravenclaw. Nor was there any surprise when both David and Daryl had been Sorted into Slytherin. Ginny had hoped that their Weasley blood would have been more of an influence, but obviously their Malfoy blood had been dominant; just the same, she had admonished them...if only for her sake...to treat their half-sisters decently, even if they were in different Houses. There was no guarantee they would do so, of course; she could only hope. For the time being, all she could do was concentrate on having a healthy baby.

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The following week, Helen wrote to tell her parents that all of them had tried out for Quidditch. Both David and Daryl had made the Slytherin Quidditch team, as Seeker and Keeper. She was Seeker on the Ravenclaw team, Rose had made Chaser on the Gryffindor team. Lily hadn't made the cut for that sport, just as Hermione had never been one for the sport...but the latest reports from her indicated that she seemed to be following in her namesake grandmother's footsteps and becoming very good in both Potions and Charms. Harry was truly thankful that Snape wasn't doing Potions anymore, if only for his girls' sakes, and that he himself was the DADA instructor and Ginny was the Charms instructor...but only for second, third, and sixth years. In which case, they wouldn't be able to teach them until next year.

Even at that, he had told them to feel free to ask him or their mum any questions on either subject they deemed necessary if there was something they didn't understand. He was also glad to hear that David and Daryl were treating the girls all right, but he couldn't be sure how long that would last. If he heard of any problems, he would have

Ginny discuss it with Draco and see what he could do; after all, he was Head of Slytherin House, having earned an honorary professorship after having given a substantial financial contribution to the school in the name of his children, both natural and adopted.

While waiting to hear more from the girls, Harry spent at least part of his leisure time inquiring as to the possibility of a family home specifically for Potters in Godric's Hollow, although there was no guarantee there would be one ... at least not there, mainly because Godric's Hollow was a very small place, little more than a village. It was more than likely that any large house would have to be in one of the larger surrounding towns, if not one of the neighboring provinces or even London itself. He wished Sirius was around to ask questions of, but Remus was all he had. So he owled him and asked if he knew of the existence of a family home specifically for the Potter family ... ask if James had ever mentioned anything to him or Sirius about it. If that was the case, Harry would appreciate it if he would tell him at his earliest convenience, since he was looking into the possibility of purchasing it for his growing family.

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The following week brought a missive from Rose, who pleased her father immensely by informing him of a new ruling (and spell) that would lessen the possibility of serious head injuries to Quidditch players: It was an invisible shield around the head that would act like a helmet. Harry couldn't have been more pleased to hear of such a development; it was definitely long overdue. He certainly could have used something like that; it would have saved him a lot of time in the hospital wing!

Rose had even mentioned times in practice where she had found it necessary to use the Sloth Roll, which involved turning upside down to keep from being struck by a Bludger aimed at her by one of the nastier Slytherin team members. She had been pleased to see that it was one of her half-brothers who had taken the culprit to task and warned him that he would answer to him if he ever did anything like that to his sister again ... or even tried to do so!

Of course, that didn't stop him, so she reported after the next practice that the three Gryffindor Chasers, one of which was Rose herself, formed a Hawkshead Attacking Formation, which involved the three players, one in the center and slightly ahead of the other two. They had zeroed in on the persistent opponent and eventually ran him off the pitch. Naturally other nasty Slytherins tried to stop them from doing it, but David and Daryl had not been among them and warned them not to try if they knew what was good for them. The Gryffindors had also reported the incident to Madam Hooch, who had taken 50 House points from the student in question.

Harry couldn't help but think that the goodness had to be at least partially due to the boys' Weasley blood ... although since Draco had mellowed out, the rest would have come from his side. Draco had first shown that goodness was possible for him when he had been unable to kill Dumbledore as originally instructed in sixth year. It wouldn't have surprised Harry one bit if Draco had been severely punished for it and therefore not allowed to become a Death Eater. Voldemort had probably even considered himself generous in allowing him to live! In the end, of course, there would have been no point in being one since Voldemort had been vanquished years ago. Of course, he, Ginny and other Aurors (when they weren't teaching, she and Harry did part-time Auror work for the Ministry) knew they would have to keep vigilant in order to make sure that another Voldemort never arose.

