

Family Inseparable

Chapter 1

Family Inseparable: Chapter 1
By: Musings of Apathy

Ginevra Weasley woke to an unusual sensation. In her seven years, she had woken in many ways, usually to her mother's coaxing voice, but sometimes to the raucous sounds that were common in the household of two loving parents and seven children; six sons, all older than the sole daughter; the baby of the family.

Rolling away from whatever was playing with her ear, her thoughts groggily drifted to her family. There were no large age gaps from one child to the next, but when you have seven, with only one set of twins, there is bound to be a large gap between the first and the last. Bill Weasley, the first, was graduated from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in just a few weeks. Charlie, just two years behind, wrote her a few weeks ago about the nightmare that his OWL exams were turning out to be, and even had a present for her when he got back from school. Percy, her ever correct brother, just finished his second year and expressed his eagerness to select his elective classes in his letters to their mum, and then in person as soon as they returned to the Burrow, as their house was called. Fred and George, the twins, were eager to start Hogwarts on September the first, but Ginny had a suspicion that they only wanted to learn more ways to prank. Ron was a year older than her, though he would point out that right now he was two years older, as he was nine to her seven, regardless that it was a matter of months.

Her slow process of waking ended on a sudden screamed note, as the something that was lightly playing with her ear, suddenly made a wide swath on her opposite cheek, leaving a wet trail. Her scream was triggered by a golden orange ball of fuzz not an inch from her nose when her eyes sprung open. She shrieked with terror that was not wholly unexpected, were another in her place.

The entire house was alerted, as only a little girl's terrified shriek would do.

Ginny scrambled back from the hairy monstrosity, clutching her long stuffed dragon to her chest. Perhaps Puff, a stuffed animal as big as her, would protect her from the monster that attacked her in her sleep. The present from her brother Charlie had been a treasured sleeping companion for a year and a half; since the Christmas after Charlie had returned from a year of Care of Magical Creatures and not just a few conversations with the Hogwarts Game Keeper, Rubeus Hagrid.

Arthur, her father, entered her room with his wand at the ready and a curse on his lips. Although he had never been a fighter, a stunner was a hair's breadth from being cast as he assessed the threat. Piling up behind him were his wife and, quickly, each of his sons. What greeted them was not exactly a threat, however. What it was appeared to be a mess of matted, thick, tassled hair with the vague shape of a dog, or at least they could tell that it had a tail, a mass at the other end that must have been a head and four legs.

Ginny was scrunched at the headboard of her bed, far removed from the hairy beast.

Arthur laughed. He laughed at the absurdity of the mess. The 'dog', he assumed, was covered in dried mud over his hairy legs, but you could easily see that the woolly hair covering the rest of his body was an orange-red colour that his cousin, the dog lover, would have called chestnut in colour. Arthur turned around, assuming that Ginny had nothing to do with the dog that terrified her being in the house, much less her room.

"Okay," Arthur said, eying his sons. "Who knows anything about this dog terrifying your sister so early this morning?"

Seeing his twin sons, both eleven, but not yet in school, holding wands ready to defend their sister, Arthur gave them a look and gestured to their mother at the other side of the crowd at the door. The fact was that they had not visited Ollivander's wand shop, but he knew that they had discovered his twin brother-in-law's trunks in the attic, where they, no doubt, obtained wands ages ago, not to mention whatever else. They quickly stashed their illegal wands up their sleeves, where they would still be accessible should any need arise.

"Dog?" a voice came from the back. "Oh, no!" Ron said, pushing his way through his brothers.

"Gudgeon!" Ron exclaimed as he rushed forward. "What are you doing in here? You were supposed to stay in my room!"

"He was!" Mrs. Weasley stormed. "Ronald Weasley! What is the meaning of bringing a dog into this house? A stray no less."

"But mum...!" Ron whined.

Arthur could easily tell that an audience was not needed for the next bit of parental conversation, so he quickly ushered the rest of his boys out of Ginny's room. While Ron and Molly debated the benefits of dog ownership versus the responsibilities, Arthur moved to comfort Ginny, who looked much more calm and balanced now that the mop of cur was identified, after a fashion. Seeing as Ginny was good after a hug from her father (and doesn't that lift any father's spirit), Arthur knelt down to check the condition of the canine.

"But Mum," Ron continued, "He's perfect. He's big and he likes to swim. That's where I found him, in the pond chasing birds. And he's orange! Isn't that great? He's already a Cannons supporter! Can't I keep him, Mum, please?"

"Molly," Arthur interrupted. "The dog, Gudgeon did you say? Has a collar with a tag and a fellytone number, in case he's lost. Oh, Honey, that must mean that his owners are Muggles. Isn't that exciting? I wonder if they use batteries?" he asked. He looked closer to the identification tag and read, "According to this, his name is Rolf."

"Rolf?" Molly asked, unsure of the name's suitability for a dog, even one so...

"Rolf, Mum," Ron exerted. "See, they can't even be trusted to name their dog properly. He'll be much better with me. Cum'on Mum, I'll take good care of him."

"Pfft," Ginny exclaimed. "And Gudgeon is such a better name than Rolf? That's it, you're no longer allowed to name anything."

"I'll have you know that Galvin Gudgeon is the seeker for the Cannons," Ron asserted.

"Kids," Mrs. Weasley stopped the building argument. "Ron, dear," she said gently, "Rolf, or Gudgeon, has a family already. He has to go back to his family."

"But," Ron tried again, "what if his family doesn't like him? What if they don't play with him and take care of him?"

"Ron," Molly said, "he has a family and he must be returned to them. They must be missing him something terrible, by now."

Molly stood and led her son out of the room, hugging his shoulders in comfort, leaving Arthur to conjure a rope to use as a leash for the dog.

"Hmm," Arthur said absentmindedly as he led the dog out of the room. "Dog must weigh near four stone. Come along, Rolf, let's find your owners. We can call them on the fellytone in the town square. I'll just have to nip into the bedroom for some Muggle coins."

Ginny was left with her well developed sense of right and wrong that had her wondering if Ron was right that the dog might not have been well taken care of, and whether that changed her parents being right to say that Rolf had to go back to his family either way. She didn't know, but if the family wasn't good, Rolf shouldn't have to stay with them. She hoped for the best for the shaggy dog.

"Ginny, honey," Molly Weasley said at the breakfast table. "I'll be taking Bill to London to get a suit for his new job at Gringotts, if you'd like to come, dear."

"What about..." George started.

"...us?" Fred finished.

"You two still haven't finished cleaning up the shed out back where your little experiment went wrong yesterday," she reminded them. "Besides, we're going to Muggle London, so I don't want too many of us along. Ginny got a rude awakening, thanks to that muddy dog, so I thought it fair that she go along for an outing. Charlie, you're in charge while I am away. You're father is going straight to work from dropping Rolf off at his owner's house."

"You mean Gudgeon," Ron grumbled. "It's much better name, anyway. Just shows they don't treat him right."

"Ronald Weasley," his mother scolded. "You're just lucky that you didn't get punished for trying to bring a dog into this house without permission. I should have had you wash that poor dog before your father took him back. Looked as if he had half the mud from the pond on his legs."

"Yes, Mum," Ron said before excusing himself in the direction of the outside door with a shout of, "I'm going to play, Mum."

Molly watched him fly out the door, his feet pounding the floor.

"Oh dear," she said with concern. "It's alright, Charlie, if he plays outside today, but would you keep an eye on him, just in case? Hasn't even had a lesson on riding a broom yet, but I swear, the minute my back is turned he'll try to jimmy the broom shed."

She caught sight of Fred and George whispering and knew that it could only be trouble. "And don't you two try and help him. And no causing trouble for Charlie. He's in charge and you'll do what he says." She eyed her boys, including Percy, to emphasize her point, even though she didn't have to worry about what her third son would do.

"Yes, Mum," Percy agreed. The twins were looking their most innocent, which was enough of a reason to worry in the first place.

Ginny Weasley burst into the shop with gusto. They were at the clothier to find a suit for her brother, whatever kind of clothes that was. All Ginny cared about was that they were looking at and buying clothes. She liked pretty clothes.

Ginny looked around for all of the wonderful clothes and pretty things that she always liked to look at whenever she got to go with her mum to the clothiers. She quickly flitted here and there around the entire shop before she figured out that none of the clothes were any good at all. They were all dark and flat and striped or...or...no patterns at all! Where were all the lacy things and frilly things? Where was the pink and the flowers and the polka-dots? She liked the polka-dots. She didn't ever get to buy the clothes that she liked to look at, but she could look. She could look at all of the pretty dresses and skirts and sometimes pants, because dresses and skirts didn't work all of that well for riding brooms, and she loved riding brooms, when she could sneak them from the broom shed. But, this shop was boring. It only had dress up clothes for men, nothing for pretty princess girls. And how was she supposed to pretend that she was a pretty princess if they didn't have any pretty princess dresses?

"Mummy," Ginny said, tugging on her mother's dress. "Mummy, they don't have any pretty clothes."

Molly Weasley looked down at her disappointed daughter and offered a sympathetic smile. "I know, baby," she consoled. "This shop has handsome clothes for your brother so that he can look proper for his first day at Gringotts. We want him to look nice for work, don't we?"

"Sure, mummy!" Ginny said enthusiastically. "Bill'll be the handsomest of all explorers in the Egyptian Deserts. He'll be the smartest and the bravest and he'll bring me back a princess's tiara so that I can be a princess too!"

Molly shot her eldest child a reproachful look. "Bill, you shouldn't be filling her head with all that talk about those tombs. You've got her thinking that you're going to bring her back a tiara or something and you never know when those things are cursed or hexed."

"Mum, first," Bill explained to his mother. "I never told her that I would be bringing her back any sort of jewelery. Anything I bring back is for Gringotts, as they're the ones who are hiring me and training me to find the treasures. Second, they didn't wear tiaras in Egypt. Third, they're going to train me to find and break curses and whatever else you're worried about."

"Hmm," Mrs. Weasley sounded less than convinced. Not that she didn't believe in her son's potential and skill, but that he wouldn't have promised her some sort of boon. Ginny was the darling of her older brothers. Both Bill and Charlie, she knew, would split the Earth to get her anything she wanted. At seven she had them both firmly wrapped around her finger. Of course, Molly knew, they both had no flaws in her eyes, as well. No doubt, she would become an expert in curse breaking as Bill was going into and whatever profession Charlie chose in two years when he completed his NEWT's.

"Ginny, dear," Mrs. Weasley said to her bouncing little girl, "why don't you wait for us over by the door. I think I saw a bench there." She turned to her eldest, "Bill, please give her her drawing book and crayons, this could take some time. I really don't know how the Muggles get by without magic."

Ginny sidled up to her brother and held her hands up for the promised supplies. If she couldn't have pretty things to look at, she could at least draw something. Charlie had been talking about dragons at breakfast and he made them sound so wonderful. Maybe she could draw her brother a picture so that he would have a dragon of his own.

"Here you go, dragonfly," Bill said, holding out a book of loosely bound parchment and a rough cotton bag filled with the coloured wax sticks that could entertain her for at least an hour or more. She took the offered supplies and flitted off back to the front door. Bill's eyes trailed after the ball of energy. "Did any of us boys ever have that much energy?" he asked his mother. "I swear that she only has one way to approach anything; with both feet forward."

"The twins came close, but they use their energy for other things," Mrs. Weasley testified. "When they get as excited as Ginevra, you know they've done something."

"True." Bill said. He noticed a store girl coming over to them. She looked harried, but the large young boy that she had been trying to help earlier seemed to have been handed off to the tailor and no longer her problem. Hmm, Bill thought, she's cute. I wonder...

Ginny approached the bench with her supplies in hand, to find that the bench was already occupied by a boy. He seemed to be about her age, with deep black hair that seemed to have been in a storm recently, as it flew off to every direction but flat.

"Hello," she greeted the boy.

He looked up from his lap and graced her with the brightest pair of eyes she had ever seen, which was not all that many outside her family, but they were still remarkable.

The boy nervously brushed his fingers through his messy hair, not improving its style one bit, not that Ginny minded his exciting hair, mind you. When he did, though, he revealed his forehead, which was previously covered by his fringe. There she saw what had become an icon to the wizarding world, of which her family was a part. The remnant of his parents' death and the changing of his life completely, his lightning bolt shaped scar would have him recognized in any magical household in the British Isles, greater than the whole world to the seven year old girl. But, as her father taught her, fame doesn't make a person great. Still, after hearing her father tell her the story of how Harry had survived that night, she hoped that he was as decent of a person as her father thought.

"Hello," Harry replied.

"Um...I'm Ginny," she introduced herself. She was pretty sure of who he was, but her parents taught her better than to be rude.

"I'm Harry," he responded. "What's that?" he pointed to her drawing supplies.

"Ooh, they're my colouring things," she said. "Do you like to draw?"

For a brief moment, Harry had an elated look about his face, but it quickly diminished before he responded. "I do in school," he said. "But I'm not allowed at home."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Paper's expensive," he said, "And they won't be wasting money for such things on me."

"But," she stammered, "you can't? At least you get to draw in school. Do they like your drawings from school?"

"I don't bring them home anymore," Harry said. "They don't like what I do."

"What do you do that they don't like?" she asked.

"They don't like anything I do," he clarified.

"They don't?" she was confused. The concept of a less than loving family was foreign to her. "They don't like to play with you?"

"I have too many chores to play," he told her. "After cooking and cleaning, and the yard is a lot to take care of. The yard has to look good, or else everyone'll think Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon were of the wrong sort, or something."

Ginny was distressed and confused about what he was telling her. She didn't know much about Muggle life, but what she was hearing didn't sound right.

"But..." she said, "What about your friends? Surely you can play when they come over. I have this friend, Luna, she comes over and we play house, or tea, or dolls. What do you play when your friends come over?"

"I..." Harry started, the words choking in his throat. "I don't have any. At school, they're all afraid of my cousin and his friends, and at home, well, I don't get out much. I go to the park, but everyone there knows that if they're my friends, Dudley'll pick on them more."

"Oh," Ginny said, absorbing his depression. "I...", she paused, the thought hanging on the back of her teeth. "Can I be your friend?"

Harry brightened for another moment, then his mood fell again. "But, Dudley. He'll pick on you too if you're my friend."

"He'll never see me," she assured him.

"Oh, yeah," he acknowledged. "But, I'll never see you either. I've never seen you before around Little Whinging. Where do you live?"

"In the country," she told him. "In Ottery St. Catchpole."

"Oh," Harry replied. "I don't know where that is."

"Well, um," she started. "Where's Little Whinging?"

"It's in Surrey," Harry said. "We took the train in and then the underground to here."

"I could send you a letter," she offered hopefully. "And I'll send some parchment so you could write back."

"That'd be nice," Harry replied, "But I don't think my Aunt and Uncle would like me getting post."

"Do you work in the garden every day?" she asked.

"Yeah," he affirmed. "If the garden wasn't perfect, my Aunt would be the shame of the neighborhood."

"Well," she said, "that'll be alright then."

They settled down to draw in Ginny's book of parchment, the book placed across their laps, where they sat close together on the bench. Ginny persuaded Harry to draw a dragon with her, which was hard for Harry, as he didn't know what a dragon was supposed to look like. After he started on a dragon as he saw for a moment on the telly news coverage of a street parade for the Chinese New Year. She corrected him, gently, and showed him what her idea of a real dragon was. Harry accepted this as her imagination, but, in truth, she was pretty accurate to what dragons used to inhabit Southern England, all of which had since moved to the more remote reaches of the Scottish Highlands. Ginny knew this, from her brother Charlie, but Harry had no idea of the truth of dragons.

"Boy," the word interrupted their good time. Harry looked up to see his Aunt and Cousin were near the cash register paying the counter girl for something. His Aunt Petunia must have tried to get his attention. Harry knew that this was a bad time to keep his aunt waiting; she usually had a short temper by the time they returned from an outing, and any mistake he made, real or vague, would be visited when they returned to Privet Drive,

If not sooner. Harry placed the supplies that he had been using of Ginny's in her bag and placed the book back solely on her lap.

"Sorry, Ginny," he said quickly as Dudley obviously became board with his mother paying for his next thing and started to look at Harry, moving to torment his freak cousin. "I have to go."

Harry quickly got up and left her with a small smile; one laced with a melancholy that left her heart sore at the desertion of happiness that she could see in him in that instant.

Harry intercepted his cousin before Dudley could really see him with the beautiful red head angel that he had spent some of the best moments of his life with just minutes before. Ginny was truly a wonderful girl, one that he thought for a second could be a friend, as long as none of his family ever knew of her. He wasn't ashamed of his new friend, just afraid of what his family would do if he had found that sliver of happiness, especially if they knew she had such a wonderful imagination.

"I thought you were buying some clothes," Harry said to his cousin, distracting the whale of a child.

"Keep that up, freak," Dudley said, "and I might just have to wipe that little smile from your face for you."

"But we both know you can't do anything to me here," Harry told him with a hint of smugness.

"We'll be home soon," Dudley said. "And when we get there, you know that Mum won't care if I take you into the back garden for some fun, if I want to."

Their discussion was ended when Petunia finished her business with the girl. She gathered them up with a loving hand on Dudley's shoulder and a shove to Harry's.

"Come along, Boy," she said in a condescending tone. "They won't have Dudder's suit tailored until Friday, the loafers. Now we'll have to come back to collect it. We'll have to come by rail once again as these layabouts are closed on Saturdays."

Ginny was shocked to see the loathing with which Harry was treated. He was a new friend, and to her that, meant something. She divested herself of the supplies on her lap and sprang up to catch him, hoping to give him some hope.

As Ginny caught Harry, he was exiting the shop behind his aunt and cousin. She heard the nasty woman that was with Harry, his aunt, decrying what the country was coming to when so many were so lazy.

"Harry," she said quickly, "you could come home with me. My family would treat you right. They're nice."

"Thank you, Ginny," Harry said, "but..."

She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek before he had to exit the shop on a glare from his aunt. Ginny's happiness at having a new friend, one that was such a nice one, was tainted with a heartache at him having to lead such a sad life.

"Come along, Ginny dear," Her mother interrupted her sad thoughts. "Did you have a good time?"

"Yes, Mum," she told her. "I met a nice boy. He's my new friend. We drew a new dragon for Charlie. He had the strangest idea of what a dragon looked like, but I drew one from my book so that we got it right for Charlie. Mum?"

"Yes, dear?" her Mum asked.

"Is paper expensive?" she asked.

"No dragonfly," Bill answered for his Mum, who was pushing the door open. "The Muggles sell it a dozen per Knut. Why?"

"Bill, Mum?" Ginny replied. "I don't think that Harry's family likes him much. I don't think they're very nice to him. Can he live with us?"

"Who's Harry," her mother asked.

"He's my new friend," she replied.

Ginny's Mum stopped at that question. Unfortunately she suffered from the same problem as many good, loving adults; she couldn't conceive of a family as bad as the Dursleys, and that would not change unless she saw it for herself.

