

Feelings

by jmlane57

This fic is one another friend and I have been working on, but because of the collaboration, I had to ask her permission to post it here--and she granted it... so I hope those who read it like it. It's basically a story of what happens when Ron finds out about Harry's romance with Ginny by surreptitiously reading his diary--then later on, Harry and Ginny help Ron and Hermione get together after a misunderstanding between them. (There are several rather short chapters, but some later ones are longer. Bear with us; as I said, we're still working on it.)

Harry's Diary

Chapter 1 of 9

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Chapter 1 - Harry's Diary

Ron had just finished his dinner and went up to the dormitory. He didn't find anyone; Harry and the others weren't there. Exhausted, he was heading to his bed when he saw a book of his on Harry's desk. He was wondering why Harry used his, but then he remembered that Harry had lost his book not long ago. He took it back, but after he had taken it, he saw another book with it, and when he read what was written on the cover, he couldn't resist reading it because it was Harry's diary, even though he technically shouldn't have.

Ron looked around to check if anyone was coming, but of course he was still alone in the room. He took the diary and opened it to the last page that Harry had written and began reading.

Dear Diary,

Today was perfect. I spent all day with my Ginny; we really had a great time together. First, in the morning we went to the lake, just the two of us. Nobody was around, we were all alone, and oh, Merlin, that kiss ...!

Ron was shocked; all his face turned red. He was so angry that if Harry was there, he would have been hard-pressed not to kill him.

After a few moments, he carried on.

As I felt her sweet red lips against mine, all I could ask of God at that moment was to let it last forever. The most amazing part was when we were lying on the ground looking at the beautiful sky and having her head on my chest; I was the happiest man in the world. Before we came back to Ron and Hermione, she gave me another huge kiss which filled my heart with pleasure. I can still feel her lips on mine. God, I love her so much; I can't survive without her. I don't care if anyone is against our love; all I

want is to be with Ginny, and I want her to be only mine ...

Ron immediately sat down on his bed; he was so shocked that he couldn't feel his legs anymore. He was really mad at Harry, but now that he read a bit more he was angry at both of them. *Traitors*, he thought. After another few moments he continued.

In the afternoon, nobody was in the dormitory, so I went up there with Ginny and we lay on my bed. And there ... I couldn't resist kissing her all the time; she couldn't help it either. Of course, I put the Invisibility Cloak on us so nobody got to see us. After each kiss, I told her how much I loved her and how much I cared about our love ...

Ron couldn't read anymore. He was shocked and at the same time, so angry that he closed the diary, put it back where it had been and went back to sit on his bed to think. *I can't believe it. All the times he was pretending to study, he was with Ginny. What am I going to do? I can't talk to him about it. I mean, that would be embarrassing for both of us; besides, he's my best friend. I can't keep Ginny away from him; our friendship would be over if I do it, but I don't understand. Why didn't he tell me? I would have let him be with her ... Anyway, better him than Malfoy*, he thought upon lying down; after a few more minutes, he fell asleep.

Harry's Diary, 2

Chapter 2 of 9

In this section, Ron confronts Harry and Ginny. Harry tries to lie his way out of it but Ginny gets upset with her brother and nothing is resolved ... at least not at this point in time.

Chapter 2 - Harry's Diary, 2:

In the morning Ron and Hermione were taking their breakfast together, but Harry wasn't with them. Ron was looking upset, unable to stop thinking about what he had read the previous night.

"What's wrong with you?" Hermione asked.

"Nothing ... it's just ... never mind. Tell me, have you seen Harry?"

"No, I haven't seen him today, but I saw him yesterday with Ginny; I think they were going to your dormitory. Ah, here they are!"

As Ron got up from his chair, he was looking at them in a weird way. Harry immediately suspected something. When they all sat down, Ron began questioning Harry.

"Where were you yesterday? I looked for you everywhere."

"Oh ... erm ... I went to the lake with Neville to help him find some plants he needed for some potion," Harry lied.

Ron scowled skeptically. "Oh, really? ... and where did you go in the afternoon?"

"I was studying in the library."

"I saw you and Ginny going upstairs; wh ..." Hermione began.

Before she could finish her sentence, Harry interrupted her. "I helped her finish her essay," he returned nervously.

"Why didn't you just go to the library? Why did you go upstairs?" Ron asked pointedly.

"We didn't want anyone to bother us, that's all!" Ginny shot back. She could feel that Ron was furious, but was fast becoming angry herself.

Harry held Ginny's hand under the table, which made her feel less nervous; Ron gave both of them a strange look, and it made Harry feel very uncomfortable.

From that moment on, Ron behaved strangely with Harry and Ginny. Every night when Harry wasn't there, he read his diary. He knew it wasn't a good thing he was doing, but kept reading.

Three days later, Ron took the diary as usual, opened it to the last page that Harry had written and began reading.

Dear Diary,

I don't know what to do anymore. Ginny wants me to tell Ron about us, but I can't do it. Ron would kill me if he knew. I love her so much; I can't take that risk ...

Ron didn't want to carry on reading, so he just put it back where it had been.

Confessions

Chapter 3 of 9

Ron goes to Harry and tells him that he knows of his relationship with Ginny; what's more, he confesses his own feelings for Hermione.

Chapter 3 - Confessions

Harry was lying on his bed thinking about all the moments that he had spent with Ginny these last few days while Ron was going to tell Harry that he knew about him and Ginny and that he didn't blame him. He entered the dormitory and stood at the foot of his friend's bed.

"Harry, I think we have to talk." Harry looked at him questioningly.

"About what?" Harry asked, getting up from his bed.

"Harry ... I know that you're with Ginny."

Harry froze and didn't know what to say or do. "Ron, I ... I ..."

"Don't worry, Harry. I'm not gonna kill you!" Ron said, laughing.

"Ron, I don't know what to say. I know I haven't been honest with you, and I'm really sorry."

"I understand. You didn't want me to separate you from her."

Harry couldn't help wondering where Ron had gotten that information. "Ron, tell me, how did you know about Ginny and me?" he asked.

"Erm ... I saw you kissing the day you went to the lake. I know you love her and I don't blame you at all."

"Thank you, Ron."

"Harry ... I haven't been honest with you, either. I want you to know that I'm in love with someone."

"Yeah, I know. Lavender."

"No, Harry, not her."

"What do you mean? She's your girlfriend."

"Yes, but I'm not in love with her."

"Who is it, then?" Harry asked with excitement.

"Promise you won't laugh."

"I promise."

"It's ... it's Hermione."

Harry laughed and Ron got angry. "You promised!"

"I'm sorry, Ron, but I can't believe it. You two are always fighting; how could you fall in love with Hermione?"

"I fell in love with her in our third year. I can't stop thinking about her, Harry. I love her so much; what should I do?"

"Why don't you just tell her?"

"Are you crazy? She would push me away."

"No; I'm sure she has the same feelings for you."

"What about Krum?"

"She's just hanging out with him to make you jealous."

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it; she was pretty upset when she saw you kissing Lavender the first time. She spent the night crying."

"How do you know?"

"Ginny told me."

"I think I should break up with Lavender first, and then it will be easier for me to tell her."