Rose had also told him that David and Daryl were becoming most proficient at casting disarming spells, hexes, and jinxes like the Jelly-Legs, and combining them as Harry and his friends once had in order to vanquish Draco, Crabbe and Goyle on the Hogwarts Express.

Harry chuckled nastily under his breath upon recalling that they had looked like giant slugs stuffed into Hogwarts uniforms, and from the sound of it, felt sure that both the boys and girls were well on the way to being able to defend themselves in battle should it ever become necessary again. For the time being, though, all Harry wanted for his children was to have a normal childhood...or at least as normal a childhood as was possible under the circumstances.

Even his and Gin's three-year-old son, young Jon, was already showing signs of magical ability, since the boy had already somehow been able to turn his hair blue, not to mention inadvertently vanish the large front window of the house, which Harry had had to replace, whereas Ginny had had to restore the boy's original hair colour.

Harry could still recall when he had vanished the glass in the snake cage at the zoo, so he wasn't surprised when his son had managed to do it as well. He could only hope that the boy wouldn't turn out to be as big a prankster as his uncles Fred and George, much less like his grandfather James. Getting it from one side was bad enough; both sides would likely be a disaster. Harry could only hope that his and Ginny's good traits were dominant and kept the bad side in check; otherwise once Jon started school, he would likely be in constant trouble with either his professors or the headmistress. Even McGonagall could only overlook so much. The main reason Harry hadn't been in trouble a lot more often than he was while in attendance at Hogwarts was because of his friendship with Dumbledore and McGonagall's love and respect for the gentle and wise, yet at the same time extremely intelligent and canny, old wizard.

Harry had even considered telling the children about the Marauders' Map, how their grandfather James had been one of the makers, but Ginny had managed to talk him out of it...at least at this moment in time...since they were likely to get in enough scrapes without it. He finally promised that he wouldn't tell them until they became teenagers ... and even then, only if they managed to keep their grades up to an "Acceptable" level at minimum, but preferably "Exceeds Expectations." Of course, considering the fact that Lily and Helen were his and Hermione's girls, it wouldn't surprise Harry if at least one of them turned out to be even more of a bookworm than she and ended up with twelve O.W.L.'s in her fifth year.

That would even beat out her mother, who had had ten "Outstandings" and one "Exceeds Expectations," for a total of eleven O.W.L.s. He had been pleased enough to get as many as he had in his own fifth year...seven, as he recalled. And even then, quite a bit of it had been due to help from Mione. Of course, he had even beat her in at least one class, in DADA ... but that was to be expected, considering all the experience he had had learning defensive spells and battling the forces of Darkness virtually every year of his magical schooling.

Of course, there was one thing he was definitely considering once the girls got old enough and if they managed to keep their grades up...getting them each their own Invisibility Cloak. He would definitely have to admonish them to use it only when absolutely necessary and even then not for frivolous things. He debated as to whether or not to tell them what he had used his own for, then decided against it; surely they would come up with their own ideas as to how to use it without his help. Well, he'd better get his mind back on his work. He didn't want Gin to lecture him for daydreaming again, since they were both Legilimens and Occlumens, necessary talents for Aurors. Which reminded him ... what was she doing right now?

He concentrated hard and eventually heard in his mind the sound of water running and hitting tiles; she must be showering. In that case, it was time for him to join her; they hadn't gone at it in the shower for some time ... and Jon was asleep anyway, so neither he nor they would be disturbed, especially if they put a Silencing Charm on his door and both a Locking and Silencing Charm on the bathroom door. Harry Apparated to the upstairs hall, so it was just a matter of a few steps until he reached the bathroom door, then entered it to find Ginny already in the shower, delightfully wet and deliciously naked, which prompted an almost immediate arousal on his part. He thought a nonverbal vanishing spell to quickly rid himself of his clothing and joined her.

Ginny was used to his doing such things by now and was only momentarily surprised; a moment later he whispered to her to wrap her arms and legs around him as he propped her against the shower wall, and yet another tenderly passionate interlude transpired. Of course, they wouldn't be able to do it face-to-face much longer once she got big enough with her latest pregnancy, but Harry intended to enjoy every pleasure his wife's body could possibly afford him for as long as possible, and this one was his all-time favourite ... just as *she* would always be his favourite, for as long as they both lived.