"Ginny, dear," she soothed, kneeling and looking directly into her daughter's eyes. "I'm sure that it isn't as bad as all that. If he needs help, I'm sure that the rest of his family or his teachers will make sure that he gets help."

"But..."

"Come along, dear," Mrs. Weasley called as she rose and started along the sidewalk again. "It's time we got along home."

Bill, ever the conscientious brother, led his sister with a soft hand on her shoulder, protecting her from the harsh world against his side. They walked

along the familiar streets to the run down looking antique pub that would provide their return home.

"Daddy, daddy," Ginny said as she ran into the house that evening. She had been in the yard playing when she heard the pop of his arrival from work. "Daddy," she screamed as she flung her arms around his waist. "I met the coolest boy today."

Arthur's life as a father passed before his eyes ten years sooner than he thought it would have. He thought that the first of his children to tell him that they met someone special would have been his first born, not his last. This was his little girl for Merlin's sake.

"Whoa there, Princess," he told his girl. "Try that one again and maybe it'll make more sense and not give your old father a heart attack this time."

"Mum and Bill took me with them to the clothing shop, but they didn't have any pretty clothes. Mummy said that that was because the clothes were hamsome clothes for Bill not pretty clothes for me. Why didn't they have any pretty clothes, Daddy? How am I supposed to be your pretty princess if I don't wear the pretty princess clothes? Can Mummy make me some pretty princess clothes? I could help."

Arthur was buoyed by the distraction that his little girl managed to provide for herself. Maybe the issue of 'boys' could be held off for a half decade or two, as would be his liking.

"Do you think that Harry would like pretty princess clothes?" she asked in wide eyed innocence.

"I assume that Harry is a boy, dear," he guessed, "so I doubt that he would want to dress as a pretty princess."

"Of course not, Daddy," she said. "I'd be the pretty princess in the pretty princess dress and he would be the hamsome prince in armor with a sword and we'll go fight evil wizards and dragons and we'll live happily ever after."

Arthur chuckled. "Sounds like a plan dear. But how are you going to fight the evil wizards and dragons in your pretty princess dresses?"

"Daddy, you're silly," her laughter warmed his heart. "When we fight the evil wizards and dragons, I'll be wearing armor just like Harry, but pretty."

"Of course," he said. "Why didn't I realize that? Now, run outside and have some fun before it gets dark and your mum has supper ready."

"Daddy," Ginny said, suddenly changing from the happy and vibrant girl, her tone now worried and seeking comfort. "I don't think Harry's family likes him," she told her dad in confidence. "He...They're really not nice to him."

Arthur took his little girl in his arms and gave her some comfort while he mulled her words in his mind. He didn't think he could do anything for this anonymous 'Harry', but he could set his daughter at ease.

"Well, Ginny," he said, "not everyone is as lucky as you and I. We have a loving family that takes care of each other and makes us happy. You can only help others as much as you can, and not more. It's good that you care about Harry."

"I do, Daddy," Ginny stated. "Can I send Errol to him with a letter. It might make him happy."

"Does Harry know about magic?" Arthur asked in return.

"No," Ginny answered. "He didn't even know what a proper dragon looked like."

"Then I'm afraid that you can't send a letter by owl if he doesn't know about magic," Arthur told his little girl. "There's laws about that sort of thing."

"What if he's being hurt and needs a friend?" Ginny asked.

Well, then," her father answered, "You'll just have to trust that his teachers and neighbors will help him too. If things are as bad as you say, I'm sure that someone will set things right and give him a good home."

Ginny twisted in his arms and gave him a big kiss on the cheek. "Thank you , Daddy."

"Okay, off you go. Time to run along and play outside," he said with a swat to her retreating behind.

Quite literally she did exactly as he said, running full tilt through the kitchen and out the back door to the garden. He admired the energy she had in her youth, but couldn't remember having half that in his own. Those years of his life were just blurs.

"Seems it was a banner day for romance on this trip amongst the Muggles," Mrs. Weasley interrupted her husband's thoughts. "Your son found the shop girl quite interesting as well, if I know him at all."

"Hmm," Arthur hummed as he encircled his wife in his arms, capturing her waist. "Is this your way of leading up to the revelation that the tailor took a fancy to you and now I have some competition for your affections?"

"Well, the man was quite something," she answered. "Head of gray hair, pronounced paunch, and a distinctively harried look over his entire face,

although that could be attributed to the dreadful child that he fitted just before Bill had his turn.”

“Do I need to take you upstairs and remind you of why we have seven children?” he asked with a leer.

“Reminders never hurt,” Mrs. Weasley smiled saucily back, holding him under the chin.

Arthur got a big grin and nearly bounced on his feet in excitement to her response.

“But dinner won't wait,” she declared stroking her thumb down his jaw as she turned and exited to the kitchen, leaving her husband dumbstruck.

Outside, Ginny was absentmindedly playing in the dwindling evening light while she thought about what her Daddy had told her.

Harry's evening after the shopping trip was not as pleasant or comforting. Vernon, Harry's uncle by marriage, came home in a bad mood having to do with being outbid for a government contract that encompassed all of the Queen's Armed Force's drill needs. The procuring official had the audacity to call into question the quality of the merchandise that Grunnings manufactured. After all, Grunnings Drills were wholly manufactured in the UK and it's commonwealths and former territories. Then the man called into question the assertion of a fine company such as Grunnings about its products being made in the UK. The whole thing was unconscionable.

“Where's the boy?” Vernon said upon entering his house. He had parked his company car outside the garage as usual so that the neighbors could see that he and his family were just that much higher in class than they could hope to be.

“In his cupboard,” Petunia said from the kitchen stove.

“Well, I distinctly remember telling him this morning to tend to the yard,” Mr. Dursley said. “But this evening I come home from a hard day's work to find that he has shirked his chores. He's eight years old. Old enough that we shouldn't have to stand over him to get his chores done. The freak's gonna earn himself a spanking.”

“Well,” she answered, “He's already earned himself a stay in the cupboard until dinner with how he behaved today. Mrs. Figg is visiting her cousin in Scotland so I had to take the freak with me to get Dudders fitted for a new Sunday suit. I told him to sit on a bench just inside the door and not to bother anyone, and do you know what he did? He sat there and talked to this worthless girl who's parents were obviously poor, the way they dressed her. He even had the temerity to use the poor girl's crayons and paper while he was supposed to be waiting quietly. Well, he's got an evening in the cupboard for taking from those less fortunate. Locked him up as soon as we got home.”

“Well, he can stay there until he can tend the yard tomorrow for not mowing the grass like he was supposed to,” Vernon declared. “Maybe his hunger will remind him to mind his P's and Q's from now on.”

Harry's time in his cupboard, with his mattress and ratty blanket, was taken up the only way he knew how when he was locked in, he thought. There wasn't enough light to read, not that he had anything to read. And there were no toys in the cupboard to play with, not that there were any outside the cupboard for him to play with. All of the toys in the house belonged to his cousin and the punishment was not worth it to sneak one, even if it wouldn't be missed.

So his mind took a wander and came across the oddest topics, such as why the lady that served the lunch at school always had a surly sneer on her face, or why Mrs. Figg's house smelled like cabbage instead of cats. But, increasingly, his thoughts trailed to the red head girl he met at the fancy clothiers. He had his first friend, thanks to meeting her. She was kind and accepting and comforting. She seemed to know a lot about dragons, as if they really existed, but Harry chalked that up to an excellent imagination.

And so Harry was content to lie on his cotton batting filled mattress and allow his thoughts to circle his new friend.

Two weeks had passed since Harry and Ginny had met. In those two weeks Ginny's parents had learned that there really was no limit to the number of times their little girl could ask about 'saving' her friend Harry. Her requests for the use of Errol had not stopped, but she seemed to understand, at least a little, when they told her no. They never really got a clear picture as to what they were saving him from, only that his family was not nice and didn't seem to like him, and that didn't seem enough to galvanize the couple into action. Not that they had enough information if they had felt the need to go rescue the boy, just his first name and not even where he lived. They never thought to ask Ginny if she knew any of this, probably because they had no intention to go steal the boy from his family at their daughter's request.

However, they were effected by her melancholy mood that had descended when she accepted the fact that her parents couldn't or wouldn't help her new friend. At night, after the children had all gone to bed the couple discussed their family, the ups and downs, including their only daughter.

“I'm worried about her,” Molly told her husband as she changed into her night clothes. “She seems so depressed lately.”

"She's worried about her friend," Arthur replied while he took his sleeping pants from the dresser. "It's hard to imagine a boy's life being so bad as all that, but I've seen what comes through the Child Safety branch of the DMLE and it makes me cringe. I don't like to think that anyone Ginny considers a friend is treated half that bad."

"But what can we do, Arthur?" she inquired with concern lacing her voice.

"Not much," he responded. "Apparently cases are hard to prove, and the laws are not the most modern. Ministry laws basically allow the head of a house to run it as he sees fit, for better or worse."

"And who knows if the Muggle laws are any better," Molly agreed. "They met in a Muggle store. The boy is probably a full blown Muggle, so the Ministry wouldn't be able to do anything from the get go."

"Hmm-hmm," Arthur agreed. "Wouldn't even know where to start."

"Maybe we could cheer her up some," Molly suggested. "I know," she voiced a revelation. "I was going to make her a new summer dress, and a friend suggested this darling little Muggle shop outside of London and the Knight's bus could take us within two blocks even during the day. While we're there, there is supposed to be a quaint used book seller that should have the books Ron will need to study this last year before Hogwarts. You know the last set didn't survive the twin's last attempts at Muggle potions."

"Oh, yes," Arthur perked up. "Quite amazing what Muggles can do with completely non-magical supplies, transmuting one thing into another. If you see any books on plugs, would you see about getting one?"

"The twins take after you, Arthur," she declared. "You and your shed. What experiments you have gotten up to in there with those Muggle contraptions, I'll never understand."

"Perfectly harmless dear," he assured her. "Besides, what father wouldn't want to hear that his son's were taking after him?"

"Ginny," her mother said at the breakfast table. "I'm going to go to buy some fabric from a little store Martha told me about. Would you like to go? You could pick your own fabric for a new dress?"

"Hmm?" a pensive Ginny looked up. She blinked for a second before a smile exploded from her down turned lips. "Really?"

"Sure," Molly returned the smile. "And there's a park to play in while I finish my shopping. Martha says that there are plenty of mum's around with their own children to mind you while I shop."

"Okay," Ginny agreed. "What kind of dress can I have?"

"A summer dress I think," Molly replied. "You'll have to pick out a light cotton, but they should have many that are bright and pretty for you to pick from."

Harry managed to escape Number Four just after he finished his chores, choosing to skip lunch, as he knew that it would be followed by more chores that hadn't be given yet. If an opportunity was provided to his aunt, she would fill his entire day with chores to 'keep him busy.' Luckily she didn't punish him for making himself scarce before the afternoon chores could be assigned. They would most likely end up as tomorrow mornings chores in addition to the regular ones.

Very early tomorrow, if he were crafty, he might be able to sneak into the smallest bedroom, his cousin's second bedroom, and borrow a book or two that Dudley had thrown in there without reading. Harry managed that a couple of times a month, but didn't dare risk it too often, and always put the book back where he found it. While his cousin was not interested in books, he did know what and where all of his things were, and would soon find out if something was missing.

Harry rounded the corner, leaving the line of site where Aunt Petunia could possibly see him from the living room window, and breathed a sigh of relief. He had escaped for another afternoon. Harry liked to take walks, especially to the park in the town center. He liked that park because Dudley's gang would harass him there, what with all of the adults around in the early afternoons. Maybe if he were lucky, Dudley and his gang hadn't graced this park with their presence after dark and the swings would still be intact. Dudley liked to break swings much more than actually play on them. Harry thought his cousin got pleasure from depriving them to the other kids, although Harry could never understand why.

Harry got to the park with only slight hunger pains, but he was used to that. His relatives didn't starve him, well, not often, but he was never given ample amounts, just enough to get him by. While his family ate a giant roast, Harry got some dry trimmings and a boiled potato. His family ate leg of lamb, Harry ate cheese on dry toast. Dudley drank the latest sugary fizzy drink, while Harry drank tap water without ice. Harry didn't complain, especially with the consequences of complaints, but what they gave him got him by.

When Harry got to the sandy portion of the park, he tried greeting some of the children around his age with a smile, but they knew of his cousin and what could happen to them if they associated with Harry Potter.

As if it were all perfectly normal, Harry took a seat in a swing far enough away from the other children to keep them safe, and started to swing.

Ginny bounced around the fabric store, with her mother wondering why the owner hadn't put all of the light cotton fabric in one place. Here she could find all of the ones with one logo on the cardboard ends of the bolts, but she had found others two isles away. This gave Ginny license to look through the entire store for the perfect dress fabric.

"Mum, mum!" Ginny yelled. "Here's the perfect one for my dress! Can I have it, please!"

Ginny came careening over to her mother with a partial bolt of fabric. Molly sighed. If it were not the right fabric, they'd never find the right place to put it back.

"Let me see it, Ginny," Molly said.

She examined the fabric. It was indeed the right weight and a good weave. It was amazing to Molly, and certainly her husband, she knew, that Muggles had come up with such ingenious machines and methods. Unacknowledged by most of the wizarding world, Molly knew that the fabric used in the wizarding fashion shops were not made by wizarding hand or wand. For more than two hundred years, the wizarding world had been quietly using Muggle enterprises to weave their fabrics, or in more modern times had just bought their fabrics off the shelf with no need to have most custom made. Some fibers that were used still had to be custom weaved, such as acromantula silk, but that was still done with strict controls, but by Muggle machine and often by Muggle operators.

What she held was a simple light cotton that was dyed in a flower pattern over the white background after the fabric was weaved, no doubt by machine. For the price, she couldn't buy such a thing from wizarding suppliers. They would claim that their's was better, charms and such, but, in truth, a little girl's dress needed no charms. When it was warm enough to wear, she would wear it. Otherwise, she had warmer clothes to be going on with.

"It looks like the right fabric, Ginny," she assessed, rolling the bolt out onto the measuring table, "But it doesn't look like there is much left."

A sales lass that had been hovering far enough away not to be a bother stepped forward. "Pardon, Ma'am," the lass said, "if you buy the last of a bolt that's less than ten yards, the discount is half off."

"Well, now," Molly smiled, "this is just enough for my Ginny's dress, so I'll take it. Please put it with the others."

"Certainly."

"Mummy," Ginny called. "Can I go to the park now?"

"Not yet, dear," Mrs. Weasley answered. "When I finish here, I'll take you across to the park and make sure that there is someone to watch over you before I do the rest of my shopping."

"Okay," Ginny agreed, dragging the word out, as if a burden.

"Your dress will need four buttons," Mrs. Weasley said. "Please go and find something to match your fabric."

When Molly and Ginny arrived at the park, she found it satisfying in design, with benches flanking the play equipment for mothers to sit at whilst their children played. The complex was large with climbing structures and several sets of swings. She sent Ginny off to play. Watching her scuttle off in her little jeans and T-Shirt. She knew that she could trust her daughter amongst the Muggles more than perhaps any of her younger boys. Ginny had always seemed to be more able to fit in with the different culture without uttering anything either embarrassing or what the Ministry would consider a secret. Ron or the twins, then she wouldn't trust. Ron had lacked the ability from his first word to think before he said anything, causing the most astonishing and mortifying things to fly out of his mouth. The twins, well, they were just too curious and humorous for general consumption.

Molly made her way over to the other mothers who were keeping a sideways eye on the children as they played. She was greeted as if she were an old friend, which made her more comfortable with leaving Ginny playing here with their children. She talked to them for ten minutes before they offered to watch her little Ginny while she finished her shopping. Before she left, she noticed that Ginny was still running around the large play complex, happy as a clam.

Shortly after her mother left, Ginny saw a familiar head of hair playing on the merry-go-round alone. He was slowly turning the large wheel with one foot while he sat on the metal surface.

Excited, Ginny ran forward with a squeal of, "Harry!"

Harry Potter was minding his own business, playing away from the other children, just in case his cousin was on the prowl with his pack when he thought he heard his name, but wasn't sure. He turned in time to see a red streak just feet away. It barreled into him, sending them both fully onto the metal disk that made up the merry-go-round, which was luckily shaded by a large tree, enough to keep the metal surface from getting scalding hot in the rare clear blue summer day in Surrey.

Harry received his intruder with a great 'oomph' as the air was expelled from his lungs forcefully. In one moment, suddenly, he was sprawled on the flat metal disk of the piece of playground equipment that he had been leisurely playing on, with a body on top of him, hugging his chest for all he was worth.

"What...?" Harry stammered in confusion.

"Harry," the young, feminine voice said close to his ear. "Harry, it's so good to see you. I've been so worried about you. Are you all right? Nothing happened to you? Are you all right?"

Harry managed to pull some distance between them, enough that he could see through his glasses that the person was familiar and acting very happy to see him, a rather new experience for Harry.

"G-Ginny?" he stuttered.

"Yes, Harry," she answered. "I'm so sorry that I didn't write to you. I wanted to write so bad, but mum and dad wouldn't let me. They...they thought you were a stranger, and they wouldn't let me write. I was so worried about you, with your relatives."

"It's okay. Thank you, Ginny," he said. "Thanks for worrying. No one's worried about me before."

Harry smiled as a warm feeling spread through his chest. Worry. She had cared about him. She cared that his family didn't. Here, this pretty girl was nicer to him than any person he could remember had ever been in his eight years. That caused a flame to be ignited in his chest that had been cold before. She cared.

"Are...are you all right, Harry?" she asked, concerned. "They didn't...they didn't hurt you did they?"

"No, well..." Harry started to say, but stopped. His brain couldn't force his mouth to tell this beautiful girl the lies that he had been forced to tell all his life. That he was fine. That his family was fine. She had inserted herself in his heart, behind the lies, at their first meeting and was not dislodged in the slightest ever since. "I mean, they locked me in my cupboard after the last time we met. They were supposed to let me out for dinner, Aunt Petunia had said, but when they were eating, Uncle Vernon said that I could stay in there until I could do my chores like I was supposed to. Since then...well...it's been..." he caught himself again, not able to say that it's been fine. He couldn't lie to Ginny. "I mean, the teacher's wig turned blue at school last week when she had been yelling at this new girl for spilling the paint and Uncle Vernon punished me when he heard. It doesn't hurt that much any more. Bruises go away in a couple of days," Harry told her, his words streaming from his lips, "so that's okay."

"Was..." Ginny started. "Was she your friend, the one being yelled at?"

"No," Harry replied. "No, I don't have any friends at school. They...Dudley wouldn't allow it and he's bigger than the rest of the kids in the class, so they stay away. But...she didn't do anything wrong. It was an accident, and she started to cry. I didn't like the teacher yelling at her. She's had a rough time, being new and all."