"Ron, thank you."

"For what?"

"For letting me be with Ginny."

"No problem, mate. Better you than Malfoy."

Harry then left the room and headed to where he was supposed to meet Ginny, intending to tell her what had recently transpired after leaving Ron alone to think about what he was going to do.

Ron's Letter

Ron decides to write a letter to Hermione confessing his love for her, then seeks her out to give it to her.

Chapter 4: Ron's Letter

Ron took time to decide what to do. Indeed, he spent the day thinking about it and finally decided to write a letter to Hermione, telling her how much he loved her, so he took a paper, a pen and began.

Dear Hermione,

I guess you're wondering why I'm writing you this letter. Simply put, I wrote it to tell you that I love you. I've loved you since our third year. I never told anybody about that before because I was afraid of being rejected. I'm sorry for my behaviour in fourth year and for all the mean things I've said to you. I know you've been hurt many times seeing me with Lavender, but I made her my girlfriend just for revenge because I've been really jealous of Krum.

The truth is that it was my way of showing you how much I love you. For years I've dreamed of having you in my arms and feeling your lips against mine. I wished to comfort you when you were sad and when you were crying; every time I lay in my bed I thought about you... and when I fell asleep, I dreamed about you. It's not easy for me to write all that, but it's easier to write it than to say it. I hope you have the same feelings for me because if you don't, I will be the saddest person in this world.

Love, Ron

Ron took the letter and went downstairs to look for Hermione; he found Harry and Ginny kissing passionately. He was a bit angry when he said, "Watch it! Just because I've given my permission doesn't mean I can't withdraw it."

Ginny turned to Ron and shot back, "Since when do I need your permission? Anyway, you said yourself you would rather it be Harry than Malfoy."

"Yeah, just as long as you don't start snogging each other in public."

Harry felt embarrassed and tried to change the subject. "Ron, have you thought about what I said?"

"Yeah, I've written a letter."

"That was a good idea; will you give it to her now?"

"I don't know, maybe... yeah, if I find her."

"Oh... good luck, then."

"Thanks."

Ron went away to look for Hermione; Ginny looked at Harry with a questioning look and said, "Ron wrote a letter? To whom?"

"It's for his girlfriend; nothing important."

"Well... it seemed important; why wouldn't he ..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Harry took her in his arms, then gave her a huge kiss which seemed to last forever. Ginny totally forgot what she had been about to say, soon becoming lost in the warm sweetness of his lips and the gentle strength of his arms around her.

Hermione Engaged

In the midst of everything, Viktor Krum proposes marriage to Hermione, and she accepts without thinking. Unfortunately Ron sees it happen and simply drops the letter he's written her and flees. A short time later Hermione finds it--and her reaction is predictable.

Chapter 5: Hermione Engaged

Hermione was sitting alone in the library thinking about everything that happened to her: her relationship with Krum, her feelings for Ron .*What am I going to do? I love Ron, and I want to be with him, but I can't just break up with Viktor; besides, Ron is with that stupid Lavender, and he is certainly in love with her, so why should I break up with Viktor just to suit him?* she asked herself, attempting to justify her actions in regards to Krum.

After a few moments, Krum came to her. "Hello, Hermo-ninny."

"Viktor! What are you doing here?" she asked nervously.

"I came to take you with me."

"What? Where do you want to take me?" she questioned.

"I cannot explain here. I must talk to you privately. Come on!"

Krum and Hermione went outside, and then once they were alone, Viktor took a little box from his pocket, and got down on one knee before her. "Hermoninny, before I met you, I didn't know what love was. What I mean to say is that I love you and want to spend the rest of my life with you." He opened the little box to reveal a beautiful, diamond,

solitaire engagement ring, held it out to her and said, "Vill you marry me?"

Hermione froze; she was shocked. Then she said, "Yes", without being fully aware of what she was saying even as Viktor put the ring on her finger*My God, what have I just said?*

But then Viktor kissed Hermione passionately, and she couldn't do anything about it; from that moment Krum and Hermione were engaged.

Ron kept looking for Hermione that day, and when he found her with Krum, kissing, and saw the ring put on her finger, he was shattered. He dropped the letter and ran away.

When Krum finally pulled away from Hermione, he said, "Come, let us break the news to the others."

"No, I don't want anybody to know for the moment. Please, let's just wait for a better time."

"Okay, as you vish. Do you vant to go to the lake?" Viktor asked, smiling.

"No, you go. I'll go back to the library."

"Are you sure you don't vant to come?" Viktor's smile faded and his tone sounded disappointed.

"Yes, I'm sure; I'll see you later."

"Very vell. I see you then." He made himself smile and kiss her tenderly, then left.

Hermione was getting back to the library when suddenly she saw Ron's letter on the floor. She picked it up, not knowing for whom it was. When she saw her name on it, she immediately opened it and read it. Tears filled Hermione's eyes as she grabbed her things, then ran to her room and spent the rest of the day crying. "He was here ... and he saw us... Why didn't you tell me, Ron ... why?" she asked tearfully.

Meanwhile, Ron was in his room thinking. *Why did you do this to me, Hermione? I should never have written you that letter; instead, I should have just forgotten about you forever*, he thought miserably as he lay on his bed, his eyes filled with tears and one arm draped across them.

Contrary to Ron and Hermione's situation, however, Ginny and Harry spent many unforgettable moments together during this time, spending almost all their time in various romantic places in and around Hogwarts. Not to say that they weren't trying to help their friends as much as possible in between trysts, but for the moment, the couple felt they deserved some time to themselves, if only for their efforts so far, if not for future efforts on their friends' behalf.

The Plan

Chapter 6 of 9

Harry and Ginny devise a plan to get Ron and Hermione together, unaware that their friends are taking steps of their own toward that end.

Chapter 6: The Plan

The next day Ron avoided Hermione and tried to stay away from everybody. He didn't even talk to Harry; anyone could notice that something was wrong with him. Hermione felt sad all day and was avoiding Viktor as much as she could. She couldn't stop thinking about Ron and the letter he had written her.

In the evening Ron was lying on his bed, his eyes filled with tears, remembering what he had seen the day he went to give the letter to Hermione.

*Hermione, you've broken my heart. Why did you do that?*he thought miserably when suddenly Harry entered the room and headed for Ron.

"Hi, Harry."

"Hi. What's wrong with you? You have been acting very odd today," Harry remarked.

"Nothing's wrong. I was just ... a little bit tired, that's all," Ron replied nervously.

"Look, Ron, I know you too well to swallow that. Besides, I'm not stupid; I could see that you're avoiding everyone ... especially Hermione," Harry returned pointedly.

Ron took a deep breath and confessed. "You're right, Harry; I was avoiding Hermione, and for good reasons."

Ron told Harry all what happened with him, and Harry felt sad to hear all this. "But why didn't you try to talk to her?" Harry wondered.

"Put yourself in my shoes. What would you do if Ginny was engaged?"

"You're right; I would probably be doing the same thing you're doing," Harry admitted, sitting beside Ron.

"How could she do that to me?" Ron said sadly.

"I think you should give her a chance," Harry suggested.

"She's engaged, Harry; I've lost her forever. I'm not going to break up with Lavender."

"Ron, you can't give up so fast ..." But before Harry could finish his sentence, Ron interrupted him.

"I'm not going to change my mind, Harry. She'll be better off without me," Ron returned gloomily, looking at the floor.

Meanwhile, Hermione was telling Ginny about Ron's letter and her engagement with Viktor.

"I don't know what to do now, Ginny; I've broken Ron's heart. He'll never forgive me," Hermione said in a tearful voice.

Ginny felt really concerned to see her best friend this sad and tried to comfort her. "Don't worry, Hermione; Harry's going to talk to Ron, and I'm sure this problem will soon be solved."

Harry went back to the common room to wait for Ginny, but when he saw her coming down the stairs, he forgot completely about Ron and Hermione. He just wanted to have her in his arms. He ran to her and wrapped his arms around her, capturing her lips with his. After a long, lovely snogging session, Ginny pulled away from him to catch her breath.

"Harry, have you talked to Ron?" Ginny asked.

"Yes; I've talked to him and he told me everything. I guess Hermione confessed everything too, didn't she?"

"Yes, she did--and I'm really worried, Harry."

"Don't be. I know we can solve this problem; we just need to have a good idea, and I think I've got one."

"Okay, so what's the plan?"

Harry explained it to Ginny and she found it brilliant, though it wasn't going to be easy for them to apply it.

* * * * *

It took several days for Harry and Ginny to figure exactly how they were going to get their friends to the Room of Requirement and arrange the best possible conditions. In most things, Harry knew Ron well, but emotionally speaking, Ginny knew him best, so Harry pretty much left it to her to figure out the romantic scenario most likely to succeed in bringing their friends together. Of course, all this was done in between conducting their own romance. There were times when it was extremely difficult (to put it mildly) to concentrate on the business at hand—but through a combination of stubbornness and determination, they managed it.

Harry was the one who suggested that what they came up with should be as much in keeping with Ron's personality as possible, yet still concise enough to get the desired message across at the proper time. It was also deemed necessary to have it all planned out before they dared to attempt to implement it. Even once the conditions were set, they still had to figure just how they were going to get their friends to come to the Room. Maybe they could say they wanted them to meet them there for an evening of fun, having dinner and/or listening (or dancing) to their favourite music, if not both.

Harry could cook, but having been under the tutelage of Molly Weasley her entire life, he knew that Ginny was infinitely more skilled in food preparation. She also knew Ron's tastes in food, not to mention Hermione's. It might even be a good idea to have the food prepared and waiting for them once everything else was ready. Perhaps once the dinner had been consumed and the couples had settled into quiet communion together, Harry and Ginny could discreetly excuse themselves so their friends (as well as themselves) could be alone.

Of course, it would likely be up to Hermione to start things off, but hopefully Ron would be able to finish them ... follow her lead, as it were. But owing to his previous track record, that remained to be seen. Even at that, Harry intended to advise his friend as best he could, even considering his own limited experience, if only to make sure he and Ginny could have some alone time without worrying about Ron interrupting them at an inopportune moment.

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Meanwhile, even as apprehensive as she was about all that had happened (and what was likely to happen), Hermione knew that she would likely have to be the one to make the first move in regards to mending fences between her and Ron, even though she had always been taught that it was the man's job to make the first move. Maybe if she wrote him a letter detailing her true feelings for him and the situation with Viktor, not to mention her hope (and wish) that they somehow manage to straighten things out between them. Perhaps that would work since Ron seemed to be avoiding her—and it wasn't hard for Hermione to figure out why.

She was more for direct confrontation to solve problems, but in this case, she fully understood his pain, fear and unwillingness to be hurt any further. Maybe it was technically the coward's way out, but considering that emotions were involved—emotions that had already been injured once—she was all but convinced that an exception could (and should) be made in this case. But even if she somehow managed to work things out with Ron, what could she possibly say to Viktor which would spare his feelings, yet still get her out of an increasingly delicate and complicated situation?

However intelligent she was, Hermione knew that this was one time she wished mightily for the wisdom of an older, more experienced person. She really wished she could discuss it with her parents, but had no way of contacting them other than owl post, and it would take too long to hear back even if they answered immediately. A telephone could instantly connect her to them; unfortunately, magic canceled out any and all electrical devices within its vicinity, so she was truly on her own. Not even her closest friends could help her now.

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Of course, this was one of the few times when she would be proven wrong—and it was only a matter of time until she found this out.

The Big Evening

Chapter 7 of 9

The big evening for Ron and Hermione happens the very next night, which Harry and Ginny have been working diligently to prepare both their friends and themselves for. Soon they will know the results of their efforts.

Chapter 7 The Big Evening

It was around seven p.m. the following evening that Harry and Ginny went to the Room of Requirement to set up for their romantic evening for four. After thinking what they wanted the room to become and walking back and forth three times in front of the wall where the door usually appeared, it did just that. They walked in and noted that there was a fully-equipped kitchen with a comfortable-looking set of loveseats before a roaring fire set on a rose-printed carpet off to the side, complete with champagne on ice sitting on a small table between the loveseats, champagne and ice which was charmed to last for hours.

Harry even noted a door off to the other side and knew where it must lead, smiling wickedly at the thoughts the sight prompted. At the proper time, he would lead Ginny into the adjoining room so they could be alone. If they played their cards right, Ron and Hermione would be too engrossed in each other to notice they were gone. Even at that,

Harry had planted clues for them to follow in various places they all frequented but where only Ron or Hermione would think to look...clues which would eventually lead them to the Room of Requirement, where their friends and a sumptuous dinner, cooked by Ginny, would await them.

Harry also planned to ward the door of the Room with a Silencing and Locking Charm if only to be on the safe side, but if all went well, it wouldn't be needed to keep them in. It would be needed simply for the privacy of all lovers concerned. Of course, neither of them knew what Hermione was doing right now, something which would also lead Ron to meet her at the Room of Requirement ... or so she hoped.

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This surely had to be the toughest thing Hermione had ever had to write, but she knew she had to ... or else it was likely she and Ron would lose each other before ever having had each other. It was up to her to tell him the truth, and she couldn't hold anything back either, not if she expected him to believe anything she said. With that, she curled up in her favourite cushy chair nearest the fire in the Gryffindor common room and began to write.

My dear (or should I say 'dearest?') Ron ...

I certainly feel that way about him, Hermione thought as her Self-Inking Quill scratched across the parchment on the lap desk before her. She decided to go for it. This was no time for cowardice; the entire romantic future of both herself and Ron depended on what she did now.

I'm sorry you have been caused such pain by what you believe to be my engagement to Viktor Krum. I have to admit I care for him, but not like you think. That emotion is reserved for you ... has always been reserved for you. I never had the nerve to tell you this before, my most precious love, but I found the letter you wrote, and it was so beautiful it made me cry. I assure you, you've not lost me ... by no means! However, it will all be for nothing if you don't believe me.

I have an idea. How about we meet in the Room of Requirement at seven this evening? I'll fix us some dinner, and maybe we can even invite Harry and Ginny to spend the evening with us. How would that be? But most of all, I want to be alone with you to show you how I feel without any prying eyes. Please say you'll come and that you believe me when I say I love you...for I've never meant anything so much in my entire life.