By now they were sitting side by side on the merry-go-round, Harry's left hand ensconced in Ginny's two in her lap. She removed her right hand and hugged Harry tightly across the ribs.

"I'm proud of you, Harry," she said. "You cared that your teacher was being mean to that girl when it didn't have anything to do with you."

Mean time, Harry had broke out into a light sweat across his forehead and a soft whimper escaped his lips as his ribs creaked, still not healed from his punishment the week previous. Ginny drew back at Harry's obvious pain.

"Harry! What's wrong?" she asked.

"It's...it's fine," Harry told a near truth. "I hurt my chest when I fell during my punishment. Uncle...Uncle Vernon kicked...he kicked me there before he shut me in my cupboard."

The confession obviously took something from Harry, the mask of pretending everything was 'fine' all of this time was gone, useless around this one girl. He could tell that she was getting upset. The reaction was foreign to his experiences.

"Cupboard, Harry?" Ginny asked. "Do...do they lock you in the cupboard in a cupboard when they punish you?"

"It's...not really that bad," Harry assured her. "It has my bed in there and it's my cupboard, where I normally sleep. Nothing unusual."

"Oh, but...oh, Harry," Ginny hugged him, careful of his sensitive ribs. "Nothing like that is supposed to be normal. Come...come live with me. We'll figure out a way. I'll figure a way so my parents will let you stay. They'll love you. Please, Harry."

"I..." Harry choked on his words. "I can't. They're family."

He knew that he couldn't go with her, no mater what he might want. Deep down, Ginny knew, too, but hoped that someday she could help Harry to come to a better home, one where she could love him, where her family would love him.

“I know,” Ginny said in a whisper. “But, someday. If you ever need to. Someday you can come live with me.”

“Thank you,” Harry hugged her back with emotion.

“I'll find a way to write to you,” Ginny proclaimed. “I'll write so that it isn't as bad.”

“Thank you, Ginny,” Harry smiled. “Come on, I'll give you a push on the swings.”

Harry jumped up and grabbed her hand. He towed her away at a run, her undisguised glee radiating across the playground and park through her genuine laughter.

An hour later Harry was as happy as he could ever remember being. Ginny had separated from him when her mum's voice rang out over the light din of children playing. Her parting kiss and reiteration of the offer of a safe place to live went unseen and unheard by her mother, but warmed Harry's heart and plastered the biggest smile on the eight-year-old's face that lasted clear to his aunt and uncle's home, at least until his cousin spotted him and his smile.

He hadn't had someone care for him before, not like Ginny did. The thought warmed Harry's heart. Her caring wormed a way into his heart and he found that he cared about her too.

Those thoughts sustained him as his cousin engaged him in Dudley's near favorite activity, Harry Hunting. Harry Hunting involved Dudley, as large as a baby whale, attempted to chase Harry in order to inflict harm on his small cousin. Unless Dudley had his 'gang' involved, Harry had a good chance of escaping a painful conclusion to the chase.

Upon arriving home, Ginny had much to think about; mainly how she was going to keep her promise of writing to Harry. She knew now that he did chores outside each morning, and that might help, as far as she was concerned. After a bit of thought, she raced from her room to the Weasley family's meager library. The bulk of the books that were to be passed down to their family was still in her Grandmother's home over in Lincolnshire. The books would be transferred as a part of her estate if and when she passed. However, no one was anxious for that to happen. The old woman was a bit barmy but was fun loving to a fault. Ginny reminded herself that she should write her Grandmum today, as it had been a week since her last letter and Grandmum loved to get letters from her grandchildren.

Ginny found the book she was looking for on an upper shelf. She scooted her father's desk chair closer and scaled the heights to retrieve the book. She remembered her mother using the book to look up the strangest facts and, therefore, knew that the book would have the information she needed. Stepping down from the chair, she cradled the leather bound book against her chest. She placed in on her father's desk and started to thumb through it, looking for an entry on Owl Post.

She found what she needed without much trouble, but had to smile at her mother when she chortled her approval at Ginny using the family books to find what she wanted. Luckily, for Ginny, Mrs. Weasley didn't know what Ginny wanted information for. Armed with the necessary information, she put the book back where she found it and raced up the stairs to compose a letter to send out the next morning.

It was just the morning after his last chance meeting with the fiery haired beauty, Ginny, that Harry was working in the garden. The task ahead of him looked sure to last until lunch time or after. How one garden could require work each and every day was beyond him. The grass grew at a phenomenal rate, due to his liberal use of the hosepipe at his uncle's instructions. The weeds in the garden seemed to want to race the grass in growth, so they needed tending to nearly every other day. His Aunt Petunia insisted this morning on a bouquet of flowers for her table, where she would be hosting lunch for the neighborhood wives, during which Harry was to be scarce, not even allowed to spend the time in his cupboard, as if he would have wanted to in the first place. No, he could spend his time in the garden shed or find himself at the park, but she left him with a stern warning about causing trouble. If she heard one peep from the others on the neighboring lanes, he wouldn't have dinner for a week.

Harry picked and choosed what he thought to be the best combination of flowers. He cut two dozen flowers low on their stems, careful enough to allow them long stems to reach out of the crystal vase that his aunt had indicated would be used for the center of the table. Harry liked the blues, reds, yellows, purples and oranges that he bunched together with some other cuttings to make his bouquet. Pleasing his aunt was something he desired, somewhere back in his mind, but not something that he counted as likely enough to devote thought to. She would have her flowers, and maybe the neighborhood women would fawn over them enough to make her aunt proud of 'her' garden.

Harry had just returned from setting the arrangement on the dining table, careful not to track any of the garden into the pristine house. He put his shoes back on, which he had taken off to avoid the dirt that was in their tread leaving marks on the white tile floor. He settled down in a bed of dirt that was planted with various bulbs, many secretly to Harry's liking as he knew his mother's name was Lily and this particular bed was planted each year with lilies, although Harry didn't think that his aunt held the significance of the flowers as Harry did.

Suddenly, surprising to Harry, a bird, as far as Harry can tell, impacted his side. The bird, really looking no more than a collection of beleaguered

feathers that stuck every which way, held something that seemed completely incongruous to the avian. Tied to his right foot was an envelope, quite a thick one by Harry's estimation. Not knowing what else to do, Harry untied the leather chord, relieving the bird of his burden.

Curious to Harry was the red wax that held the envelope closed with a rather loopy, fancy 'W' pressed into the pressed into the center of the blob. The wax held the flap of the envelope closed, which Harry thought was normally why you licked envelopes, to get the glue to stick the envelope closed. Of course, the envelopes that he had seen his Aunt use for correspondence before were not made of such thick, rough paper. Smoothing his thumb over the strange paper, he found it not to be as rough as he assumed, simply mottled in appearance as the fibers that constructed the papers were not bleached to be the pristine white he was used to. The paper was, however, just as thick as it appeared. In school they were given paper for their writing practice, but it was very thin, nothing like this paper.

Harry slit his index finger under the flap, forcing the wax to separate from the paper and allowing him to pull the contents from the envelope. Harry set the envelope aside, careful to not wrinkle or crease it. What he retrieved was many sheets, at least ten, stacked and folded in half. On the first he found a letter, written in ink in an unsteady hand. Sitting back, careful not to harm the collection of feathers that had picked itself up and was drinking from a watering can Harry had filled earlier.

Harry read:

Dear Harry,

I finally figured out how to write you. The owl that delivered this is our family owl. We have had her for years and use her for delivering post on occasion. Normally he would be sent out in the evening to deliver the post first thing in the morning, but I know that you can't receive post around your relatives, so I found that if I wait for a day where Errol, that's his name, hasn't been used for a delivery the night before, I can use him in the morning without anyone being he wiser. Also, if you want, you can write a letter on the parchment that I sent with this letter and send it with Errol before he leaves. That way we could stay in contact and I won't worry as much about you.

Life here is good. I do so wish that you could or would come live with me. You'll always be welcome and I'll figure out how to get my mum and dad to allow you too. Ron has been attending lessons during the summer with a family in a neighboring town, much to his objection. He didn't work hard enough this spring, and so he still couldn't write proper when mum tested him last week, so he has to learn over the summer. I attend lessons with a friend of mine just the other side of the meadow, but I worked hard, so I get the summer off from lessons. I've known Luna forever. You'd like her. She's nice and her dad, who gives us the lessons, is so fun. He sees things differently than any of my family, that's for sure, but that's okay.

I think that Percy finally picked his electives for school, or rather picked nearly all of them to take. He thinks that the more he does in school, the better he'll do after he leaves. I don't know how he can consider that! It's going to be five more years of school before he graduates and by then who knows what will have happened. Of course, he wants to be names prefect and then Head Boy, but I think that he's always angled for that. He's so different from the rest of my brothers. Percy has always been the one to follow all of the rules. He does everything mum and dad say and tells us that they are in charge, so the rest of us should too. I don't really disobey, but if I did everything just like Percy does, I wouldn't know you and I wouldn't ever have any fun.

Now, Bill and Charlie, they are cool. Bill has graduated and started work for the bank. That's why we were at the clothier's, to buy a new suit for Bill to wear sometimes to work. I've never seen Bill dress like that before. He really does look good. Mum is so proud of him, so is dad. Charlie got his test results back. He got good marks and dad and mum were so happy. They say that good marks will help him have any job that he wants, although he told me that he wants to work with animals, so I don't know if his grades will matter as much as how he is with the animals.

My brothers Fred and George, they're the twins, they pranked me yesterday. The dress that I was going to wear to go to Luna's house wouldn't fit. They made it smaller. I was trying to think of some way to get back at them, but they are good at pranking, it's almost all that they think about. I don't know if I'll be able to come up with anything good enough. I don't want to just hit them, but I don't know what else to do. Can you think of anything?

I was hoping to see you when we picked Bill's new suit up from the tailor's shop last Friday, but you weren't there. I didn't even see your aunt or cousin there. I hope that your family is treating you nice, but if they aren't, you could always come stay with me. I've got a big bed and there's enough blankets for us both. Have you been eating any better? I could send you some biscuits or a meat pie or something, if you want.

Please write back.

Ginny Weasley

P.S. Just write whatever you want and then tie it to Errol's leg. He knows the way back and he'll bring it to me. I won't get in trouble if I get post, so don't worry about it. Please write!

Her mentioning her return trip to the tailors reminded Harry of the previous day. Aunt Petunia had been complaining earlier as she let out Dudley's new suit around he belly and waist where he already strained the buttons. She complained that the tailors has purposefully tailored it too small, only to collect more quid on top of the outrageous prices they already charged. It was obvious to her that that was their scam, as they had left fabric to make the tailoring easy while they charged a premium for the service. Harry thought it more likely that they looked at the beached whale and knew he wasn't done eating. He held his own council on his comments, not wanting in on his aunt's indignation or anger.

Harry reread the letter to savor the words of his friend. He was confused about why her family wanted to use an owl to correspond with others, but accepted it. He didn't know everything about the world and figured that there was many stranger things out there than he could see from his cupboard. Harry desperately wanted to write back, and now he had the means, with eight sheets of that rich paper that Ginny used to write him her two page letter. He shuffled the paper so he could save her letter to him. He wanted to save the envelope as well, but he didn't have another. He could scratch his name out, which he now realized said the strangest thing:

Harry James Potter
The Garden in the Morning
Number 4 Privet Drive
Little Whinging, Surrey

He couldn't remember telling her his middle name, but passed it off as a flaw in his memory. They had talked about so much, it wouldn't be too inconceivable that he had told her that. He went to write his letter, happy to be communicating with his friend, but was unhappily confronted with the fact that he had no pen to write with.

He thought.

He could take a pen from his uncle's desk, but his uncle might notice, and, whether there was proof or not, Harry would be blamed. Maybe...maybe if Harry took one of the pens that his uncle abhorred writing with, the man wouldn't notice. Vernon had been given a full set of calligraphy pens, and had not appreciated the gift, as Harry knew full well. The gift had been from the corporate headquarters of the company that owned Grunnings to each of their directors, of which Vernon was one of many. In the privacy of his home, Vernon had railed at the uselessness of such a frivolous gift. Of course, he knew the price of such a set, but that enraged him all the more. With such an exorbitant price the company could have gotten him such a better gift, some fine cognac with a cut crystal dispenser and crystal snifters is the example he used at the time. Harry knew the pens were shoved in a drawer somewhere with the rest of the things that his uncle didn't care for, but couldn't just bin.

Harry brushed himself off and looked to see that Errol, the owl, wasn't in the view of the back windows, as that would get his aunt going on freakish issues, and he just didn't want to waste the time. He wanted to write the letter to Ginny before the owl decided that he had been patient enough waiting.

After shucking his shoes outside the back door, Harry sneaked inside to find the set of pens. He had less trouble than he expected in trying to find the unwanted pens; he found them at the bottom of the junk drawer, underneath the tea cozy Aunt Marge, Vernon's spinster sister, had given Petunia for her last birthday. The knit monstrosity had to be saved for when Aunt Marge visited, but wouldn't see the light of day besides, and even then only if they served her tea, which Harry thought to be unlikely. The corpulent women preferred good brandy to anything as mild as tea.

Harry didn't feel safe with the pens out of place too long, but knew that it would be an absolute tell if the walnut display box with the cut glass window was found not to be full of the four pens that it came with. Removing one would be evident, what with the felt lined indentation for each pen. He removed the entire box, intending to return it to the bottom of the drawer when he was done.

In his stocking feet, he made no sound as he exited the house. He reshoed his feet and took his supplies to a hidden garden table where he could compose his missive.

Harry finished his letter as quickly as using the unusual writing instrument would allow him. He was not used to the quill style writing instrument. He used as much care as he could, but his letter was barely legible, what with the scratching of the nib and the running of the ink. In the end, he hoped that Ginny didn't think less of him for his messy letter.

After finishing his letter, he refolded it as neatly as possible, and put it back in the envelope from Ginny. He readdressed the envelope with as much information as he knew, which wasn't much, but if the owl really knew his way back, it wouldn't matter. As smoothly as possible, he addressed the envelope:

Ginny Weasley
Ottery St. Catchpole, UK

He turned the envelope over and found another problem, the seal. Ginny had, somehow, sealed the envelope originally with a brilliant red wax, one that he imagined closely matched her hair. The problem was that he didn't have anything to reproduce what she did. After a second's thought, Harry went through dusting himself off and returning to the house, leaving his shoes on the step once again. Moments later, he returned with a small magnifying glass from his cousin's second bedroom, originally from an entomology science set that Dudley had received from somewhere last Christmas, but found boring.

Once again hidden from view by the house, Harry used the magnifying glass to remelt the wax and, after some thought, used a small sharp stick to carve his own logo into the molten wax. He couldn't think if his family had any symbol that would have been used, so he came up with one of his own.

The scar on his forehead was the one feature about himself that he especially liked. It set himself apart from his family and especially his cousin. Maybe it was how adamantly his aunt disliked the mark, but to him it was special. Whenever she tried, however unsuccessfully, to cut Harry's hair, she always left his fringe to cover the 'hideous' scar, as she called it. No matter what she did, however, his hair always grew back before breakfast the next day, sometimes before returning from the barber. However, no matter how much she disliked it, Harry liked it, and didn't mind when the wind blew his fringe from covering his scar. It made him different, and when you have a family such as his, you don't want to be the same, no matter how much he is punished for being different.

So what Harry carved into the red wax was a lightning bolt, roughly the same shape as his scar, as he could remember. He didn't have a mirror out in the garden to check, but he thought he got it close.

Harry tied the letter to the owl's leg, just as it had been tied when it came to him, and asked the owl, no matter how silly he felt, to deliver the envelope to Ginny. He hoped, aloud, that she was alone when it was delivered, mainly because he knew that her parents hadn't given permission for her to mail him, and he desperately didn't want to get her in trouble.

With a labored first several beats of his wings, the owl called Errol was back in the air, headed away from Privet Drive, with a skinny boy watching it go until he could see no more. He hoped she got his letter all right.

The letter came with Errol's return flight to find an anxious girl waiting in the garden beneath a plum tree to escape the warm sun. She had been in wait ever since before first light when she had sent the decrepit family owl on his way. She tried to stay away from her family, in hopes that the return message would arrive while she was alone so she didn't have to answer any questions. As luck would have it, Errol was particularly intelligent this day and didn't arrive until after Ron had stopped bugging her.

She was surprised, when it arrived, to find the letter inserted back in the original envelope with the address changed to hers, or at least as close as Harry could be expected to know. She was surprised to find her wax seal, which she had borrowed the wax and the Weasley signet, was remelted and a new symbol was carved into the wax. It was obvious by it's crudity, that the lightning bolt was not an impression of a signet of Harry's, but, rather, something he made himself, completely one of a kind.

Ginny had set the envelope aside and proceeded with the letter.

Dear Ginny,

Sorry if this letter is not as well written or worded as yours, but I haven't had the need to write to anyone before. I was very happy to get a letter from you, especially in such a strange way, but I can only find myself glad for the unique method, because I probably wouldn't have gotten it in the first place if it had come by postman. My uncle would not have abided me sending and receiving mail. I should also apologize for the messiness of the writing. I haven't used a pen with a metal nib before and the only pen I could sneak was a set of calligraphy pens that my uncle wouldn't miss for some time. Maybe, with practice, I'll improve.

I was glad to hear from you about your brothers. I wonder what it would have been like to have such a loving family. It's too bad that your brother Ron has to repeat his schooling in the summer. Will it be too boring there with him away for most of the day? Does your friend Luna come over often? I haven't had any friends come over, or really any friends to invite, but my cousin Dudley has friends around all of the time. They like to play games and cause trouble. My aunt says that he is just a growing boy that likes to be rambunctious. I say that he is a pig in a wig that likes to bully others. He likes to play a game, as he calls it, called Harry Hunting, where him and his friends, if they're around, try to find me. I've gotten better at it. They can hardly catch me anymore unless they corner me in the beginning. When they do, it's not fun. I try to just not get caught, so that Dudley or his friends don't do anything.

My aunt is having the women from the neighborhood over for lunch today, so she told me to do my morning chores in the garden and then make myself scarce, which means that I'm in the garden where they can't see me right now. They won't be over for an hour or two yet, though, so I'll be done with this letter by then and I can go to the park again or something. I think that that would be the best to keep my aunt happy, or at least not mad.

Thanks for saying that I can come stay with you. It means a lot to me. I hope that it doesn't get that bad here, but they're my family. They might not be a good family, but they're mine. I hope that I don't have to leave, but if I do, your family sounds so nice. I can't think of somewhere better that I'd like to live.

I'll think of you, Ginny. You make it easier for me to get through the day. Thank you.

Please write me again.
Harry Potter

The letter broke Ginny's heart. Harry was so determined not to give up on his family, so determined not to quit. She felt so much for Harry in the short time that she had known him. She wanted him safe. She wanted him with her where she could help him, keep him happy.