If you believe me, please answer me as soon as you get this. It will make me the happiest, luckiest witch in the entire Wizarding world!

All my love now and forever,

Your Hermione

Upon finishing the letter, Hermione went to the Owlery and chose the first owl she saw, a large tawny, thrust the letter under its beak, then told the bird to deliver it to one Ronald Weasley post-haste and wait for an answer. The owl seemed to nod in understanding and took flight a moment later, the letter held firmly in its beak. Hermione felt as if a great weight had been lifted from both her shoulders and her heart to know that she had finally managed to tell Ron how she truly felt about him. Now all she could do was wait for his answer and pray that he would believe her.

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The owl found Ron within half an hour, and he found tears misting his own eyes at the poignant and beautiful words Hermione had written him. He had never been so happy, his heart had never felt so full ... and he could hardly wait to be alone with her and show her how he truly felt! Of course, he couldn't do this until they were truly alone, but once they were, she wouldn't know what hit her.

My most precious and beloved Hermione ...

Thank you so much for clearing things up. You have made me the happiest, luckiest wizard in the world. I will do everything I can to make sure you never regret choosing me. And yes, that would be great if we could have an evening together with our friends ... Just let me know when and where you plan to do it, and I'll be there with bells on!

Yours forever,

Ron

He then scribbled her name on an envelope, slipped the letter inside and thrust it under the owl's beak before telling the bird where to take it and who to take it to, already making plans as to what he would do and say when he saw Hermione again. Of course, making plans was one thing. Actually carrying them out was another...but he planned to do his best, even if he had to ask Harry for help.

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But even as Ron was doing this, Ginny and Harry were setting things up in the Room of Requirement. Or more accurately, she was getting the dinner made, and he was setting up the clues which would lead them to the Room at the proper time. At this point, of course, they were unaware that it was the other letters exchanged between their friends which would ultimately bring them to the Room, but what mattered was that they would show up. And once they were there, they would see to it that things progressed as they should, whatever they had to do...up to and including locking them in the Room.

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Once seven o'clock rolled around, the matchmakers were as ready as they would ever be, the food ready and waiting in the kitchen/dining room section of the Room and their friends waiting in the living room section. It was very hard for the other lovers not to begin their own evening together, but they had to wait until their friends had arrived and they had had dinner before they could leave and be alone.

Hermione arrived first and was stunned at what Harry and Ginny had done, hugging the stuffing out of them for being so perceptive and helpful once she realised why they had done it. Now all they had to do was wait for Ron to come. Harry had already assured his closest female friend that he wasn't about to let Ron leave until he and Hermione had resolved things to everyone's satisfaction, even if he and Ginny had to lock them in the Room. Hermione laughed and said, "I don't think it'll be necessary to do that if we play our cards right ... but then, one never knows, so it might be a good idea to keep it as a backup plan just in case of necessity."

Harry had even asked her if she had found the clues he had planted, and Hermione shook her head. "No, I'm afraid not. I came here because Ron and I had planned to meet here for a private discussion...but it's all the better that you and Gin have anticipated our needs." Just then, they heard a commotion at the door, and Ron stepped in, slowly, carefully, gauging as to whether or not it was safe to enter.

"Hello, everyone ... Harry, Ginny ... Hermione ..."

Hermione smiled tenderly in Ron's direction, knowing she was all he saw, despite their friends' presence. "Ron. I'm so glad you could come."

This time it was Ron's turn to be stunned at what their friends had done ... and while he was taking it all in, Harry had surreptitiously cast Locking and Silencing Charms on the door of the Room. All of them were dressed in their nicest casual clothes, and once Ron took a deep breath, noting the smells of all his favourite dishes, he suggested they all sit down and tuck in, then move to the living area where the couples could have a private talk.

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Which they did. In fact, Harry and Ginny were simply pretending to talk themselves; instead, they were listening to Ron and Hermione's conversation. Even at that, they had

their backs to them, so the others had a modicum of privacy. Their smiles grew wider and more knowing with every passing moment. In the end, they simply held each other, and Ginny rested her head on Harry's shoulder as they listened.

"Ron, why didn't you tell me sooner? If I had known how you felt, I would never have accepted Viktor's proposal."

"Because I ... didn't think you could ever love me. I mean, you're so ... smart, so beautiful...and I'm so ... ordinary. How could I ever expect you to give me more than the time of day? You deserve someone extraordinary ... someone like Krum."

"You seriously underestimate yourself," his companion all but crooned back, resting her hand over Ron's nearest one. "What if I said I wanted you instead? That I've always wanted you ... ever since fourth year...and that the only reason I accepted Viktor was because I didn't think I could ever have you? But now that I know how you feel, I know it would be wrong to stay with him. Neither of us would be happy, and I would be wasting both his and my time. My heart knows where I belong...and I belong with you."

His heartbeat went into the stratosphere at both her touch and her confession. "Just the same, I should never have sent you that letter."

"Why do you say that? Is there something wrong with telling someone you love them?"

"Not ... wrong so much as pointless. For all I knew, you never cared for me as more than a friend. And the way I treated you then ... I don't blame you for being upset. I was a totally foul git...but I was so hurt, so jealous, seeing you with him when I wanted so much to be with you myself."

"I realise that now ... and you were not wrong to send the letter. It was beautiful, and I'll treasure it as long as I live. I hope you liked the one I wrote back just as much."

"I did ... but I've been such a ruddy coward. How could you possibly..."

Hermione put a hand to his cheek, and Ron felt all the blood rush to his face.*Oh, God*, he thought. *Her hand is so soft. I want her to go on touching me ... Never stop ... Please ... never stop ...*

"You were simply afraid of being hurt. That's natural. So was I ... which was why I could never bring myself to tell you my feelings before now." She gave him a heart-stopping smile when he lifted a hand to cover hers.

"But ...Mione, you've always been one of the bravest people I know, standing up to Malfoy and all. I could never have done that."

"That's one thing. Baring one's heart is something else again. No one likes feeling vulnerable, and when you fall in love with someone, you give them the power to make you feel vulnerable simply by what they do or say...or *don't* do or say."

"Just as it crushed me when I saw you with Viktor, and then he proposed to you and you accepted," Ron recalled.

"As I said, I only did that because you were with Lavender and I didn't think I could ever have you," Hermione reiterated, her eyes filled with tears. "If you had any idea how much it crushed *me* to see you with her ..."

"Don't cry, 'Mione. I'm sorry for both hurting you and for not asking you out in fourth year. If I had, none of this would ever have happened, and we'd be together now. But it's too late. You're with Krum and I'm with Lavender."

It was then that Hermione noticed Harry and Ginny had discreetly taken their leave but didn't say anything to Ron, preferring to let him think they were still nearby, at least for the time being. "That could be changed, you know. Nothing's firm yet."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll break up with Viktor if you break up with Lavender," she finally blurted, knowing she had to say it while she still had the nerve.

"I can't ask you to do that."

"What if I want to?"

Ron's heart felt so full at her declaration that he didn't think it would be able to contain all the love he was feeling for the girl beside him. In fact, if he felt much more, he was certain it would literally explode.

"Bloody hell, Ron! What do I have to do to convince you that I love you? That I've always loved you and always*will* love you?"

Ron looked up into Hermione's eyes and realised she wasn't lying. She didn't generally use profanity, but had this time ... which seemed to be the only way to get through to him. What was more, she had said she loved him directly from her own lips. It was real...just as he had always dreamed and hoped for...and now here he was, just looking at her lovely face, into her soft brown eyes, totally lost for words.

"Ron ... I want to hear you say you love me, that you don't want me to be with Viktor. If you do, I'll break up with him and be all yours."

It was at this point that Ron finally realised that Harry and Ginny were gone. He had no idea when they had left, but he was frankly glad they were gone, most likely to carry out their own rendezvous. Meanwhile, he had his own to worry about.

Ron then slid his arms around Hermione's waist, pulled her close, and they kissed passionately, fiercely, for several moments. When he finally pulled away, he said, "I love you, Hermione, and want you to be mine alone. Please don't ever go back to Viktor. We belong together."

Hermione's brown eyes glowed as they looked into his blue ones, her lips sweetly swollen from his kiss, and said, "I promise you, I'll break up with Viktor today."

"And me with Lavender," Ron said, hugging Hermione again, unwilling to ever let her go.

Ron and Hermione talked for hours after that, telling each other everything they should have said before this but couldn't say until now. Only then did Harry and Ginny check on their friends from the adjoining room, smiling knowingly, wickedly, upon seeing them kiss passionately. Their work was done, at least for now, so they had earned some more quality time alone for themselves.

In fact, Harry was even planning the best way to propose to Ginny, even owling Gringotts to send him his mother's engagement and wedding rings from his personal vault so he could propose properly. He hadn't even told his friends his intentions, much less Ginny, and wouldn't until he had everything planned out to his satisfaction. He might even decide to use the Room again; he hadn't made a definite decision on that yet, but kept it as an option. Until he did decide for sure, they would keep to the status quo.

Preparations, Endings and Beginnings

Chapter 8 of 9

Preparations are made for the birthday parties of both Harry and Ginny and he sends for his mother's ring in order to propose to Ginny properly. Meanwhile, Hermione and Ron make the necessary breaks with their current "significant others" in order that they themselves can be together.

Chapter 8 – Preparations, Endings and Beginnings

But even as Harry was making his plans to propose to Ginny, both of his friends were making plans to end one relationship in order to start a new one—with each other. They were under no illusions it would be easy, nor were they looking forward to the possible reaction of the other person in question. Even in the best of circumstances, there were going to be hurt feelings and plenty of them, no matter how gently the words were put.

Most of all, Ron wished he could have someone do this unpleasant task for him—but unfortunately he was the one who had gotten himself into this situation in the first place, and it was therefore his responsibility to end it. Maybe it would help if he kept picturing Hermione's beautiful face smiling and glowing with love for him, declaring that she would belong to him and him alone for as long as they both lived ... Of course, a lifetime commitment meant marriage, and he knew he wasn't ready for such a step just yet, any more than he was sure Hermione was—but when he was, he knew who he wanted to marry. Meanwhile, he had best find Lavender and break it off with her as gently as he could.

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After owling Viktor at his hotel, Hermione sat beneath a tree near the Black Lake, trying to think of the gentlest possible way to break off her engagement to him. It had never been easy for her to do such things, but a lot of necessary things were difficult, and this was just one more. She had a book in her lap, but had been so preoccupied with her dilemma that she had been unable to read for one of the few times in her life.

So preoccupied, in fact, that she didn't hear the footsteps approaching her on the paved sidewalk a short distance away. It wasn't until a shadow fell over her that she looked up and saw Viktor's rugged, weather-beaten face. She smiled and invited him to sit down next to her, even allowing him to hold her hand, but demurred when he tried to kiss her. He hid his disappointment as best he could and spoke quietly but his Bulgarian accent betrayed his inner feelings.

"Hermo-ninny, your letter troubled me greatly. What is on your mind that you would need me to meet you for a private talk?"

"Viktor, I can't deceive you any longer ... and what's more, I cannot marry you. I ... love another. It would be a waste of your time and mine to go through with the wedding, and you deserve someone who truly loves you."

He was silent for a long time, then his grip on her hand tightened, as if by letting it go he would lose her for all time. As it was, he sensed it was going to happen regardless of what he did, but wanted to keep her near him as long as possible. "I have ... very deep feelings for you, Hermo-ninny. Feelings I have never felt for anyone else in my life."

"I know you do, Viktor, and I'm very sorry that I have to do this. You're a wonderful person and are very special to me ... and should make one very lucky witch a wonderful husband. But I cannot be that witch, for my heart lies elsewhere. It always has, and always will."

"Then why did you accept my proposal?" he demanded, his accented words laced with deep hurt this time.

"Because I was unsure of how my other love, Ron Weasley, felt about me at the time. But he recently confessed that he loved me, and I had to tell him how I truly felt about him. He knows about us, you see, and in order for us to be together, I have to end it with you."

"It is said that this ... Ron ... already has a girlfriend," Viktor pointed out.

"Yes, I know—but he said he was going to break up with her so we could be together ... that he had only begun his relationship with her to make me jealous."

"That is ... somewhat immature, you must admit," Viktor returned with a disapproving air.

"Perhaps so, but that is part of what I love about him. I truly believe that my love will help to mature him into the man he is meant to be. Please don't deny me that chance."

"But my feelings for you aren't simply going to go away."

"Not overnight, no, but eventually you should be able to put it behind you ... with any luck." Hermione knew she didn't sound too hopeful of that, but had to let Viktor down as gently as possible. She felt Viktor raise her hand to his lips and kiss it, then look deeply into her eyes.

"Please, Hermo-ninny, stay with me. I will do everything in my power to make you happy, give you my devotion, a beautiful home, children ..."

"I can't." She was unable to look up at him because tears filled her eyes even as she clung to his hand like a lifeline.

"You mean you won't. Well, then, I can only hope that this Ron treats you right. If he does not, you may warn him that he will answer to me if I ever discover that you are not happy and it is his fault."

"Thank you for caring, Viktor. I hope we can always be friends." Viktor forced a smile, and it was at this point that he drew Hermione into his arms and held her for the last time, resting his cheek on her hair and stroking it, breathing in the scent of the rose shampoo she used and savouring the warmth of her body.

Only after he finally released her did she remove the engagement ring from her finger and give it back to him. Viktor pocketed it without a word, then brought the both of them to their feet. "May I walk you back to the castle?"

The walk back was quiet, the other all too aware of their companion's presence, although they didn't touch again until they reached the doors. "Thank you for everything, Viktor."

He simply nodded, his eyes clouded with pain but his face impassive. "You will always be in my heart. The best of luck to you now and always."

The couple shared one last fierce embrace, then Hermione opened the door and disappeared inside the castle. Viktor left as quickly as he could, then once outside the grounds, he Disapparated.