At the same time, she was so happy to be talking to him. She was so happy to ever be talking to him and looked forward to talking to him in the future. For some reason, Harry made her happy.

She got up from under the plum tree and went inside, intent on writing another letter to Harry, hiding the letter inside her blouse.

While Harry was going from one chore to the other, Ginny was trying to think of a way to bring him to the Burrow. She was coming up blank. Even if she got him to the Burrow, she knew what her parents would say. They said it when Ron had a dog that he found. The dog had a family and so it had to go back to its family. It was clear to Ginny; unless Harry was family, he wasn't going to be able to stay with her. But Harry wasn't family.

Ginny had been trying to think of ways to let Harry stay, just in case he did ever decide to leave his aunt and uncle. She was intent on that goal, all the while bugging her mum and dad to check on Harry, to see if he was alright. She knew he was healthy enough from her letters to and from him

every few days. She cherished those letters more than anything she owned.

Dear Ginny,

Thank you for your letters. I'm feeling better after my cold. Aunt Petunia even reduced my chores to only the garden until I felt better. She didn't want me to spread my germs over the house, so when I came in after weeding and mowing the lawn, she sent me to my cupboard with a bowl of soup. It was nice. I could just lie under my blanket after eating my lunch and sleep. I was so tired that nothing could have felt better, nothing that I have known before, anyway.

I'm glad to hear that Bill's job at the bank has been going well. His bosses sound like amazing people. They sound like they can fix any problem, the way he talks. He makes running his job sound so fulfilling. I hope that he finds the training to be as good. I don't understand what he will be doing after he is trained, but that must be some interesting bank if they employ treasure hunters. My uncle works for a company that makes drills, and I don't think his banker does anything like that.

What was it Charlie wants to do with animals after he graduates? Will he have to go to university? Working with animals sounds like fun. I'm glad that he can get into a career that he'll like.

Thank you for the continuing invitation. I have to go now. I don't know how much longer my aunt will be busy before she notices me writing this letter, not to mention Errol.

Goodbye for now.
Harry

"Mummy," Ginny said. "Luna's birthday is in two weeks. Can we make her a summer dress like the one you made me?"

Molly paused from at the breakfast stove. She had forgot that the fellow wizarding family would be celebrating a birthday in a fortnight. She had received an invitation for the Weasley family to attend. Ginny had always been a considerate girl. A summer dress would be a nice present.

"That'd be nice, Ginny," her mum said. "But we don't have any fabric."

"Could we go back to that shop and get some more?" Ginny asked. "Could I spell it with a nice print?"

"Yes," Molly said. "Yes we can go to the shop and get some more. But you know that you're not allowed to use magic. You can pick a pattern there that she'll like."

"Okay, mummy," she acquiesced.

"Get ready, I'll tell Charlie that we'll be gone for a few hours," Molly agreed. "I'll use the trip to pick up a few more things from the other shops there."

"Can I play in the playground again?"

Harry was having an average day. He was working in the garden again, seemingly a constant job during the summer months. The good news was that he could slip out after the lawn was done again, if he didn't mind missing his lunch. The thought of escape was more powerful than his hunger, so he chose to go to the park rather than eat a couple of slices of bread, dry, with some cheese and water. The walk from Privet Drive to the center of town did nothing to prove him wrong. Years of hunger made the little he had easy to ignore.

Harry looked at the shops that surrounded the village square and the park with curiosity. There were women and men, people going from shop to shop buying this's and that's. Harry was curious about what it would be like to buy what you wanted, to have the new clothes rather than his cousin's cast-offs, but that all seemed a fantasy. His aunt and uncle wouldn't be buying him anything new. He was just a waste of money. The way he had heard his uncle figure it, he cost more than a hundred quid a month, an outrageous amount in his uncle's words.

Rather than go around the shops, as he might want to do, had he any money, Harry headed straight for the park. There were less children today than normal, but there were still several women watching the children play. Somehow, Harry wondered if his own mother would have been with those women watching him play, if she hadn't been killed when he was a baby. Maybe his father would have been there too, as he sometimes saw fathers with the mothers on Saturdays. But it was all a fantasy. His parents were dead and wouldn't be coming back.

Harry approached the more vacant side of the playground, not wanting the other kids to have to steer clear of him if he tried to go amongst them. The kids had started to tease him at school, sort of like how Dudley and his friends did, only without the hitting. It seemed they liked that they could. Harry just chose to avoid the mess.

At the relatively unused side of the playground was the merry-go-round that he had been at a couple of weeks ago when Ginny had showed up. Being around her was nice. It sent waves of joy through him. Not for the first time he considered if he could leave his family and go live with the pretty girl, his friend, his only friend. Less and less was he seeing a problem. Sure the Dursleys were family, but they weren't a good family. When

he was younger, he imagined a completely different aunt and uncle showing up to take him in, to remove him from the Dursleys to somewhere else, somewhere better, but that had never happened. Did the somewhere else have to come from some previously unknown family? Could Ginny be his chance at somewhere else, somewhere nice? But Ginny was more than that to him. She was his friend, and if he ever went to live with her, it would mean more to him than just somewhere else.

Harry saw that the merry-go-round that he had used before was occupied, but with only one kid. It took Harry two seconds to realize that this kid, a girl, was familiar. The flaming red hair, the angel like face...it was his Ginny.

"Ginny!" he exclaimed nearly without thought. "You're back!"

"Harry?" she returned, turning around. "Harry! I didn't think I would see you."

Simultaneously, huge smiles broke their faces where a lack there of was previously prevalent. They nearly ran at each other, directly into a great hug. They held on for dear life, happiness pouring from their actions.

"I didn't think I'd see you," Ginny repeated, "when I didn't see you when I got to the playground. You weren't here."

"I'm glad that you're here," Harry told her. "But why are you here?"

"I came to see you, silly," Ginny replied. "Luna's birthday is in two weeks, so I asked my mum if we could buy some fabric so we could make a dress like mine for her. She liked mine. So I got my mum to buy it here so I could see you. I'm so glad you're here."

"But," Harry argued playfully, "doesn't that mean that you came here to buy some cloth?"

"That's just what my mum thought," Ginny said. "I'm only seven years old. I have to have some excuse to come to Surrey."

Harry laughed. "I guess you couldn't exactly tell them that you wanted to visit a really nice park."

"No," Ginny said. "But Luna really did like my dress, so she'll like her birthday present a lot."

Harry and Ginny were having a good time. Harry pushed Ginny on the swings several times and showed her how they could push the merry-go-round until it was going so fast that they had to hold on while they lay on it's flat surface.

They were enjoying themselves on the teeter-totter when a most unwelcome interruption gained their attention. Ginny was on the ground when Harry's cousin and his friends stepped from behind the jungle-gym, taking Harry by surprise. There was nothing he could do from up high on the other end of the board.

"Well, if it isn't my freak cousin," Dudley said loud enough for both Ginny and Harry to hear. They were hidden from the mothers' benches by the same jungle-gym that Dudley had rounded.

Harry was not happy, and was just a bit scared. He would normally just run away, being no match for Dudley and his three friends, but he couldn't do that without Ginny, and she was quickly surrounded.

"And a little friend too, Harry?" Dudley asked. "Resorted to ugly little girls when none of the boys would be your friends? Just pathetic, Potter."

The look in Ginny's eyes was fear. She looked Harry straight in the eye from twelve feet away. Harry returned the gaze and tried to give her some confidence that everything would be alright.

"There's nothing wrong with girls, Dudley," Harry proclaimed. "And Ginny's not ugly. She's very pretty! Just like an angel."

The proclamation warmed Ginny's heart and a smile broke the corner of her lips, but the fear didn't leave her eyes.

"We all know that girls have cooties," Piers, one of Dudley's gang, said. "If you've been touching her, then you have cooties too. Gross!"

Harry bristled. No one would talk bad about Ginny!

"She doesn't have cooties!" Harry yelled. "You're just too stupid to know anything about it!"

Ginny got a look of determination in her eyes, Harry could see. It was as if she had made a decision. She started to straighten up, raising the teeter-totter and lowering Harry just a bit.

Dudley's gang, however, while not smart, could see the movement and sprung into action. Two of them held the low end of the teeter-totter down, leaving Harry in the air and Ginny out of control, while Piers pulled Ginny from the end and held her arms behind her back tightly.

"Well," Dudley said. "If she doesn't have cooties, I guess that she still has to pay for hanging out with a freak!"

Dudley rolled his sleeves up on his right arm, just as he did before hitting Harry when he was held in the same position. Harry was worried for Ginny, a sentiment mirrored in Ginny's eyes as she turned to look at him.

"Don't you touch her!" Harry yelled.

He started to get up from the end of the board he was sitting on, thoughts of leaping into action, no matter the height, dancing in his head.

"Brave now, are you?" Dudley mocked. "Let him down, boys. Let's see what he's got."

The two boys on the low end of the teeter-totter shared a look before both stepping away from the board at the same time. Harry's end rocketed for the ground before Harry could make his escape. He floated above the board while it fell and then impacted just after the board hit ground. His rear end impacted the board just where he had sat seconds before, the impact sending shocks through his body, making something down there seem that it was damaged.

Harry rolled to the side, just missing the board as it sent back up, now devoid of any weight on either end. He fought his way to his hands and knees, mindful of the pains now in his lower back. He looked up at the laughing boys and a very concerned Ginny.

"Well, now," Dudley taunted. "Doesn't seem like he's in much shape to defend his girlfriend now, does it boys?"

"Looks like she'll have to take her punishment alone, then," Piers said, tightening his grip on Ginny's elbows.

"Let go of her!" Harry yelled.

Dudley, after smirking menacingly at Harry, pulled his arm back slowly for a good hit. Harry looked on with too good of a view. The tableau laid out in front of him, a side view of Dudley preparing dramatically for a solid punch, his number two, Piers, holding his target, and Ginny, the target, watching pain as it comes.

Harry surged to his feet and yelled once more, as Dudley wound up, "Let her go!"

Suddenly Ginny wrenched from Piers solid grip and flew through the air, straight into Harry's arms, where he managed to catch the girl that weighed nearly what he did.

Dudley's swing continued as before, the big whale not able to realize that his target was no longer there. The result was him punching the air straight out of his friend. Dudley's big ham of a fist, even at nine years old, sunk into his friend's stomach. Piers doubled over in pain.

Harry spun with Ginny's impact, but managed to keep his feet under him. He looked at the girl in his arms in shock, and up to the four pack of stunned boys, each of which was well larger than either Harry or Ginny.

A slight movement from Dudley shook them both from their shock. Harry went through his fight-or-flight instinct. While Ginny had been in danger and out of his reach, the answer was fight, but now that Ginny was in his arms, it seemed like a better move to get out of there.

"Come on, Ginny," Harry pulled her after him as he took off in the other direction. "Run!"

He was just half a stride ahead of her, with her hand clasp tightly in his to make sure she didn't get left alone with the brutes. They left the sand of the playground with Dudley and his gang a healthy length behind them but not far enough for their safety to be assured. Dudley would be twice as vicious with them now that they had escaped than he would have been before, but that would just be a comparison on number of bruises, nothing more.

Harry led Ginny around a great bush, but it wouldn't be sufficient to protect them from the gang of bully's. There was no place safe to hide. Harry continued around the bush until they were pointed back at the playground, their pursuers still ten yards behind them, but coming on fast.

Harry aimed for the safety of the immediate area where the mothers protected, where the preschoolers played on the elephants and horsies mounted on springs and the colorful rings and slides were low for their smaller bodies.

Harry and Ginny raced for the playground, seeing it as safety. Harry didn't want to run over any of the toddlers, so he aimed around the back of the mothers' benches, but Ginny had another idea, as she steered them for one of the vacant benches not five feet from the group of mothers. She sat them both down and put her arm around his shoulder to prevent him from bolting as the gang came closer. Ginny was used to the protectiveness of adults, where Harry had little reason to trust in it.

Dudley came to a halt just behind the bench, wheezing for his breath after the run. He was just reaching for Harry's head, when Piers caught up and grabbed his friend's arm.

"Big D," Harry heard Piers whisper, "don't! There's adults here. We'll get the freak later!"

Dudley huffed in anger and replied, "Yeah, and his little girlfriend when we see her too."

"Watch out little girl," one of Dudley's more silent heavies whispered as he leaned over between Harry and Ginny's heads. "We catch you again, and you'll hurt."

"Let's get out of here before the little scaredy cat gets us in trouble."

Dudley and his gang stalked off, glancing back at the couple to see if they were going to stay there or run again. Ginny and Harry stayed put, where

it was relatively safe.

Harry let out a breath. "Ginny, I don't think its safe for you to come back her again," he told her. "You know they'll hurt you if they get a chance."

"Oh, Harry," she answered. "But what about you? They'll hurt you too!"

Harry tried to comfort her with a hug. "They always try to hurt me. Most of the time they don't catch me."

"That doesn't make me feel better," she said. "Will your aunt keep him from you?"

"Not likely," Harry answered truthfully. "But Dudley never tries anything around her. If she doesn't see it, he's perfect."

"But, Harry," she pleaded. "That just means that you should come live with me even more now. You won't be safe here."

"Have you talked to your parents?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Ginny moaned. "They won't let you come. They say you already have a family and that your teachers or neighbors will help you if you are having trouble. They think that if you have a family, that's where you should be."

"Well, I guess that's that," Harry frowned. He was really liking the idea of moving in with Ginny.

"Oh, but, Harry," she said, "I'll find a way. Just come stay with me, I'll find a way to keep you, even if they don't really know about it."

"How would that work?" Harry asked dubiously.

"I don't know," Ginny replied. "I don't know, but I figure something out."

"Ginny," Harry told her, taking both of her hands in his. "I don't want to get you in trouble with your parents. I'll be fine here. It'll be okay."

Ginny stifled her threatening tears. "But, Harry," she argued, "what's your uncle going to do tonight? What's your cousin going to tell him?"

"I didn't do anything wrong," Harry said. "Besides, your family loves you. I can't screw that up."

"You won't," she answered.

Harry hugged her again, silently giving his decision. "I love you, Ginny. Thanks for being my friend."

She hugged him back, giving her support. "I love you too, Harry. Please stay safe."

"I will," he assured her.

She steadfastly doubted his ability to make good on his promise.

Harry pulled Ginny to her feet as he rose. He took her hand in his and started toward the shops from the playground. One side of the park was houses, the other shops, and Dudley and his gang went the way of the houses, conveniently for Harry and Ginny.

"Come on," Harry said. "Let's get you back with your mum before Dudley comes back."

"Okay, Harry," Ginny said. "But I'm not staying away."

"Okay, Ginny. But watch out."

Harry stayed out as late as he thought he could. Despite what he told Ginny, he was worried about what his uncle would do when he arrived home. He came home just before dinner should have started to a eerily quiet house. The light from the evening sun was still enough that no one part of the house was brightly lit by electric lamp, so he couldn't judge from the light spilling into the hallway where his family was, but he knew that he would have to face them at the dinner table. That was not an option, especially as he had become extremely hungry in the hours since Ginny left.

He approached the door to the dining room that attached the kitchen cautiously. He slowly pushed the door, trying to see if there was a trap waiting in the form of his seething uncle, but missed any waiting danger.

He stepped inside, only to see that his uncle, aunt and cousin were already sitting to dinner, a large roast and trimmings. Harry had hardly stepped to his place at the table when he saw that there wasn't one. His chair and place setting were missing.

"So the freak thinks he can skip out and not have to help," his uncle said threateningly. A shiver ran down Harry's spine. "Your aunt prepared this lovely meal, took her hours it did, and where were you?"

Harry tried to stammer out a response, but was caught short with a backhand across the cheek. He flew from his feet to the tile floor, cracking the back of his head soundly, eliciting stars to dance around his head.

"Don't even try to lie to me!" his uncle boomed. "Dudley already told us what happened at the park. Says that you were causing trouble, hanging out with some floozy."

"She isn't..." Harry started only to be knocked back again, only this time he had less distance to travel to the floor, although that didn't help his painful impact.

"Don't interrupt me!" his uncle yelled. "And then, apparently, you called him and his friends idiots or the sort."

"I didn't..." he started again, but was back on the floor, this time impacting his forehead solidly, making the stars dance more vividly as his vision swam.

"Now you're interrupting again!" his uncle told him. "Where were we? Oh, yes. You called him names. Me? I'd say that that deserves an answer, but you ran away like a wimp before he could defend his honor, so now you'll take it here."

Harry's aunt didn't protest in the least. Dudley stood and waddled around the table, cracking his knuckles menacingly as he approached Harry's prone position. Petunia even patted her son on the arm as he passed, as if he were doing a good thing. Harry lay vulnerable on the floor, waiting.

"Get up," Dudley said with an added kick to Harry's midsection. "Get up so we can do this proper."

Harry struggled to his feet after another kick, if only to get whatever it was over with. He really wished now that he had been able to take Ginny's offer for another place to live when she was offering earlier. It appeared that she had been perfectly correct in her worry for Harry's safety.

Dudley wound back, just as he did earlier, and let his fist come forward, putting as much force behind it as a nine year old could. Harry was hit in the stomach, right on his bellybutton, which doubled him over and evacuated his lungs. Harry put his hands on his knees as he coughed and coughed. The impact complemented the kicks quite horribly from his perspective, leaving his insides feeling like they were on fire with pain.

Dudley, never one for patience, lifted Harry's face with his left hand, obviously planning more than one hit. Harry's face was already starting to swell from his uncle's earlier ministrations, but apparently Harry's intact glasses insulted Dudley somehow, as Harry's nose was his next target. He wound back and came in with a great jab punch, aimed at the center of his face, right at the bridge of his nose and his glasses.

Harry winced as he knew the punch was coming, but something stopped it. Fist stopped inches from Harry's intact nose, pressing against a curtain of light that stood between the fist and Harry, extending in bolts several inches from the fist. Everything stayed that way for half a second, until Dudley was repelled, flying across the room and impacting with the wall just under the hanging telephone. His head hit with a solid thump and he sank down to the floor, unmoving.

Vernon, seeing this, turned a deeper shade of purple. He rotated on his feet until his rage was aimed at Harry, who stood shocked, again, for the second time that day as something strange and unexpected happened around him.

"How dare you!?! " Vernon raged. "How dare you, you freak!"

Vernon rushed forward with red in his eyes. Harry stood no chance.

Two hours later, Ginny was pulling the light summer covers over her pajama clad body. She hoped that Harry was alright, but she had her doubts. If his family was only as bad as he said, he would be in trouble, but if they were any worse, it could be extremely bad.

Next time she would convince him to stay with her. She'd find a way.

She snuggled down, but sleep would not come anytime soon, as she worried about her friend, Harry Potter and listened to the ghouls in the attic banging the pipes in protest of the quiet house.

Not seconds after the beating stopped, Harry was unceremoniously dumped into his cupboard and the locks were slammed home. He had not eaten anything all day and was unlucky in his beating to not have been knocked unconscious, although his head was still hurting with bruises and knots all around. Sleep would not come for him, as the pains in his face, chest and torso warred with his wish that he was elsewhere, that he had taken one of the many opportunities over the years to run away.

He had hoped for most of his life, ever since he learned that all families didn't treat their children like he was treated, that some other family member, one that he didn't know about before, would come along to take him away, would give him a nice home where he could be loved. Then Ginny, a friend, but not much more than a stranger, came along and offered just that. Harry was reluctant because Ginny had a family and he wasn't it. He knew that he was supposed to be with family, but that didn't seem so important now. After their first meeting, they had gotten to know each other well through letters and two more meetings. Harry meant it earlier when he said he loved her. He hadn't loved anyone before, in his memory,

but he loved Ginny, and she loved him back.

Now, lying on his lumpy cotton mattress, bleeding and in dire pain, the reasons that he had turned Ginny down, at her invitation and insinuations, were not coming to Harry. He should have accepted. He should have gone and lived with someone that loved him, rather than his family who hated him.

Harry wished with all his might that he could live elsewhere. Harry wished with everything he had that he were living with Ginny. He wished that he was with Ginny, where ever that was. Harry concentrated on Ginny, hoping that she could assuage his pain and make it all right.

Harry's concentration on a single minded goal did something with a part of him that he didn't know about. It had worked twice today already, but it was called on again.

With a crack, Harry James Potter disappeared from Number Four Privet Drive, Little Whinging, with just the bloodied clothes on his back.

Ginny was startled from her worry with the crack of apparition just beside her bed. She had heard it many times before, and probably wouldn't have this time, what with the ghoul making a racket, if the sound hadn't come from right beside her bed.

She jumped in fright and hurdled herself away from the noise, off the side of the bed and onto the floor. Being untrained, she didn't come up swinging or hexing, but she was frightened, until, that is, she heard a moan come from the far side of her bed, where the apparition happened.

Curiosity getting the better of her, she slowly crept around the foot of her bed to see the intruder.

What she saw was a bloodied and beaten figure, but she could tell that it was her friend Harry, the one she had been worrying about, in one way or another, since they met nearly a month ago. She immediately rushed to his side.

"Harry! What happened?" she asked.

He tried to answer, not understanding where he was or why Ginny was there, but not caring through the pain. He was unable to form the words, other than a weak, "Help."

Ginny checked him over and came to a conclusion. She had to help him, but if she told her mum or dad, Harry would be healed, but returned to his family. Who knows if he could survive that. But her mum and dad had sent that dog back, not even showing concern in their decision about whether he had a good home, just whether he was supposed to be living with his family. So if they knew, Harry would go back to Little Whinging. Same with her brothers. She loved them, but couldn't trust that they wouldn't tell their parents.

Ginny made the decision to go against her parents without their knowledge, alone if she had to, to keep Harry safe, which meant keeping him away from his family. She would be his family and she would take care of him.

In the immediate future, she needed to get him healed. For bruises and thumps, potions would do, Ginny knew from her mum treating her and the boys for their accidents. The breaks in skin that were bleeding would be taken care of by a general healing potion as well. Luckily her mum kept a cupboard in the kitchen stocked in case of injury, as they happened often.

She steeled to the ground floor, making sure to be silent and skip the noisy steps and to walk at the sides of the stair case to not arouse her mum and dad as she passed their bedroom. She didn't take the candle from her room, so the light wouldn't alert anyone in the house as she moved to the kitchen. There, she retrieved a candle and whispered the wandless word to light it, a spell that was even activated by small children in wizarding houses. The candles were spelled for safety and longevity and sold by the dozen in Diagon Alley.

She reached the cupboard and quickly found the general healing potion, one for knocks and bruises and one for pain. She took two of each, one dose for tonight and one for the morning, to set Harry right. After a moment's thought, she also grabbed a light sleeping compound that her mum kept for emergencies. Harry would heal better if he would sleep and this would give him the necessary nudge.

Before leaving for her room, Ginny checked the laundry for what had been freshly cleaned but not put back in their respective rooms yet, and found a t-shirt and boxers that her brothers would unknowingly contribute to Harry's aid, the boxers from Ron and t-shirt from Bill for Harry to sleep in. With a second thought, Ginny grabbed an old pair of shorts and a t-shirt from Ron's stack for Harry for the next day, along with a wash cloth and towel to get cleaned up tonight. Harry hadn't come with any luggage and what he had on needed to be burnt, and would be.

Dowsing the candle, Ginny retraced her steps back to her room, where Harry still lay on the wood floor on the far side of her bed from the door.

"Harry," she touched his shoulder. "I'm back, Harry."

"Ginny," Harry said deliriously. "You're real? Not a dream?"

"Yes, Harry," she answered. "I'm real."

"Good," he drawled through the pain.

"You need to drink these," she told him. "They don't taste good, but they'll help."

"Med-cin?" Harry asked groggily.

"Yes, medicine," she agreed, close enough.

He swallowed as she poured the first, a pain relief potion, down his throat. He sputtered a bit at the rancid taste, but swallowed it all. The same happened with the two healing potions, although the knocks and bruises potion was particularly like month old cabbage and turned his stomach.

"Before the last of the medicine, let me get you cleaned up," she said.

She helped the groggy boy with removing his bloodied clothes, but was surprised to find him without underwear of any kind.

"Dudley's wouldn't fit," Harry explained, "so I went without."

"Of course," Ginny agreed with his logic, having learned long ago about his family never buying him clothes.

Shrugging, it wasn't anything she hadn't seen before, living in a house with two females and seven males. It was different than when it wasn't your own brother, but it didn't bother her in the least, and Harry was in no condition for any of his bother to register in his own mind.

She quickly helped him into boxers and Bill's over-sized t-shirt, prepping him for bed. When he was ready, she could only see the ends of the orange tartan boxers below the hem of blue Puddlemere United t-shirt. The orange clashed horribly with the gold on the Puddlemere logo, but it was good enough to sleep in after dark.

"Harry," she said. "You need to get into bed before I give you something to make you sleep."

"Bed?" he asked. "Okay."

He climbed from the floor and into the waiting bed. He took the place of the large stuffed dragon that Ginny took from him. She placed it in the closet before taking her place on the other side of the bed. She pulled the covers over them both, covering Harry's head completely. Her arm draped over his healing body just as she always did with the stuffed dragon that was usually in his place. She soon fell into a deep sleep, no longer plagued with worry.

Family Inseparable

Chapter 2

Family Inseparable: Chapter 2

By: Musings of Apathy

In a room at the top of a stone tower in an ancient castle sat a man, his beard flowing in silver to his belt and glasses perched on his nose. He was busy, but with as little to worry him in the past years compared to the decade prior, he was happy, his smile evident behind his beard and in his twinkling eyes.

He monitored many things in the wizarding world, whether they be part of his duties as Headmaster, Supreme Mugwump or Chief Warlock. But what he considered his most important task in monitoring the world for the future was his protection of Harry James Potter. He did this through a few of the silver instruments on his tables and shelves, and, according to them, the outlook was better than it had been for years. The instruments mostly fed off of Harry's own feelings, and he was feeling more at home and safer than he had in a long time. Things were improving. Similarly, according to a monitor on the wards surrounding his aunt's house, not a single dark wizard or witch had approached his town in all this time.

His back-up, Mrs. Figg, was to be away from her post for two more months, at least, while she tended to her daughter who had just went through a difficult birth of her first child. The Headmaster was not especially supposed to do it, but he checked the enrollment roles of future students and saw that the family of squibs was going to get a pleasant surprise in eleven years, a most pleasant surprise indeed.

But Mrs. Figg being gone from Little Whinging wasn't a burden, because the instruments showed Harry home and safe from any dark wizards.

Mrs. Weasley knocked before walking into her daughter's room with a load of folded laundry. She bustled around, hanging and filling drawers. Ginny, however, didn't stir. Her crown of red locks peaked from under the quilt and Mrs. Weasley could see the lump her daughter made wrapping around the lump her companion made. Charlie had really hit the nail on the head by choosing the stuffed dragon, which Ginny dubbed Puff from a story her father had read her. She now slept with the dragon every day, without fail. The thing was as long as her! But Molly remembered her youth, before she was married, and her staunch use, then, of her own full length body pillow. Now she still liked to cuddle in her sleep, only now Arthur provided the cuddles in return.

She bustled around the bedroom, cleaning and tidying the small space. Ginny's was the smallest bedroom, barely enough room for a cot in case she had a friend over for the night, but not enough room for it to be any stretch of time. Ron's room was the same way, but with seven children, they had to make do with what they could. They took turns in everything. Arthur and her had their own loo, but the other children had to get by with sharing one. She tried to make it easier by teaching them early to clean up after themselves, but boys were harder to teach than she remembered being herself.

Ginny's dresser and night stand were littered with dolls and stuffed animals. She found several of her potion vials, undoubtedly from the 'potions' the twins made for Ginny at her insistence. She had watched with concern, at first, as the twins made the first. She talked to them about the 'potions', but they insisted they wouldn't hurt their little sister. She watched as they took various juices from the cupboard and minced flower petals from the garden into the mixtures. Molly knew the 'potions' to be harmless and without effect, but when Ginny wanted to play healer, the twins were her natural source for the 'medicine' that she pretended to give her dolls and animals. Really, Molly was sure that Ginny convinced her brothers to make her the 'potions' so that she could have more of the juice, and flower petals weren't toxic, according to her reference book, 'Household Hints for the Modern Witch' by Gilderoy Lockhart. The man knew his stuff, and he made it clear that the flower petals wouldn't harm. The book even told stories about his exotic travels and the things he had eaten in far flung countries. He had eaten violets in Venice, daylillies in Da Nang and roses petals in Raniganj, so some juice with ground up petals wasn't going to hurt her. Molly gathered up the empty potion vials so she could *scourgify* and store them for the next batch of potions she made for the house. She swore, with six boys, if she didn't have some potion making skills, the family would go dry in the vault. The boys were always snitching a healing potion of one sort or another when they scraped themselves up.

Ginny was neat, but was still learning the rest of the household chores that were a woman's duty. However, she had many years before it would be necessary. For Arthur's sanity, it would be at least a decade and a half before that day. But, who knows, maybe she would be like so many young adults and get married directly out of Hogwarts. Whatever made Ginny happy.

She finished tidying up in Ginny's room and moved on. Ginny was still sleeping, cuddling her companion, from what Molly could see, and oblivious to the world. A bit more sleep would do her good while the porridge cooked. Plain, it was nothing to look at, but the kids would eat it up with a bit of jam and honey.

Ginny awoke slowly, basking in the warmth under the covers. She didn't go through the shock of finding someone in her bed without remembering why; she remembered who and why he was there. When her father and mother told her stories repeated from the Daily Prophet about how Harry Potter had changed the world, she had imagined him a knight in shining armor. Her father cleared that up right quick. He reminded her that he was just a little older than her, not some grown man on his steed saving damsels in distress. He had done a great thing at a age when the only explanation could be his raw magic aided by something unknown. Still she had hoped that the reality of Harry Potter turned out to be as nice as she had imagined. What she found was a nice boy who was given to share himself with other caring people. Harry, however, was not a perfect knight in shining armor. He had problems; a family that hated him, a cousin that bullied him and children around him that treated him like he had the pox. But he had things going for him as well; he was kind, despite his treatment by his family, he was loving, she knew, he was powerful, as demonstrated by his accidental magic the previous day, and he was loved, which she hoped helped him, as she didn't plan to stop.

Beside her, Harry shifted. He twisted into her and clutched her tight from his dark position under the covers. Ginny lifted the covers to allow some light into their little world. She saw that Harry's bruises had improved and he no longer looked like her mum's meat cupboard, but he still needed some tending.

"Harry," she whispered.

He mumbled something unintelligible, but didn't do anything further toward awakening. She moved her hand to shake his t-shirt clad shoulders, which provided some more response, but nothing like actually waking. He still didn't seem to want to do that.

Ginny slid from Harry's grasp and exited the bed. She smoothed down her pajamas, where the top had bunched up and would have gotten a bit breezy, had it not been summer. Harry was left under the covers, the blankets covering to his lower back, leaving marks showing on the back of his shoulders and the side of his face that wasn't pressed into her mattress. Her heart ached for him and she promised to do what was necessary to keep him safe.

"Harry," she insisted quietly, "you have to get up, now."

Harry shifted, opening his face toward Ginny's voice.

"Harry," little Ginny said. "Wake up. You have to drink your potions now."

Harry mumbled something that seemed to end in a question mark, so Ginny repeated herself. Harry, too bleary to question, sat up and downed another round of healing potions before the foul taste shook the sandman from his head.

"Yuck," he declared. "What's in that stuff?"

"I don't know," Ginny said honestly. "Would it help to know?"

"No."

Harry was awake and aware for the first time since his trip through the ether. He examined Ginny's room; the dresser, the walls with hand drawn dragons and pictures of family, sign on the back of the door proclaiming the room a 'Brother Free Zone'. A thought came to him, albeit slowly.

"Ginny?" Harry cautiously asked. "Where am I?"

"You're in my room."

"But..." Harry stammered. "How? I don't remember leaving my aunt's."

"Well," Ginny temporized. "Um...Magic."

At his unbelieving look, she rushed on. "My daddy tells me bedtime stories. Sometimes they're about this evil wizard and the powerful and young wizard that defeated him. But daddy told me they weren't just stories. It really happened."

"Like Merlin?" Harry asked, pegging on the only wizard name he could think of.

"Yeah, Merlin was a wizard," she confirmed. "But a long long time ago."

"You mean, he was real?" Harry asked wide eyed.

"Yeah. Um...Harry," Ginny bit her lip. "I know how you got here. You're a wizard. I'm a witch. Magic is real."

"It can't be," he insisted. "I can't be a wizard."

"Why?" she asked.

"I'm just Harry. I live with my aunt and uncle. My parents died in a car crash when I was one. Would all that have happened if I was a wizard?"

"Car crash?" she asked. "What's a car?"

"Car, you know," he told her. "You know, big metal thing that moves people around?"

"Oh," Ginny realizes. "I've seen those. My daddy called them automobiles, though."

"Same thing."

"You're mum and dad didn't die in a car crash," she told him. "They died when the evil wizard killed them."

"But..." Harry argued. "The Dursleys told me that my father was drunk and crashed the car. I can't remember, but when I try real hard, I remember a flash of green light."

Ginny gasped, tears coming to her eyes. "That..." she stammered. "That's the killing curse."

"The..." Harry repeated.

"The killing curse," she told him. "It wasn't a crash. The evil wizard tried to kill you after your parents but it broke."

"Broke?" Harry asked.

"I don't know," she told him. "You're alive. He's not. He just vanished."

"But I'm not a wizard," Harry repeated.

"Yes you are," she told him. "When you were a baby, it was your magic that protectedd you. My daddy and mummy told me stories about Harry Potter who was magic just like me. Oh, and remember in the park? That was magic. You pulled me from that mean boy with your magic."

"I did?" he asked. "Then, last night when Dudley tried to hit me, his fist just stopped and he flew back into the wall. Did I do that?"

"Yeah," she affirmed.

"But," he rationalized. "How did I get here?"

"You must have wanted to be here," she told him. "Your magic brought you here. It's called appa...appa...app'rition. Yeah, app'rition. Your magic brought you."

"Wow," he said. "Can I go anywhere I want?"

"Eventually," she said. "They don't start to teach magic until you're a lot older and you can't get a license for app'rition until you're way older. Bill can do it."

"Cool," Harry said. "But how did I do it then?"

"I don't know," she said. "I once turned my brussel sprouts into green chocolate, but I have no idea how to do it again."

With a promise of food, Ginny put her dressing gown on and left Harry alone in her room. He got dressed in the shorts and t-shirt that Ginny had left out for him. Now all he could do is look around the room and wait. When he looked closer at the photographs that hung on the walls, he staggered back when he saw one waving at the camera. Not just with a hand up in a waving gesture, but actually waving back and forth at the camera from behind the glass in the picture frame. Curious, Harry looked at the cover of each of the books on the shelf, but didn't open any, as he didn't want to overstep his bounds. Eventually, all that was left was for him to wait on the bed for Ginny's return.

Meanwhile, at the breakfast table, Ginny was dishing plum jam into her bowl of porridge. She liked it best with jam and a dollop of honey right in the center. She didn't stir the bowl, preferring to get a bite of pure jam and honey with each bite. As she ate, she listened and participated in the conversation around the table.

"Mom," Fred started. "Forge and I have an experiment that we need to do, can we use the shed out back again?"

"What do you want to do?" she asked.

Meanwhile, Ginny was drawn into a conversation that Bill was having with his dad about Gringotts and his new job.

"I'm telling you, dad," Bill said. "Most wizards don't even come close to understanding what Goblins really are or how useful they can be."

"And why is that?" Arthur asked, drawing out the logical conclusion from his son.

"Well," Bill said. "I think that it comes down to the prejudices that most of our society have, both overt and ingrained."

"But many families," Arthur argued lightly, "such as ours, actively discourage bigotry. How do you think that effects things."

Ginny didn't understand everything that her brother and daddy were talking about, but she enjoyed listening to her big brother Bill bring such an adult.

"I think that it's ingrained," Bill said, "In our education and in how the ministry treats non-humans. They lead our society, for better or worse. Was Professor Binns the History of Magic Teacher when you were in school?"

Arthur laughed. "It hasn't been *that* long ago since I was your age, son. Professor Cuthbert Binns died in my third year, your mother's second. But he had taught history at Hogwarts for nearly a century before his death of old age. He may have even taught Dumbledore while the Headmaster was in his youth. If not, it was close."

"And that's part of the problem," Bill espoused. "For more than a century History of Magic has taught about goblin wars, but not the Goblin's reasons behind them. They make it out like they want to overthrow the Ministry, when they are fighting for their rights and for treaty violations."

"And who knows how long the same curriculum was taught before Professor Binns was on board," Arthur added.

"Yeah," Bill adamantly agreed. "And in truth the Goblins are right helpful in the things that concern them. In my first week there I saw a young couple come in there. They had been devastated by a fire in their home. They lost everything. They were trying to get a loan from the Goblins to be able to rebuild their lives, but were so shaken. The loan officer, Flintring, helped them out. He suggested a vault search before they entered into a loan, not a normal procedure for the bank when they are dealing with Muggleborns, which this couple both were, and they found that the wife's great-great-

great-something-aunt was a witch, the last witch before a long line of squibs. It was a simple procedure, just a drop of blood, and they had enough to rebuild their lives without being monetarily indebted to the bank."

"Well, you're right," Arthur said. "Most witches and wizards wouldn't think to ask for help from non-humans, more their loss. Unless they know what they are asking for, our society isn't used to asking for anything from the Goblins."

What she was able to understand of her brother and father's conversation gave her an idea. The Goblins could help. She didn't know how, but isn't that what her daddy said? The Goblins could help even if you didn't know what help exactly you needed.