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However, the same could not be said for Ron's own encounter with his erstwhile girlfriend. He did manage to get it across to her that he had fallen in love with someone else and wished to end their relationship, although he hoped they could stay friends. "I'm afraid I can't do that, Ron. At least not right away. And I'm not stupid; I've seen how you look and act around Hermione Granger. You fancy her ... you've always fancied her."

"It's not that I didn't care for you, Lav, but Hermione is ... something else again—and I've never been able to divide my affections, at least not romantically speaking."

"In other words, I was just someone you used to make her jealous, and now you want me to let you go so you can be with her." Lavender's eyes filled with tears but she said, "Well, I suppose I can't stop you and should be big enough to wish you well—but I hurt too much right now to do that. I'm sure you understand why."

Lavender sighed sadly. "Don't worry, Ron, I'm not going to make a scene, even though every instinct is telling me to do just that—but even if I fight, I know I'll lose in the end, so what point is there to that? Go now. Go to her. I'm sure she's looking for you." He walked a few steps away and looked back at the blonde girl sitting on the sofa nearest the fire in the Gryffindor common room. Her eyes filled with tears before she bowed her head and turned away from him.

Ron had never liked confrontations like this, and he liked hurting people even less, especially female people, but in a case like this, it was unavoidable. The only good thing about it was that it was behind him now, and he had a clear field to Hermione. Now all he had to do was find her.

Birthdays/Proposal

Chapter 9 of 9

This is where both Harry and Ginny have their respective birthdays even in the midst of Harry's making plans to propose to Ginny ... with help from Hermione and Molly.

Chapter 9 Birthdays/Proposal

A few days later there was an owl post from the Burrow telling of Molly's having set up everything for Ginny's upcoming seventeenth birthday party. When Harry got it, he kept the subject of it secret but otherwise Ginny and his other friends knew about it. However, he decided that he was going to need Hermione's help in setting things up so he could properly propose to Ginny at some point during the party. Either that or after it, if it wasn't too late after it had finished.

The perfect birthday present for her from him would be an engagement ring...preferably his mother's...and marriage proposal. Which reminded him, he would have to owl Gringotts so they could get it out of his vault and send it to him at the proper time. He was just finishing up his seventh year and was therefore still at school, so he couldn't leave there yet. Of course, they would likely have to wait a year, until she was out of school and of age, but what mattered to Harry was that they would belong to each other, now and for as long as they both lived. A year was a comparatively short time, but at the same time, an eternity, until he could truly call Ginny his own.

However, Ginny knew Harry well enough to know when he was keeping something from her, and she sensed it was something having to do with her upcoming birthday. She didn't question him for that reason, even as she recalled that Harry usually gave nice gifts on birthdays and Christmas, but this time she was convinced that this particular birthday would be the nicest one she'd ever had in terms of what he was going to give her. But he only had a month to go, so she truly believed he was making plans on that score, even if he wasn't telling her about them.

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Over the next few weeks, he met with Hermione to discuss his plans for proposing to Ginny and the present he intended to give her even as he exchanged owls with Molly on basically the same subject. Of course, it wasn't easy for them to hide it from the ever-perceptive Ginny, but at the same time, they were glad that she wasn't pressing them on the subject because both were terrible liars and if she confronted them, they wouldn't be able to resist her. Or at least Hermione wouldn't be able to. Harry had inherited his parents' stubbornness and was therefore more experienced at resisting Ginny, even though it wasn't any easier for him than it was for Hermione, mainly owing to his strong feelings for her.

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Shortly after graduation, where all three of the trio graduated with honours, most of them the kind having to do with having vanquished Voldemort the previous year, the four went out to celebrate. Hermione had even been the valedictorian of the Hogwarts graduating class of 1998. Harry also got the Order of Merlin, First Class, and not only for his outstanding work in Defence Against the Dark Arts. The elder Weasleys had even been there to see them graduate, and Molly had hugged each in her customary bone-crushing manner while crying with happiness the whole time.

Once she managed to compose herself, and the girls had left the private room at the Leaky Cauldron pub for a time, Harry and Ron discussed the particulars of the upcoming parties...Harry's birthday first, of course, since it was just twelve days before Ginny's. He would be eighteen and therefore old enough to marry without anyone's consent; however, Ginny would technically need her parents' consent. [After said discussion, the girls returned and the celebration continued.]

And that was only if she and Harry decided they wanted to marry before her eighteenth birthday. Which was the main reason why he eventually decided to postpone their wedding not only until she graduated but until her own eighteenth birthday. He was sure that she wouldn't want to wait that long, but he would have to keep reminding her that that was the way it would have to be done if she wanted to be able to marry him without her parents' consent. She wouldn't like it but she could and would live with it, knowing that once Harry made up his mind, he was virtually immovable.

It was the following day, after graduation celebrations were over, that they headed to the Burrow, Apparating there after leaving the Hogwarts grounds for the last time, shrinking their trunks small and light enough to fit in their pockets, linking arms and all concentrating mightily on the same thing in order to get to the Burrow in jig time. After being welcomed in Molly's usual manner and settling in, Ginny was inexplicably tired enough to need a nap, at least for an hour or two. Of course, she sensed that Harry must have slipped her something which would put her to sleep...Sleeping Potion maybe. Not a lot, just enough to get her out of the way for a couple of hours so she wouldn't overhear the plans they were making for her party.

Of course, this was above and beyond the discussions involving Harry's own birthday, which she had definitely been involved with and had already decided the non-material thing she was going to give him. She wouldn't tell anyone, not even Hermione, only willing to say that she was certain Harry would love it and consider it the most memorable birthday gift he'd ever gotten. That had earned her a disapproving look from Hermione, at least in the presence of the elder Weasleys. By themselves, she gave her friend a sly smile, certain that she knew what Ginny had in mind.

But this wasn't so much about Harry's birthday as it was hers and Ginny knew it. If she hadn't been so godawful tired, she would have defied him and listened in anyway, but she just couldn't keep her eyes open any longer than it took her to reach her room and lie down on her bed. Harry followed her in order to make sure she not only made it safely, but to give her a kiss before she fell asleep, then moved quietly to the door and slipped through, closing the door every bit as quietly. Upon doing that, he added a Silencing Charm for good measure, and not only to ensure that Ginny had an undisturbed nap.

He exchanged a knowing smile with the others sitting at the kitchen table, rejoining them and resuming their discussion as to just how he was going to pull off what he had planned in order to propose to Ginny. They had already figured how to get them out on the lake in the little boat docked at the side of the pond at the Burrow and intended to charm some fairies to fly around them to cast a romantic glow to the scene. He had also already gotten a bottle of expensive Muggle champagne called *Dom Perignon*

which he intended to charm to keep it cold until the right time.

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It was a week after they had arrived at the Burrow that Harry owed Gringotts to send his mother's engagement ring to him, keeping the wedding ring in reserve until the actual day. He even showed all concerned (except Ginny, of course) and both Hermione and Molly thought it was one of the most beautiful rings they'd ever seen ... a round two-carat diamond surrounded by a dozen quarter-carat diamonds set in 24k yellow gold.

Whatever James Potter's other faults, he had had excellent taste in jewelry, everyone had to admit that...especially his son, who had now decided on someone special himself and planned to propose to her in the near future with the very same ring his father had used to propose to his mother. Nor would they be surprised if it had been magically treated to fit Ginny's finger perfectly.

By the time two weeks had passed, Harry and company had gotten everything ready for not only Ginny's birthday but his proposal to her. He had even gotten her a nice dress to wear for her birthday with the help of Molly and Hermione. The latter had even decided to use a Hairdressing Charm to put Ginny's hair in an attractive style. Ron had even been impressed that Harry thought enough of him and his sensibilities regarding Ginny to ask him for her hand.

Of course, the ones who really counted were Molly and Arthur, but Ron had always been very protective of his sister, and Harry was ever mindful of that, eventually deciding to act accordingly. He even asked him to be best man at the wedding when the time came and was sure that Hermione would be maid (or matron) of honour, depending on when Ron finally got up the nerve to propose to her.

She was now happily showing off a promise ring he had given her the day of their graduation, but sensed he was holding off on his proposal until after Harry had married Ginny so as not to overshadow them. Perhaps he would even propose to her the day of their wedding. She could only speculate, of course, but it would be wonderful if he did. What mattered was that they were finally together. Meanwhile, they had best concentrate on the plans for the upcoming birthdays of the couple in question.

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Ever since graduation, Ginny had been making her own special plans for Harry's birthday and fully intended that he would be knocked for the proverbial loop when she finally decided to give him her presents, which would be both of the material and non-material variety. Just exactly what they involved, nothing anyone did could get Ginny to divulge anything, not even Hermione. Ginny intended that literally everyone would be surprised, but only *after* the presents had been given.

Just the same, Harry couldn't help suspecting what the gifts might be, knowing Ginny as he did, or believed he did anyway, but was convinced that his own to her would at the very least equal it, if not surpass it. After all, how often did one get proposed to on one's birthday? Especially on the birthday which officially made them of age?

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It definitely seemed to be true, the old saying that the older one got, the faster time seemed to pass. At least in this case, anyway ... because it hardly seemed like six weeks had gone by, and that it was already near the end of July, and Harry's birthday was looming closer by the day. Ginny was becoming more and more secretive, and to his dismay, Harry discovered that she had learned Occlumency and thus was able to block his Legilimency search of her mind ... especially if she had any idea that he was curious about anything she wasn't telling him and knew she would refuse if he asked her directly.

Of course, Ginny wasn't the only one being secretive, but she seemed to be the only one who had strong enough Occlumency shields to block him, so Harry had managed to learn what the others were giving him for his birthday, although he kept his knowledge to himself, fully intending to act surprised when the time came in order to please them. All the same, nothing could have prepared him for the way Ginny had awakened him. First she kissed him awake, then once he had gotten his glasses on, had sealed the door of his room, putting a Silencing Charm on it for good measure, then dropped her brief, lacy nightdress.

Harry's eyes widened and his libido shot into the stratosphere. Was this part of what Ginny had been hiding from him the last six weeks? If so, he intended to live out every fantasy he had ever had about her, enjoy every minute of what she had planned. After that, he literally forgot everything but her ... and even if he died before all this was over, what a way to go!

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Once it was near time for the party, Ginny could sense that they were among the first ones awake along with Harry, but didn't go down until Hermione came to fetch them. Harry couldn't help snickering when she mentioned that Ron had originally been recruited to do so. However, knowing his sensitivity to possibly seeing anything intimate, especially anything involving his sister and best friend, he had implored Hermione to take his place. She had agreed, but made sure to remind him that she wouldn't always be able to do so. Ron said what mattered was that she did so when she could.

It wasn't long before Molly levitated the large oblong cake with a colour picture of Harry in full Quidditch Seeker regalia and on his broomstick, reaching for the Snitch, into the dining room from the kitchen and lowered it onto the already-set table which she had recruited Hermione to do, since she seemed to be the best at it other than herself.

There was also the traditional table on which a large pile of presents sat and at least three long tables upon which virtually every favourite food Harry had ever had was present, buffet-style. Upon their singing "Happy Birthday," and Harry holding hands with Ginny, who was on his right, Molly gave the signal which indicated that they could now tuck in. Opening presents could wait until after the birthday dinner.

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And they did, at least the vast majority of them. Ginny had had to have a few sessions with Hermione to perfect the spell which would enable her to make the material part of her gift to Harry, but it was worth it. She had gotten a gold chain with a pendant in the shape of an animated Golden Snitch, wings and all, then pointed her wand at the dangling pendant and murmured the incantation Hermione had taught her which would literally enclose a piece of her heart in the miniature Snitch. (The incantation meant "enclose a piece of my heart in this pendant for all eternity.")

She knew she had succeeded when it began glowing, then stopped after a minute or so. However, Hermione had also told her that the Snitch pendant would glow in the dark so the pendant would be unlikely to ever become lost. She had given it to him when they were alone, shortly before the birthday dinner. His eyes had lit up upon seeing the golden Snitch on the chain, but almost literally glowed when Ginny explained what was in it, which was why it was charmed not to open.

"With this pendant, I give you a literal piece of my heart to carry close to your own always," she crooned after he had put it around his neck, the Snitch seeming to take on a visible glow as it lay against the warmth of his neck and throat. "You can hide it whenever you wish," she assured him, but Harry raised her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"Why should I want to hide it? I'm proud and honoured to show it off to all and sundry, now and always," he declared.

"Even to Fred and George?"

"Even to Fred and George," he assured her. "Thank you, love. It's the best birthday gift I've ever gotten. Other than you and your love, of course. I may even ask for the means to do the same for you in the not-too-distant future," he speculated.

"I'd love to have a literal part of you close to my heart, beloved, at least until I can carry one inside me ..." Her voice trailed off and Harry knew what she meant. It was then that he decided to find out just how to do the same thing as Ginny did, then give it to her on either her next birthday or Christmas, if not their wedding day.

Just then, they heard Molly call them and only reluctantly pulled out of their lingering kiss and went downstairs to join the others. Once they arrived, the wireless was set up so that all those with significant others could dance to their favourite music ... that is, charmed so that the individuals involved would hear only their favourite songs and dance accordingly. Harry and Ginny were naturally among them, hearing their own favourite song, "Wind Beneath My Wings," soon after Molly had pointed her wand at the radio and spoke the necessary incantation to activate the charm.

The pair in question seemed to literally be in a world of their own as they swayed, wrapped in each other's arms, to the music; Harry even sang it softly under his breath, resting his forehead on Ginny's. When it finished, she smiled tenderly at him and whispered, "Happy birthday, my love," and finished off the song with a kiss even as she caught the glow of the miniature Snitch. Ginny sensed her beloved's anticipation and couldn't help smiling wickedly even as he warmly nuzzled her neck. He hadn't seen nothing yet!

Ginny had planned their first time together to happen on Harry's eighteenth birthday ... and to be as special as she could possibly make it. Now she would likely be driven up the wall by his secretiveness regarding what he intended to do for her birthday for the next eleven days, and it was just as likely that she wouldn't be able to get anything out of him any more than Harry had out of her.