She finished her bowl of porridge and dished another, adding marmalade and more plum jamb and a dollop of honey. She folded a few pieces of fruit and some toast in a napkin as she stood from the table.

"Still hungry, Ginny dear?" her mother asked quietly.

"I wanted to take some food with me for a project in my room," she said. She hadn't lied, but her mum probably thought the food would be for her. "Can I take some pumpkin juice up with me."

"If you clean up all of your dishes before dinner tonight," Molly said, "then yes, you may."

Ginny readily agreed and fetched a jug from the cold cupboard before she took her bounty from the kitchen and up the stairs. Extra food was not unusual for the Weasley kids. They always seemed to be taking extra portions, but easily burned them off in one of many athletic pursuits. If nothing else, Molly was a mother that wanted to make sure that everyone around was well fed.

"Hmm," Arthur said to his wife, "I almost expected her to mention that Harry chap again. I wonder if she decided to trust that he is being looked after now."

"We can only hope," Molly agreed. "I do worry about the poor boy. But what can we do about a Muggle boy, no matter his plight."

"And the MLE's check of the shop the day after your visit only showed your's and Bill's wand presence that day, so the boy wasn't wizard-born," Arthur reminded her. "There's nothing we can do. The Ministry has no ability to find a Muggle boy by his name alone, and they did report as much as they could through the Muggle authorities, but that's all they could do. I'm sure the Muggles will be keeping an eye out for the boy."

"I hope you're right, Arthur."

Harry ate with appreciation as much as he could of the food Ginny brought him. With a large bowl of porridge, four pieces of buttered toast, two apples, a plum and three figs, he had more food than he normally received in an average day. Harry savored the flavors of the porridge, as that and the toast would not keep for his lunch and dinner later in the day. With an apple and fig for lunch, he would have a good sized dinner of the rest of the fruit before he went to sleep at the end of the day, where ever that happened.

"Mmmm, Ginny," Harry said appreciatively. "This is so good. Don't you think your mum will miss this much food? I don't want to be a burden."

"It's not that much, Harry," Ginny told him. "I'll try to bring some more for lunch and dinner, if I can."

"More!?! " Harry asked, wide-eyed. "This is already a lot of food. Aunt Petunia never let me eat too much."

"Eat whatever you want," Ginny said. "There's always enough food in Mum's kitchen."

"Okay," Harry agreed cautiously. He'd still save something for later, just in case.

"Oh," Ginny said. "Bill had a good idea! We can write the bank for some help."

"You...you told Bill I was here?" Harry asked, glancing at her door, as if expecting it to be stormed at any time.

"No," Ginny assured him. "Bill was talking about his job and how helpful the Goblins were. I think they might be able to help."

"G-goblins?" Harry stammered.

"Yeah, goblins," Ginny said. "They run the wizard bank, Gringotts. They could help."

Harry thought about it. He was willing to trust Ginny and her world; it had to be better than the one he came from. He didn't understand the magic part of what he was told, but his hopefulness let him accept it as a possibility, as did his trust of Ginny's word.

"How can we ask them?"

"Write them a letter, silly," Ginny said. "I'll help you."

After helping Harry to write a letter, she changed and set out with the rolled parchment to check if Errol was rested enough to carry it to London. The owl was sleeping with his head tucked, but Ginny could tell that he was rested in body, as he acted like a bird on his roost rather than a beleaguered feather duster on the table below. The owl had been in the service of the Weasley family for so long that he was old and bone weary in his old age. After a round trip delivering mail, he would come home to fall limp on any flat surface for some rest. He only made it up to the roost after a good sleep.

She roused the bird for the delivery, but despite the off-time request, the owl took it without argument. He was well used to this little girl's unusual mail delivery requests by now. After accepting his instructions, Errol swooped out of the kitchen doorway, which Ginny made sure was fully open for the bird.

For the rest of the day, Ginny told Harry everything she could about the wizarding world as she understood it. Harry absorbed the information like a sponge and was attentive to every word Ginny said. The attention made Ginny feel even more special. In a family of nine, even one that tried as much as the Weasleys, one individual tended to be washed into the background, and if one of them wasn't causing a ruckus, as the twins often did, they were more easily ignored. So Ginny enjoyed having Harry all to herself.

A knock sounded at the stately doors to the grand office. With a command of 'enter' called, the executive secretary brought in an envelope for the powerful inhabitant of the office.

"Pickrake," the secretary called. "This arrived from the mail room. The Goblins there thought it was best routed to you, from it's address."

"Bring it here," the Manager of Gringotts London instructed. "I wonder who would be writing me instead of their account manager?"

He took the parchment roll from his secretary and examined the wax to see if it could shed any light on the possible contents.

Dear Mister Goblin Head,

My name is Harry Potter. My friend said I should write. Her brother said that the Goblins could help with alot of things. I need help. Ginny said that I had to be honest with you. My aunt and uncle are not nice people. They don't like me and they hit me. It was really bad but I don't live there anymore. Ginny said I could live here with her. Ginny's real nice to me. But she says that if I'm found by her parents or brothers they will send be back with my aunt and uncle since they are my family. I don't want that. I want to stay with Ginny. But Ginny says that I would have to stay with family and she isn't family. I wish she could be my family. Her family is so nice. Can you help me so they don't find out that I'm here? Can you help me to not have to leave? They won't send me back if they don't know I'm here. Please help me so I'm not found.

From Ginny and Harry.

P.S. I put some blood on the bottom there. I don't know why. Ginny said to.

There was indeed a drop of blood, which a common goblin piece of magic revealed to be from the true heir of the Potter name and legacy.

The Goblin Manager stood from his desk with an amused grin on his face. Of course, while any goblin would recognize it as such, most humans would have to try to resist the urge to just run away in terror, as his feral, sharp teeth mashed together.

Oh this is so fun, so rich. The hero of the wizarding world was placed in such a deplorable environment and had found himself a way out when his own kind hadn't even lifted a finger, or even noticed, for all Pickrake knew.

Pickrake so loved playing with the wizarding world that had maligned his tribe so. He found pleasure when he could help cause the sort of chaos that would be coming when this was discovered. He liked to help humans, when he found them worthy, that is. And this human, heir to the Potter legacy, had just shown himself worthy, by helping himself and then asking for help when he knew he needed it. Well, Pickrake would find a way to help the whelp out.

"Morrknife!" he bellowed.

His door opened, emitting his executive secretary. She was a fetching goblin and quite capable, to have risen in the ranks to be his assistant.

"Send for the Potter family account manager," he told her. "And make sure that he brings the appropriate ledgers and keys. I wish to go to their vaults. Young Lord Potter has asked for assistance in a personal matter and I am going to grant his request."

"Right away," she said, excusing herself.

Pickrake sat back with his mind turning over what help he could offer the young Lord, and what entertainment could be had through his assistance.

Ginny had, indeed, come through with a modest lunch and a fabulous dinner, by Harry's standards, which left Harry lethargic and sated for the first time in his memory. He now had so much food that he ate a snack between lunch and dinner, as his stomach started to demand more. He placed the uneaten fruit in Ginny's nightstand with her permission.

That night, for the first time when he was fully conscious and coherent, Harry snuggled down with Ginny under the covers, her head once again the only thing peaking above the covers.

When they both awoke, they had been left undisturbed once again in her bed. This time, Molly had no clothes to put away in the early morning hours and so had left the couple alone to their sleep, even if she still thought the second lump in Ginny's bed was still a stuffed plushy dragon.

They awoke to heavenly smells of breakfast wafting up to them. Their mouths both immediately watered.

"Mmm," Harry hummed. "That smells good. Good morning, Ginny."

She yawned. "Good morning, Harry. You're right, it does smell good."

They both removed themselves from bed and stretched with smiles on their faces. Ginny looked at the door and back at Harry. She hated to just leave him there, but didn't have another solution. Outside her door, she heard two sets of heavy feet descending the stairs loudly. She counted that the twins had now gone to breakfast.

"Go ahead," he told her.

"Okay, Harry," Ginny said. "The bath is a flight up the stairs. Breakfast will take a while. It can't be heard from the kitchen. You could take a bath if you wanted."

"Um..." Harry said. He had got along the day before with a wash cloth and towel along with her ancient water basin in her room, but a bath sounded great. "Really?"

"Yeah," she confirmed. "Feel free. I'll, um...oh, you need clothes."

Harry looked down at himself. He was once again wearing the blindingly orange boxers and oversized t-shirt she had nicked the night he arrived. His other change of clothes, which she also nicked from the laundry room, were under her bed. The clothes he arrived at the Burrow in were completely missing, disposed of efficiently by Ginny.

"Just wear those," she told him. "You still need to rest. So just get back in bed. I'll find you something to read."

"Oh...thanks," he tentatively gave her a half hug in appreciation. She would have none of it and returned the hug in full, testing his newly healed ribs.

Outside the door they heard another cacophony as one more of her bothers descended to breakfast.

"Sounds like Ron," she said. "That'll be the last of them. Go bathe and I'll bring you some breakfast."

Ginny parted with a hug. She slipped her dressing gown on and exited the room.

Harry took the towel that Ginny had provided him the previous morning and cautiously pulled the door open. What he saw was stairs spiraling down and up from Ginny's small landing. Apparently they were in a tower of sorts as Ginny's room was the only one on this floor. He could not hear any sounds coming from the floors above, but the din from below spoke of the large Weasley clan. Harry was unsure of venturing from the safety of Ginny's bedroom, but a bath was what he needed more than anything at the moment. Turning back into the room, Harry snagged an apple from the nightstand drawer and cautiously left the confines of the girl's room.

He crept slowly up the stairs, staying to the outside of the tread, just in case any had loose enough nails to squeak as they flexed. Half a turn up he found another door, which proved to not be a bathroom, as it contained a bed and desk rather than tub and loo. The bedroom was neat as a pin and the door declared it to be Percy's. Harry vowed to himself to keep an eye out for signs on the other doors, so as to not risk discovery.

Another half turn up the circular stair found another door. This one unlabeled, although the door knob was porcelain rather than brass, and had little red roses painted onto the glazed surface. Harry slowly turned the handle and pushed the door. Inside he found the bathroom he was promised. The room was old and lived in, unlike anything that would have been allowed in the Dursley house. The floor was aged tile, with the glaze worn in front of the pedestal sink and still damp around the claw foot cast iron tub. Harry was glad that it was sunny out, as he couldn't see any switch on the wall for lights, not that he saw any fixtures with bulbs. All he could see were several candle holders with half burned candles encrusted in melted wax along one wall.

After the lack of electric lights, Harry was glad to see two taps overhanging the tub and a rubber stopper hanging from a beaded chain draping over the side. In a dish on the window sill were three bars of soap; one white, one orange and one blue. He replaced the stopper in the tub before trying the left hand tap. The water that came out was steaming and very hot to the touch. Harry let it run while he pulled the other open. He was rewarded with cold, nearly icy, water to temper the scalding hot from the other tap. Harry stripped as the tub filled. The tub was large and slow to fill, but Harry didn't want to rush it by opening the taps any further. The rush of full blast water could make too much noise, despite Ginny's assurances otherwise.

While he waited for the tub to fill enough, Harry investigated the sink. There he found many used tooth brushes in a variety of colors sticking from an old coffee mug. Harry, however, was only interested in the tube of tooth paste that was beside it. He spread a bit on his right forefinger, just as he had many times at the Dursleys', so that he could clean his teeth. He worked the paste into a lather and scrubbed each tooth until he could feel it smooth and squeaky. When he was done, Harry rinsed and spit, his teeth clean and sparkly.

Harry tested the temperature of the water before slipping into its hot depths. He turned the taps off when the water was enough to cover his chest as he lay down in the steaming water and wasted no time in grabbing each of the bars of soap and testing their fragrance to his nose. One, the blue one, he recognized as the one Ginny used, the others he wasn't sure about. He chose the white one, the one without fragrance, and lathered his body, cleaning himself thoroughly.

Down at the scrubbed wood dining table, the family, including Ginny, sat for a typical Weasley breakfast. There were bangers, eggs scrambled fluffy, eggs with their orange yolks still standing up and wobbling in the middle of a white apron, rashers of bacon, stacks of toast, and, since it was summer, stacks of fruit from the village market. The table was the normal study in a rambunctious large family, with many conversations and attentions divided many ways. Ginny sat next to her father, this morning, so she decided that he was as good a source of information as she needed.

"Daddy?" Ginny started. "What's family?"

What do you mean, Ginny?" her dad asked.

"Well, I know that Bill and Charlie and Percy and Fred and George and Ron are my family because they're my brothers," she enumerated. "And you and mum are my family because you're mum and dad, but what else is family?"

"Well, baby, normally, family are the people that we care about and are related by blood to us," Arthur answered. "Like your Grandmum. She's your mum's mum, so she is family and we care a lot about her. The same's true of your fourth cousin Elsie, we don't see her often, but we care about her and she's related to us and is family."

"But," Ginny argued. "I understand that mum's my family, because we're related, but is she your family? She's not related to you."

Arthur stole a glance at his wife and found her following the conversation. He winked at her with a smile. "Oh, yes, she is part of my family and I'm part of hers," he told his daughter. "See, not all family is related to us. She is family because we loved each other and we married. So, she is family."

"What's married?" Ginny asked.

"Married is where a boy and a girl who love each other decide to spend the rest of their lives together and so they make a bond with each other," he told her. "In the Muggle world, the bond is simply a legal commitment with verbal oaths exchanged, but in the magic world, the bond is magical. There are no governments to say that you are or aren't married. Magic is the bond. A witch and a wizard perform a ceremony and bind themselves together in love for the rest of their lives."

"Wow," she said. "And you loved mum that much?"

"I still do," he said. "I loved her then and I love her now."

"Oh, okay," Ginny said. She then wrinkled her nose. "Does that mean that I have to marry my brothers? We're witch and wizard. I love them. Does that mean that we have to marry?"

"No, baby," he laughed. "You don't marry brothers. They're family already. When the time is right, you'll meet another wizard that you'll love and want to spend the rest of your life with and that is the man you will marry, if he feels the same. Then he'll be family."

"Oh, good," she proclaimed. "Thank you, daddy."

She gathered toast, bangers, scrambled eggs, bacon rashers, and cheese and assembled a sandwich of great proportions for Harry's breakfast. She was ignored as she once again wrapped the food in her napkin with a couple of pieces of fruit. She had news to tell Harry.

Off to the side, Molly wondered if Ginny's interest in extra food was the precursor of another growth spurt, or just normal kid stuff. These things tended to go in waves, she found. Her boys were always 'sneaking' food to their rooms, despite the abundance in the cold cupboard all the time.

When Harry finished bathing himself, he drained the water, careful to use clean to rinse the residue from the sides and bottom of the claw foot tub. He cleaned the bathroom as much as he could without mop and bucket, but didn't waste any time. He didn't know how much longer the family breakfast would last and didn't want to risk discovery.

Quietly, Harry padded down the stairs two doors to the one that said 'Ginny' and closed it behind himself. He was wearing the same boxers and t-shirt that he wore the previous two nights, but Ginny made a good argument that he needed the rest. While the potions that Ginny gave him managed to heal his wounds nicely, he was still sore and tired from the experience.

He found, quite to his surprise, a large owl on the ledge outside Ginny's window, waiting patiently as it perched on a brown paper wrapped, string tied package. If not for Harry's previous use of Errol, he wouldn't have been so bold as to open the window and let the great bird in.

The bird immediately made use of the window and launched himself into the air for a very stilted tour of the room. Its wings were so long that its laps seemed near pivots. It dropped the package on the bed and landed on the headboard.

"Is...is that for me?"

The owl didn't respond, though Harry hadn't expect him to. He knelt on the floor in front of the bed so he could see what it had in store. A label stuck on the outside identified its addressee as:

Harry James Potter

Ginevra Molly Weasley's Bedroom

The Burrow

Ottery St. Catchpole

England

The first thing to strike him was the exactness that the magic world could use in addresses without using street numbers. He remembered Ginny referring to her house as 'the Burrow', although he didn't get the reference, but what surprised him was Ginny's real first name. He hadn't heard the name 'Ginevra' before, although it didn't bother him in the least. Harry decided that Ginny must not want to go by her full first name and he wouldn't

force the issue.

Harry puled the loose ends of the bow and turned the package over. Without the string to keep the package closed, the paper opened right up revealing the most peculiar contents. Sitting there was a folded cloth so fine and transparent that it seemed to be spun clouds. On top of the fabric, whatever it was, was a letter addressed in coal black ink with an elegant hand.

Harry removed the letter and opened it, as it was addressed to him.

Mr. Potter,

As you may see, I received your request for assistance and have decided to help.

Enclosed, you will find some articles that I found upon inspection of your family's vaults here at Gringotts bank. I hope that you will find the assistance you need in these items. There were more items that you may find interesting and helpful when making your way in the world of magic, but I believe that these most suit your request to be concealed and to stay at your current residence.

Please feel free to owl me again, as I would be pleased to help.

Pickrake,

Managing Goblin of Gringotts London

Curious, Harry set the letter aside and explored the package contents. There he found that the fabric Pickrake sent was a square many feet across, large enough to cover his aunt's couch. When he draped it over his arm, he was surprised to find his arm gone from the crook of the elbow to the vee of his thumb. Sticking out in the middle of nowhere were his four right fingers, but he could not see anything else. It wasn't like he saw the bloody ends of his fingers, thankfully, they just sat there.

Smiling a conniving smile, Harry spread the fabric out between his hands and pulled the whole thing over his body. It draped to the floor and pooled at his feet with the excess. However, Harry could still see his body from under the drape. He decided that what he needed was a mirror. He started to walk from the room, careful not to step on his drape, but was caught short by a hoot.

Harry turned around, suddenly remembering the owl that had waited after he opened the package.

"Oh, sorry Mr. Owl," Harry apologized.

Harry went to Ginny's desk and penned a thank you note for the nice goblin who had helped him. He tied the rolled note to the owl's leg, as the owl must have intended, with its leg stuck straight out in offering. Harry thought to offer the owl a snack, but all he had left was some fruit and he didn't think that owls liked fruit. He thought he remembered from school that they liked little rodents. The owl didn't seem concerned, as it took flight when Harry seemed to be done and flew out through the window and off into the sky over the far trees.

Shaking his head to clear it, Harry redraped the cloth over himself and cautiously went to the door. Opening it slowly, he saw no movement up or down the spiral stair. He crept out, completely covered, and made his way up two doors to the loo, where he could find a mirror.

Ginny finished with her breakfast and fixing a sandwich for Harry, along with more fruit. She knew he had some left in her nightstand still, but he seemed to really like what she had brought so far. As soon as it was politely possible, she excused herself from the breakfast table and took Harry his breakfast.

"Does she seem to be acting particular to you, Arthur?" Molly asked.