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It was incredible that the time could pass so fast, and yet so slowly. Ginny had been awakened on the morning of her birthday in a most provocative way, and they had shared a sweet, languorous snogging session before going down to Molly's traditional birthday breakfast. Harry was as attentive to her as ever, but Ginny's own Legilimency could sense that something very significant was in the offing, especially after she had opened her other presents, yet had not received one from him.

However, Harry seemed to be a good enough actor so that it was well into the afternoon before he inexplicably disappeared with Ron and Hermione to set things up for the big proposal scene, which he had planned to have happen just after dusk. He had invited her for a boat ride on the large pond not far from the Burrow, fairies lighting up the air around them with a romantic glow.

Hermione had prepared her, dress, hair and all, so that Harry had literally been struck speechless at his lady's beauty upon seeing Ginny make her entrance. Nor did he speak when he approached her, simply offered her his arm and they left the house together, heading down the road to the pond and the small dock where the boat was tethered. He had dressed in his best casual outfit of fitted black jeans, his favourite green lightweight cotton long-sleeved shirt and jumper vest a shade darker with an "H" on it.

They got into the small boat and he had the charmed bottle of *Dom Perignon* on ice in a small tin set just out of Ginny's sight. Hermione's fairy charm was due to begin any moment now, since it wasn't quite dusk yet. He wanted to make sure it was timed just right so there would be the perfect romantic atmosphere when he made the actual proposal.

They were roughly in the center of the lake when Harry brought the bottle of *Dom Perignon* and two glasses into view. "I believe a toast is in order, my lady."

"A toast?" Ginny's heart began to pound in anticipation in spite of her efforts to remain calm.

"It's a very special day. You're of age now, an adult, and can do whatever you like ... well, more accurately, almost whatever you like. There are still some things you must wait another year to do, but for the most part..."

Ginny reached to put a finger on Harry's lips. "Talk later, love. Let's get to the toast."

"Oh, yeah. Right." He broke the seal, popped the cork and poured roughly an inch of champagne into the glasses, then they touched the glasses. "To you. To us. To our love."

Ginny smiled and echoed him, for the most part, but added her own ending. "To you. To us. To our love. To the happiest day of my life."

Harry's eyes widened in spite of himself but that was the only indication of surprise he showed; when the glow of the fairies began, he reached into his pocket for the small deep blue velvet box which held his mother's engagement ring. "Ginny, you've asked what I intend to give you for your birthday ... and now I intend to tell you...or more accurately, show you." With that, he moved to open the box and show her what was inside. The beauty of it rendered her momentarily speechless.

"Oh, Harry ..." Her eyes were misty with tears of happiness.

"I've never been good with words, Gin, you know that. All I can do is speak my heart. I love you. I want to spend my life with you. Please make me the happiest, luckiest wizard on earth. Marry me." While their eyes held, Harry withdrew the ring from the box, tucked it back into his pocket, then slipped the ring onto the proper finger. He then looked up and into Ginny's soft brown eyes, waiting for her answer ... which wasn't long in coming.

She lifted his chin, leaned over to kiss him deeply, sweetly, then smiled as she drew back. "I would be honoured, Harry ... and the ring is beautiful."

"It was my mother's. Or more specifically, the one my dad gave her when he proposed to her. They left the rings to me for just such a moment as this. Of course, I don't expect you to marry me right away. I was thinking, after you graduate Hogwarts and go into Healer training. I have also arranged it so my Auror training won't start until after our honeymoon is behind us."

"You've thought of everything, haven't you?" she returned with a knowing smile.

"I tried," he confessed. "Now, let's have another toast." This time Ginny knew why he wanted it and what was more, knew exactly what she intended to say.

"To the happiest day of my life, which will be when I marry you, the love of my life."

"To a life full of love, life and children with the love of my life." Ginny smiled; they touched glasses and drank. The warmth engendered by both the warm night, the romantic setting and the champagne prompted the lovers to move into each other's arms for a long, lovely snog ... at least until their movements made the boat tip sufficiently to dump them into the water. It was fortunate that Harry had placed a Sticking Charm so as not to lose the champagne bottle.

As it was, they came up together, both soaking wet but laughing, although both had cried out in surprise as they had been unceremoniously dumped in the water. Neither were aware of it yet, but they had been heard even at the Burrow. Harry helped Ginny Apparate to the shore, but even as they materialised, he saw Molly, Ron and Hermione approach them.

"Are you all right, mate?" his concerned friend asked as he came up beside him. "We heard you call out and got here as quickly as we could."

"I'm fine," Harry assured him. "That is, *we're* fine. Just soaking wet."

Hermione came up next to Ginny. "You're a mess, Gin. All my fine work undone."

"It was worth it," Ginny sighed happily.

"What do you mean?" the other young witch asked.

"Look." Ginny held up her left hand to show the ring glittering on it.

This time Hermione seemed stunned momentarily speechless herself. "Does that mean what I think it means?"

"Harry asked me to marry him."

At this point, both Ron and Molly stepped up to join them. He had caught the tail end of the conversation. "Run that by me again."

"Did you say what I thought you said?" came from Molly, also having caught said conversation.

"Harry proposed to me," Ginny repeated. "He gave me his mother's engagement ring."

"Do I want to know why you're both soaking wet?" the older woman asked.

"I don't think so," said Ginny. "But I'll tell you anyway. We were ... snogging, got carried away and the boat tipped over, dumping us both in the water."

Molly sighed. "Well, I can at least give you credit for honesty, if nothing else. Now you'd better get out of those wet clothes before you both catch your death."

Nothing either of the couple said changed her mind; she conjured a couple of blankets, and the friends in question wrapped them around Harry and Ginny, then led them back to the house and got them out of the wet clothes as quickly as possible, making sure they were kept separated--at least until they were dried off and gotten into dry clothes. Drying charms were done to get their hair dry again.

Once they were dried off, everyone wanted the entire story of the big proposal scene, from start to finish. Everyone ended up laughing even in the midst of congratulating the couple on their engagement ... and Molly was already making mental plans for the wedding. Ginny could tell that simply by the look on her mother's face; it was the same look as she had gotten once she'd learned that Bill intended to marry Fleur. She had best warn Harry as to what to expect as soon as she possibly could. Meanwhile, they might as well enjoy the attention and congratulations.

Once they were alone that evening, Ginny's head resting on Harry's chest, her small hand with the ring on it right over his heart, she felt the soft rumble of his voice. "What was that, love?"

"My parents. Sirius. Remus. Tonks. Dumbledore. They won't be here to see us get married."

"I'm sure we'll think of something, include them somehow, love. Don't worry."

"Maybe pictures in the chairs reserved for them, if not portraits of them," Harry tentatively suggested. "Something so I can feel that they're with us, at least in spirit."

"That might work," Ginny agreed. "Meanwhile, we've got plenty of other things to think about and take care of between now and then." She lifted her head and stroked her partner's lips with a finger, which prompted a tender smile and his lips to kiss her finger. "This, for instance." With that, she moved to pull his face close and kiss him deeply, which in turn prompted him to once again rekindle their own personal magic...magic which needed nothing but themselves, magic which had begun the day they'd met ... but most importantly, magic which would last as long as they both lived.