"Well, she is taking extra food," he answered, "which she never has done before, unless it was biscuits. And she was asking the strangest questions for a girl her age. But I don't think anything's wrong."

"Well, I won't worry about extra food," Molly agreed, "as long as she doesn't make a mess of it. She just seemed different."

"Maybe it's that she stopped asking you about her little friend," Percy offered. "Up until yesterday, a day hadn't gone by that she hadn't asked you to go get him at least a few times. Now she doesn't even mention it."

"Maybe she heard from him that he's doing alright," Charlie said.

"Maybe," Molly said.

Ginny entered the room to find it empty, at least as far as Harry's presence was concerned. On her bed was the remains of some brown paper wrapping with a couple of boxes on it and a letter set to the side. After reading the letter, she was excited and anxious to learn what the Goblins thought would be helpful. Of course, that relied on Harry's parents having put something in their vault that would have helped Harry stay concealed in a house without the owners of the house knowing for an undisclosed time.

Behind her she heard the door open and close. She turned, putting herself in front of the bed, concealing the detritus of the package. She couldn't see anyone or anything in her room, however. She swept her eyes over her whole room and still was alone.

"Ginny!" she jumped as she heard Harry just in front of her. "You've got to see this! It's so cool!"

“Harry?” Ginny responded. “Where are you?”

“Oh, sorry,” his head suddenly appeared in front of her. Like a curtain being pulled back, Harry’s whole body appeared. In his hand was a silvery cloth that looked delicate and exotic. “The Goblins sent this from my family’s vault.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Harry said. “I hoped you knew. Here,” he offered, “take a look and see.”

He handed her the cloth and she saw her arm disappear from the elbow down. She played with the cloth, letting it flow from one hand to the other back and forth. It almost acted like water when she let it cascade through her hands. Experimentally, she held it up to the light and could see through it as if it was hardly there. She flipped it over, and found the same thing; both sides appeared the same.

“Harry,” she intoned slowly. “I think I know what this is. This might be an invisibility cloak.”

“What’s that?” Harry asked.

“It’s this,” she said. “It makes whatever’s under it invisible. You could use it here. It’s perfect. Mum always has food in the cold cupboard so you could get breakfast lunch or dinner anytime you’re hungry.”

“Do you…” Harry started cautiously. “Do you think that would be alright?”

“Sure it’s alright,” she told him. “Mum feeds everyone that comes here. Of course she would want you to eat.”

“But,” Harry argued. “She doesn’t even know I’m here.”

“She makes sure *everyone* that comes to the Burrow eats,” Ginny insisted. “You’re no different. Come on. What’s in the other things the Goblins sent?”

Harry went with her to the bed and looked through the two boxes that remained in the middle of the brown paper wrap. He chose one, a large flat one, and opened it. Inside was a glass sphere with a beautiful, sparkling collection of points of light. They were gathered in a disk, bulging at the center, with two arms coming off in a spiral. The shape was beautiful and mesmerizing. Wrapped around it was a silver cage attaching it to a fine silver chain. Harry and Ginny stared at it in awe.

“Wow, what is it?” Harry asked.

Ginny reached into the box to a scrap of parchment that was placed in the center of the chain’s loop.

“It has a note.” She unfolded the scrap and read aloud, “*I believe that this will be helpful. This pendant, a galaxy, has notice-me-not charms on it so that the wearer will have some anonymity. According to our vault records, this pendant has been in the possession of your family for half a millennium. Take care of it well.*”

She removed the silver necklace from the box and opened the clasp. Pulling his shoulder toward her, she turned Harry around and stilled him. She brought it around his neck and clasp it, letting it hang down his chest. As soon as she withdrew her hands, her eyes wandered to a picture of her two eldest brothers on the wall beside her window.

“Ginny?” Harry asked. “Did it work? What happened?”

Startled, Ginny tried again to look at Harry, but found her eyes sliding off him to the other side of the room.

“I think it works, Harry,” she said. “I keep trying to look at you, but I end up looking at the other wall.”

“Cool!” Harry said. “Is that what magic does?”

“It does a lot of things,” Ginny said. “Oh, this is frustrating. I can’t seem to look at you when I try.”

“Oh,” Harry said, concerned. “What are we going to do?”

“Bill says that a lot of magic is dependent on what you’re thinking,” she told him. “Try thinking that you want me to be able to see you.”

Harry scrunched up his face in concentration, not that Ginny could see. He tried and tried, but to no avail.

“Can you look at me?” Harry asked.

Ginny tried again and found herself looking at a picture of Percy in his dress robes from a distant cousin’s wedding.

“No,” she answered. “Just keep trying. It might take a lot to let me see.”

Harry pulled Ginny to the bed with him and guided her to sit beside him, his hand clasp in hers so that they weren’t separated by whatever the charm was doing.

Some time of concentration later, aided by Ginny’s calming touch, they found success. Ginny could fix her eyes on him easily. He just had to hope

that it would work for the others while it still let Ginny see him.

"This is perfect, Harry," she proclaimed. "Between the invisibility cloak and this necklace, you won't have any trouble. This pendant is beautiful. Too bad that no one can see."

"So, what do you think is in the last box?" Harry asked.

Without answering, Ginny simply picked up the small, rectangular box and flipped the lid. Inside was two rings, one feminine with a ruby, etched with a lion's head surrounded by wings, set in a gold braided band. The other was masculine with another ruby, slightly larger with the etching filled with a fine string of gold, set in golden Celtic knots making up a heavier band.

This time Harry picked up the folded parchment and read aloud to Ginny, "*These are the potter family rings for Lord and Lady Potter. You should wear these when it is appropriate.*"

"What do you think that means?" he asked.

"Don't know," she answered. "If you're Lord Potter, you're wife would be Lady Potter."

"But I don't have a wife," Harry said.

Ginny thought and remembered what she had talked to her father about at breakfast that morning. She related what she had learned about what family is.

"...And he said that mum is is family because they're married," she continued. "They loved each other and wanted to spend the rest of their lives together so they got married. Now she is his wife."

"And he is her husband," Harry concluded. "So, they're family now, but they weren't before."

"Yeah," she agreed. "That's what daddy said."

They were silent for a moment as they let their thoughts settle.

"Oh," Ginny broke the comfortable silence. "Mum always says that you should write a thank you letter when someone helps you or sends you a gift, so we need to write Mr. Pickrake a thank you letter."

"I did," Harry agreed. "I've seen my aunt send out thank you notes to people every Christmas. I wrote a letter to Mr. Pickrake and sent it with the owl that was waiting."

Family Inseparable

Chapter 3

Family Inseparable: Chapter 3

By: Musings of Apathy

“Vernon,” Petunia called to her husband. “Before you leave for work, would you leave the key to the freak’s cupboard?”

“Think he’s been punished enough, do you?” Mr. Dursley answered from the door to their en suite loo. “After what he did to our Dudley, the boy can sit in there and rot for all I care.”

“I agree,” she told him. “I’m going to give the freak some bread and water so he doesn’t die on us.”

Vernon came back into the bedroom straightening his tie. “I don’t have a problem with the freak’s demise.”

“Nor I,” Petunia answered with a scowl on her face. “But someone knows he’s here. One of those freaks would notice and what would we do then?”

“True,” Vernon said. “Just don’t let the freak out for long. ‘Till Dudders is feeling better, the brat won’t see the light of day, if I have my say.”

“I’m making Duddykins favorite this morning,” Petunia said. “I’m sure he’ll be feeling better in no time.”

“Did the freak make any complaints yesterday?” he asked.

“Not a peep,” Petunia assured him.

“Maybe he’s learning.”

The first full day that Harry was at the Burrow, he ate just a little, being too used to his aunt and uncle’s insistence that food eaten by him was wasted and, therefore, to be given at a minimum. On the second day, his appetite was becoming what might be considered by others as normal. The massive sandwich that Ginny prepared for his breakfast on his second day, he would have previously considered a full day’s meal or more. However, before consuming the sandwich, he had eaten one of the apples that was left over in Ginny’s nightstand on the way to his morning bath. A half hour after breakfast, Harry was feeling the extra food that his body was not quite ready for. With Ginny on lookout, Harry rushed to the loo under his new invisibility cloak. Shortly later, Harry was back in Ginny’s room, suffering the punishment of gluttony. He would have to give his body a chance to get used to the volume of food that a normal child consumed in a sitting before he let his eyes talk for his stomach.

“Oh, Harry,” Ginny said with worry. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t realize there’d be a problem. Are you alright?”

Harry groaned. “I think I ate too much. I...I just need to lie down.”

“You need to rest anyway, Harry,” she told him. “You’re still not healed from before.”

“I’ll be okay,” Harry told her. “I am tired. I’m just going to sleep. Why don’t you go ahead outside with your brothers.”

“Oh, I was hoping that you could come out with me,” she lamented. “But rest. You’ll feel better tomorrow.”

With her guidance, Harry settled on the bed. Ginny covered him in the invisibility cloak and tucked it in before covering him with her sheets and blankets. Harry was asleep before she would leave the room for the great outdoors.

Harry’s Aunt Petunia slid the key home in the dangling padlock and turned it for a definitive click as the shackle popped out. She removed it and slid the slide bolt open, unlocking the door to the cupboard under the stairs.

“Come out, boy,” she said harshly. “You have fifteen minutes to clean yourself up and use the loo before I lock you back in here. You’ll get some bread and water to let you think of what you did wrong. Another couple of days and we’ll see if you learned anything.”

When she didn’t hear any stirring, she let the glimmer of worry cloud her face. Was she too late? She peaked into the small space, but had to move to the side to allow enough light in so she could see the contents.

Ginny played with her brothers for most of the morning. She packed a small sandwich and a couple of more pieces of fruit with some cold water up to her room for Harry’s lunch, but he didn’t rouse. She kept quiet to not wake him and left the food on the lower shelf under the nightstand in case he should wake. It would not be evident there in any matter. She again spent the afternoon outside with her brothers.

Fred and George had filched a wand from the attic, most likely from Uncle Fabian or Uncle Gideon’s trunk. The deceased twin uncles were heroes in the Fred and George’s eyes. The prankster twin brothers of their mother had left journals that served as inspiration for their senses of humor and prank.

Oi, Fred," Bill yelled. "Leh'me see that. I want to show Gin-gin something."

"You got a wand already, Bill," Fred argued. "Use your own!"

"We snagged this one fair and square," George continued.

"Long as mum isn't the wiser, it's fair anyway," Fred added.

"I may be an adult," Bill answered. "And can hex you two without a ministry letter. But the tracking charm hasn't faded yet."

Fred and George looked at each other in consideration. Ginny looked on with deep interest. She wondered what her eldest brother had in store for her, what he wanted to teach her.

"I'll give it back without telling mum if you do loan it to me," Bill bargained.

"Since you're so nice about it," Fred agreed.

"We'll be generous in sharing our bounty," George concluded.

"Good to know," Bill said. "Give it over."

"But, dear brother," George said.

"We'll bring it along," Fred continued.

"To the lesson ourselves," George concluded.

Bill fairly snatched the aged wand out of the twin's hand. "No, this lesson is just for our sister," Bill told them. Ginny's curiosity was at an all time high. "You two make enough trouble as it is."

"We're hurt..."

"Downright stunned!" they claimed.

Bill smiled as he reached his arm back over Ginny's shoulder. "You'll get over it."

Bill turned himself and Ginny toward the wood behind the house.

"Come on, Ginny," the twins heard as they walked off. "I need to teach you some things so you can defend yourself."

"From who?" Ginny asked.

"Anyone. Your brothers, strangers, whomever."

"Call for you, Mr. Dursley," his secretary called to him over the intercom.

He pressed his button and spoke back to her, "Did you at least find out who it is? That is your job."

The secretary ignored his abusive tone and answered, "It's Mrs. Dursley, sir."

She was doubting that she needed this job enough to put up with the arrogance and abuse that rolled off her employer like the copious amounts of fat on the man's chins, but once again decided to keep a stiff upper lip and continue.

"Alright," Mr. Dursley answered. "No disturbances, Martha."

She cut off with a answer of, "Yes, sir."

"Hmm," Vernon said to the empty room. "At least this one has been trainable."

He pressed the blinking line and picked up the receiver. "Hello, Pet."

He listened to her for a a bit before interrupting, "Calm down, Petunia. Tell me what happened."

He listened to her tell the story for a bit longer before she paused, waiting for him to fix it. "Okay, this is what you do. If we're lucky, the brat's gone for good. Clean up his cupboard with bleach, make sure that all traces of him are gone from there. Move his clothes to Dudley's second bedroom and put sheets on the bed in there with a couple of the blankets from the upstairs cupboard. Make the bed look lived in. I'll take a long lunch and come home. Have his mattress and sheets from his room ready and I'll take it with me and dispose of them. When I get home this evening, we'll both go to the constable and report him missing; a runaway."

He listened to her worries over his plan before he responded, "We'll tell them he's runaway for a day or two before, so we didn't call thinking he would just be coming back like before. That'll make them not investigate much. With everything clean, they won't find anything anyway."

He listened to her agreement with his course of action. "I'll be there in two hours. Have everything ready. It'll be alright, Pet. You'll see."

He hung up and made arrangements to be gone from Grunnings for a couple of hours around his lunch time. In his mind, he was looking for holes in his plan and hoping that his freak nephew had left for good.

When they had walked a good way through the wood, Bill and Ginny entered a clearing well known to all of the Weasley children. It was a popular place for games and chases.

“Bill, what...” Ginny started but was cut off by a raised hand.

He raised his wand and waved it around the clearing, creating a gray mist. With a stab, the mist rushed from the center of the clearing and seeped into the trees all around. As it seemed to solidify into a wall connecting each boarder tree, they heard a duo of yelps from one side of the clearing.

“George, Fred,” Bill yelled toward the yelp. “I’m serious, no eavesdropping.”

He waved his wand in another spell that sent a lime colored bolt to a random spot on the coalesced white wall, causing the entire perimeter to glow green momentarily before it settled into a dull olive color.

“There,” he said. “That’ll keep this private.”

“What’s that?” she asked.

“A privacy ward,” Bill said. “Even works in an open area.”

“Wow, is that what you’re going to teach me?” she asked.

He ruffled her hair in an affectionate manner. “No,” he said. “You’re quite the little sprite, but you won’t be able to do that until the end of Hogwarts, if you’re even that lucky. What I’m going to teach you is something that you can use to defend yourself and to teach any of us lot a lesson if we get out of line.”

“Really?” Ginny asked. “But I wouldn’t want to hex you.”

Bill smiled. “Thanks, kiddo, but you never know. Besides, the twins need someone to keep them in line and to remind them not to mess with you.”

“Cool!” Ginny insisted.

Bill drew the 'loaner' wand from his pocket and showed Ginny how to hold it and point it. Within the hour, Ginny had learned to be proficient at sending the sickly yellowish gray bolt at her target, in this case a regretful Bill, with the practiced incantation of, “*Bates Mocus!*”

To be nice to her brother, she also quickly dispelled the secretions from his nose with the equally newly practiced, “*Finite Incantatem!*”

Of course, much to Bill’s detriment, the dispelling incantation was much harder to correctly pronounce than the hex itself.

All in all, Ginny learned some good magic that day, if only she has access to a wand when she needs one, such as the next time the twins start a new round of pranks.

By the end of the week Harry was more properly up and around. His bruises had faded fast with the assistance of Mrs. Weasley’s potions and his lethargy had changed into the opposite, a new abundance of energy that was wasted inside Ginny’s small bedroom. Without anything else to do, he devoured any and all books that Ginny would sneak up to him. Harry had reached a good pattern of going down to the kitchens in the times of the day and night when they knew that none of the family would discover him and cleaning up thoroughly behind himself so that his activities would not be noticed.

The only problem surfaced one morning when he was finishing his bath, He had taken a quick one, still not trusting there not to be an interruption, which was the saving factor. When the door knob jiggled as he was putting his boxers on, Harry panicked.

“Mum,” he heard one of Ginny’s brother’s yell. “The bathroom door’s stuck.”

“Try harder, Ronald,” Harry heard the matriarch answer from down the stair well. “No getting out of it. You have to bathe and go to your schooling.”

“But it’s summer,” Ron whined.

While this was happening, Harry rushed to get the rest of his clothes in hand and his invisibility cloak from the sink counter. He had the cloak halfway over him when he noticed his necklace with the galaxy ball on the other side of the sink. He snatched it just in time to pull the whole thing together.

Ron tried the knob in earnest this time, and found it locked. He heard him trying to turn it as the cloak flowed to the floor around Harry’s feet. With a deft flick, Harry unlocked the door after it went still and waited.

“But it’s locked, Mum!” Ron whined.

“It is not,” his mum answered. “All of your brothers and your sister are down at the breakfast table. No one is using the loo. Now, get in there and take your bath before you get yourself grounded.”

The knob suddenly turned, unencumbered by the lock. “I’m already grounded,” Harry heard Ron grumble as the boy moved into the bathroom.

He sucked himself to the wall, mindful of the hem of the cloak pooling at his feet. After Ron passed, Harry slipped out through the still open door. He saw Ron starting to take his pajamas off over his head, mind searing orange no less, as he slipped down the stairwell.

“And close the door before you start,” Mrs. Weasley yelled up the stairs.

Harry heard more grumbling as the door was slung shut with an almighty crack. He managed to slip into Ginny’s room without any more close calls, his heard pounding against his ribs as it was.

That left him behind her closed door with a damp head and an arm full of clothes.

Ginny was happily eating her bangers when she heard something that nearly made her panic. She saw her life flash before her eyes, as she imagined Harry being discovered and her mum storming into the kitchen, telling her that she should have known better, that Harry could never stay. She had done everything in her power, and some things that clearly stepped over the line, to keep Harry safe and with her. They had been doing good with the eating and bathing to this point. She had filched extra clothing, enough that he had a couple of changes still waiting for him.

“...All of your brothers and your sister are down at the breakfast table. No one is using the loo.” she heard her mum yell up the stairs.

All she could think was, *Harry!* She knew he was the one in the bathroom, and that he would soon be discovered. And if he were discovered, he would be sent back to his ‘family’ no matter what was the story.

She did the only thing she could she waited. When no shout of discovery came, she excused herself from the table and stole up to her room, her heart pounding and her breath ragged.

“Harry,” she whispered after she closed the door. “Are you there?”

After a moment’s pause, Harry peaked his head from under the cloak. “Is it safe?”

Ginny flung herself into his chest, wrapping her arms tightly around his invisible body, pinning his left arm to his side and his right awkwardly in the air holding the cloak off his head.

“Is it safe?” she mocked. “You’re asking me? I thought it was over.”

“N-no,” Harry stammered as he freed his right arm and returned the awkward hug. “I’m fine. I’d already drained the tub.”

“Good,” she agreed. “Oh, I’m so glad you’re safe. I thought they would find you and then you’d be forced back with your aunt and uncle.”

“What are we going to do?” Harry asked. “I can’t bathe when you’re eating breakfast, now, can I?”

“No,” Ginny agreed. “I didn’t realize, but with Ron’s tutor back from holiday, he’s going to have to eat and bathe earlier.”

“When will I bathe?” he asked.

“When I do,” she decided. “I used to bathe with Ron all the time. This way you can’t be caught.”

Not seeing any problem, Harry agreed, “If you think it’ll work.”

“Yeah,” she said. “Come on. Get dressed and I’ll ask mum if I can go to Luna’s today.”

“Really?” he asked. “Can I go?”

“Yeah, silly,” she smiled, grabbing his hand and dragging him to the closet. “Course you can.”

A quarter hour later, the couple was walking to the dirt road that serviced the Burrow and a little ways down where there was a large meadow. Luna Lovegood lived on the far side of the meadow from the Burrow, leaving them to have a pleasant walk through the tall green grass under the cloud dotted summer sky.

“Harry,” Ginny said as she looked back along the path they walked. “You can take your cloak off now.”

Harry blushed unseen under the cloak. “Sorry, I forgot it was on. I’m used to it.”

He pulled it off and folded it into a square small enough to fit in his back pocket, in this case in a pair of pants removed from some old clothes in the attic that used to belong to the twins. With two boys before Ron, the Weasleys had more than enough clothes to pass on to Ron, although he avoided the ones with obvious burn marks and off color bits from their amateur potions experiments and pranks. This left clothes still wanting in a trunk in the attic. The ghoul tended to harass any of the boys that went into its domain, but Ginny had a free reign. Apparently it liked her and didn’t want to scare her off.

Harry was amazed at how small the huge cloth would fold, the first time he folded it. The fabric was finer than the finest silk but many times as strong. He had carelessly snagged the cloak on a protruding nail in a stairwell board and managed to not rip the sturdy fabric in the slightest. He

could fit it in his pocket and it would still unfurl and cover him, and Ginny if necessary, in a heartbeat without creases or wrinkles.

"That's alright," she said. "I just wanted to see you while we walked in the sun, for once. And to hold your hand without the cloak in the way."

Harry blushed with a smile on his face. "Okay."

The meadow was so broad that the crossing took them a good amount of time at their leisurely pace. Harry was glad to be out from under the cloak, but felt secure in the necklace around his neck for keeping him somewhat protected from discovery and a trip back to Little Whinging.

When they reached the far side of the meadow, Harry silently donned the cloak once again and retook Ginny's hand with the thin fabric captured between.

They made it to Luna's house in a trice. Harry admired the unusual house with a smile. The house was in a classic country style with exposed brick exterior and a steep slate roof. Moss was working its way down from the eaves while vines worked their way up from the foundation, giving a comfortable old look. The house sat on a calm, unmarked country road at the start of some more serious forested hills. A short distance from the low brick wall that peaked through the flowering overgrowth was a heavy stone monument, set with mortar, holding an ancient spring fed trough.

A placard read: *Feel welcome to quench yourself, dry soul. The spring water is pure and clear. The trough old and worn. A life's journey aided, their goal fulfilled.*

A small pipe sticking from the rock face supplied a steady stream of clear, cool water to the trough, which in turn spilled to a small, rock lined pond, not much more than a permanent puddle, that fed the heather and bracken. The vegetation gave way to large, full bushes and lush ground covers as they neared the house. The simple brick house was inviting in a way that the Dursleys would never have appreciated, making Harry love it all the more in an instant.

Ginny let them through the wooden gate in the low wall without hesitation and approached the door. Harry stood closely behind her shoulder as she knocked on the old panel door. He heard movement inside the house before it opened without preamble. On the other side was a girl, about Ginny's age, with long, dirty blond hair and silvery eyes.

"Hello, Ginny," the girl said with a happy, dreamy lilt.

As Ginny returned her greeting, Luna's eyes shifted steadily to a point over Ginny's right shoulder, looking directly into Harry's eyes, despite him being under the invisibility cloak.

"Hello, Harry Potter," she said definitely.

"How...?" Ginny started.

Before Luna could answer the unasked question, a blond man appeared behind her. He rested his hands on her shoulder and smiled at the visitors, both of them, which unnerved Harry a bit.

"Hello, Ginevra," he greeted. "Who is your friend?"

"How did you see him?" she asked.

"Is this thing even working?" Harry asked at the same time. He stuck his hand out of the cloak to see if there was a difference, although he couldn't see one way or the other if there was, due to his eyes being under the cloak in the first place.

"Oh, do come in," Luna invited. "Daddy will explain it all."

As she entered the home, both Luna and her father kept their eyes glued to Harry, despite his lack of presence in the visual spectrum. They entered the comfortable living room, which housed a surprising amount of furniture, enough to seat many guests, as well as the hosts themselves. They seated themselves at a love seat across from their hosts silently.

The silence stretched on as both Mr. Lovegood and Luna seemed to stare at the space where Harry sat under the invisibility cloak. Harry was uncomfortable, but couldn't break the silence himself, out of nervousness. The journey to Ginny's friend's house had started so care free and sunny, now he didn't know what to think.

Ginny cleared her throat for a hint of sound in the room and then giggled nervously when nothing else followed.

"Oh," Ginny suddenly said. "Introductions...Harry, would you take your cloak off?" When he silently complied with her request, she added, "Oh, and your necklace."

When Harry removed the galaxy, both of the Lovegoods blinked and shook their heads, as if clearing them.

"Oh, quite good," Mr. Lovegood exclaimed. "Thank you for removing your charm. Taps into a family trait or two, I'm afraid."

With a puzzled look, Ginny proceeded to introduce Harry, "Luna, Mr. Lovegood, this is my friend, Harry Potter. Harry this is my friend Luna and her father Lukasha Lovegood."

"Hi," Luna responded.

"Hello, Harry," Lukasha smiled. "It is nice to meet you. Sorry for our responses earlier. You just happened to stumble on two of the blood traits of my

line. We can see through concealing magic, including things like your cloak and more natural magical camouflage that some magic creatures use. And second, diversionary magic, such as the Notice-Me-Not charms on your necklace, draw our attention instead of the reverse. Yours is so strong that it is nearly entrancing. I apologize for our rudeness, however.”

“N-not your fault,” Harry said. “I guess it's understandable now.”

Ginny relaxed and smiled, the tension gone. “Harry, remember when you did that thing where I could look at you? Maybe it would work for them.”

“Maybe,” Harry replied. “If you don't mind, sir, I'm going to try to stop the necklace. Could you put your hand on my shoulder?”

“Worth a try,” the man said with enthusiasm.

He stood in front of Harry with his hands on the boy's shoulders while the necklace was replaced. Immediately Lukasha Lovegood's eyes snapped back to Harry's face. With a bit of concentration, Harry managed to include the man with greater ease than the first had taken. The process was repeated with Luna, thankfully with the same results.

“Now,” Mr. Lovegood continued once they were all seated once again. “How did Harry Potter come to be traveling with Ginevra Weasley under and invisibility cloak and heavy diversionary charms?”

“Um, well,” Harry started. “I...my relatives aren't nice. After I met Ginny, she invited me to live with her where it's safer. Somehow, I guess I wished myself to Ginny, and there I was.”

“Accidental apparition,” Mr. Lovegood proclaimed. “And the hiding?”

“Harry can't go back,” Ginny said. “If he's found, he'll have to go back.”

“Okay,” he responded. “I think your parents might surprise you, but I won't tell them if you're not causing any harm.”

“Thank you,” Harry said.

“Harry, you should go talk to the Goblins at Gringotts, however,” Mr. Lovegood advised. “The Potters have been a fine, upstanding family for longer than they have been Potters. I'm sure there is something set up for your upbringing.”

“They won't force me to go back?” Harry asked.

“They helped you with the cloak and necklace, Harry,” Ginny reasoned.

“Okay,” Harry agreed.

“Very good,” Mr. Lovegood clapped. “I'll just floo your mum, Ginny, and see if she would allow you to come along this morning.”

He rose and approached the fireplace. Harry was confused and momentarily frightened as the man stuck his head in the fire, which had turned green, but that abated when he didn't seem to come to any harm. Neither Harry nor Ginny could hear any of the conversation, so just waited patiently.

Shortly, Mr. Lovegood returned from the fire and requested that Ginny floo home for a moment before they embark. Harry was fascinated this time as Ginny disappeared in the green flame, leaving a calm fire and the echoes of her call of, “The Burrow.”

When Ginny emerged once again from the green fire, she was clutching a small leather sack and had changed her clothes.

“Mum insisted I change into my new dress,” Ginny said by way of explanation.

“Okay,” Mr. Lovegood said, ushering them all toward the fireplace. “Ginny, why don't you go first to the Alley and Harry will follow. Luna and I will be along after.”

Ginny agreed and showed Harry the Floo Pot where she had retrieved some powder for herself. She told him about the ash and when to take a breath and what to say. She told him everything her father had told her when she made her first solo floo trip. She then vanished in green flame to greet him on the other side.

“Your turn, Harry,” Mr. Lovegood prodded. “Think you got it?”

“Yes, sir,” Harry said with more confidence than he had.

He did as he was shown, tossing the powder in the yellow fire, watching the fire turn green, taking a breath, stepping in and calling out clearly, “Diagon Alley.”

In Little Whinging, a doorbell sounded, interrupting the activities of one of the households. Each house looked the same, within a small margin; pale tan bricks, thin gray mortar lines, dark shingle roofs. So to distinguish this house from the hundreds of others, the sign at the end of the street said 'Privet Drive' and the number on the door was a simple '4'.

The door was opened by a slender woman, tall in stature, with a craning neck and long face.

"Hello Constable," Petunia greeted, keeping up appearances. "Please come in."

"Thank you, ma'am," the officer said, entering the house. "I'll try not to keep you."

"Please, have a seat," she entreated. "Would you care for tea?"

"No, thank you, I won't be long," he said, his creased black uniform flawless. In one hand he held a bound notepad and in the other his peaked cap from his uniform. "We have checked into your nephew's disappearance. We have found no traces. No neighbor saw him leave." As he was looking down at his notepad, he failed to see the look of unhappiness that showed on Petunia's face when she realized that the bobbies had went around asking about her family's business. "And he hasn't showed up at any hospitals or shelters. At this point the active investigation is over and he has been listed on the missing children's database. He will be looked out for throughout Surrey. If he is registered at any hospital or orphanage in England, you will be notified and he will be returned safely."

"Thank you," she replied evenly.

"There is no reason to worry, ma'am," the constable tried to reassure her, mistaking her tightly controlled voice for that of hidden concern. "There is no evidence of foul play. I am sure that he will be returned to you in as good of condition as he departed. Fear not."

The constable stood and departed with little show of emotion from Mrs. Dursley. This convinced him that the woman was just holding it together while a stranger was in her house. There was nothing further he could do to comfort her in his professional capacity. He drove away in his panda car, hoping for something to bring the case back to active for some hope for the woman.

With the constable gone, Petunia dialed a familiar number on her phone.

"Vernon Dursley, please," she paused as the receptionist asked a question. "Yes, this is his wife."

After a dizzying journey, with many unfamiliar grates flashing by before he decided that he would close his eyes, and remove his glasses before the next trip. Harry stumbled from what he hoped was the right fireplace. He was unsure how he was supposed to tell what was right, after listening to Mr. Lovegood's instruction to not step out of the wrong one.

Ginny caught him with a hug before she started to brush the soot from his clothes. The brush was surprisingly effective at removing the black carbon powder, an effect he had no trouble attributing to magic.

"You made it," she stated. "How was your first floo trip?"

Harry looked around the dingy pub that looked to be out of another century, but dismissed the thought, as he hadn't experienced pubs in the past, beyond hearing Vernon's rants and the few glimpses on the telly. The attendance in the pub was light, just a couple of patrons that were either sloshed or tired from a hard night's work and had yet found a bed.

"Strange," he said. As he did, Luna joined them without falling to the floor herself. Swiftly behind her was her father.

"Harry?" Ginny asked. "Would you carry this in your pocket? This dress doesn't have any."

She held up the small leather pouch which contained her allowance, one of the things she had to floo home for. The sack contained four individual sliver sickles and twenty-nine individual bronze knuts. Harry accepted the sack and shoved it in his front pocket were it would be safe. He could tell it was her coin purse, but didn't pry.

Mr. Lovegood ushered them through the pub without anyone recognizing Harry for who he was. Harry didn't know better, but Ginny was glad, as she didn't have Harry put his cloak back on. They emerged in a brick walled spot that seemed forgotten at the corner of four buildings. It was empty save for a couple of metal dustbins.

"That, Harry," Mr. Lovegood told him, "was The Leaky Cauldron, the primary entrance to Diagon Alley, our next destination. In case you ever meet him, the proprietor of the pub and inn is a man named Tom, but be cautious, the actual owner of the business is the Ministry of Magic and you can't trust what they put in the food. If it just says something like 'meat pie', you'll never know what kind of meat. Stick to things that are identifiable, like roast beef or chicken sandwiches. I once uncovered a plot by the Minister to rid himself of the Goblins by having them murdered and baked into the meat pies. Of course, we all know that wouldn't work. The Goblins are too ferocious to be taken like that."

"Wow," Harry said, not disbelieving anything, but not believing it whole either.

"Now, come along," he said, tapping the right brick with his wand. Harry had not seen too many wands to date, just a couple in the Weasley house while he was under his cloak, and the use of them still amazed Harry. Where Mr. Lovegood tapped, the brick started to wiggle, which caused the other bricks to wiggle in a wave as they retreated to form a large arched entry to a cobbled street that Harry would have never guessed to see behind a pub. "Welcome to Diagon Alley. Luna, keep an eye out for nargles and other creatures. You know how they like to visit busy magical places."

"Of course, daddy," Luna responded.

Harry didn't even question the thought of a creature he hadn't heard of before. He had read of many new and fascinating creatures in the books Ginny brought him to read, what was one more? Ginny, however, smiled, finally understanding that Luna and her father could really be seeing things others didn't.

They walked down the center of the alley along the cobbled streets. Harry's neck swiveled left and right in constant motion. He would need ten more eyes around his head to see all of the interesting things. The pet shop had hairy snakes and winged lizards in the window, as well as a bat hanging from their sign. Harry thought it to be part of the sign until it scratched its belly with

a claw sticking from its wing joint. There was a shop selling cauldrons; black, gold, silver and clear. There were shops with things in bottles and shops with books, ones with clothes and ones with brooms. There were cafes, a couple of pubs and an ice cream parlor.

"Up ahead," Mr. Lovegood said. "We'll go to Gringotts first."

In front of them, looming over the fork in the alley was a stark white building with stairs leading up to a huge set of burnished bronze doors, the likes of which Harry had never seen before. Dressed in a scarlet and gold uniform, a single creature stood outside, giving each person that approached an eagle eye, no doubt looking for trouble.

"That's a goblin, Harry," Ginny whispered to him. Harry accepted the information, but didn't do anything more than give a polite wave to the creature, for which he received no response.

Harry ascended the steps and pushed on the doors, expecting to find them unmovable, but was surprised when they moved smoothly under his strength. This led them to a small entry and another set of doors, these silver with an engraving that Harry couldn't read before he was ushered into the bank proper by his companions. There he saw more goblins working behind counters on tall chairs. There were ones counting gold, silver and bronze coins by the stack, there were goblins peering through complex looking eye pieces at large jewels, and there were others making entries in huge ledger books. Only a smattering of humans could be seen, mostly customers, but some workers behind the line of counters.

The four stood patiently at a line on the marble floor, waiting for an unoccupied goblin teller. Mr. Lovegood crossed his arms and held a content smile on his face, while the children all looked at anything and everything with curiosity.

"May I help you?" a goblin asked as he closed the ledger book he was working in. The four walked up to the counter the goblin was using.

"Go ahead, Harry," Mr. Lovegood urged. "You're the only one that can conduct your business."

Harry stepped forward nervously. "Um, hello."

"How can I help you?" the goblin asked, strain on his patience evident in his voice.

"Um...I wrote to Mr. Pickrake and he wrote back with some help for me. Can I speak to him?" Harry asked.

"PICKRAKE is a very busy goblin," the teller said. "What is your name?"

"Harry Potter, sir," he responded.

"Very well," the goblin said, showing no interest. "I will send a note to Pickrake, and he can decide if you are worth his time."

"Thank you," Harry responded.

"You can wait over there," the goblin dismissed. "A messenger will find you with an answer."

Harry and his companions stepped back and waited where indicated. Mr. Lovegood settled on the bench and proceeded to distract them with stories of searching for fantastic creatures, his wife's work for a small spell research firm and Luna's accomplishments in art. Luna was blushing furiously at his praising description of a bird she had sculpted from clay that proceeded to come to life and fly away. At her age of five at the time, she was inconsolable. Harry quite agreed with her logic when she said she decided to not sculpt another until she could figure out how to keep her art from flying away.

A half hour later, a wait made easy by Mr. Lovegood's stories, a goblin approached.

"Is one of you Mr. Potter?" the goblin asked.

Harry nodded and said, "I am."

"PICKRAKE will see you now," he said, turning and walking toward a hallway at the far end of the main banking room.

Harry looked at the assembled group and started to follow the goblin. Behind him, he heard Mr. Lovegood say, "We'll stay here and wait for you, Harry."

Harry turned around to see that he and Luna hadn't moved. Ginny, however, looked torn.

"Will you come with me, Ginny," Harry asked.

"Sure," she agreed. She was relieved to go with him. She had helped him in his dealings to date and felt a certain personal investment in his welfare.

They were directed into a large, stately office to find a more wrinkly goblin sitting behind a grand wood desk.

"Hello, Mr. Potter, I presume," he stepped around the desk and shook Harry's hand. "And this must be Miss Weasley. Please sit and we will get

down to business.”

Harry and Ginny sat in neighboring leather chairs facing the goblin. They were both nervous and unsure, to the extent that they sought comfort in each other. Their hands met between the chairs and clasp as if natural.

“What business brought you here today?” Pickrake asked.

“We were visiting Mr. Lovegood and he said that we should make arrangements since I am not at my aunt and uncle's anymore,” Harry said. “Is there something given to the people I stay with?”

“There is, indeed, provisions in your parent's will that provide for your care,” the goblin said. “Unfortunately, these provisions were not enacted due to circumstances surrounding your placement in the Dursley household. As they were forbidden to be your guardians, they could not be compensated in the slightest.”

“What do you mean?” Ginny asked.

“The will specified two homes that you could be raised in and an executor to provide for your wellbeing should the both of those not be possible,” Pickrake replied. “As they were not possible, the executor, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, chose a home for you of his own council. But, as he ignored your mother's wishes that you not go to her sister, payments could not be arranged to them and Gringotts would not recognize them as having any power of attorney over your assets. Gringotts informed Lord Dumbledore of their inability to receive any compensation for housing you, but the decision was his alone.”

“Professor Dumbledore put him there?” Ginny asked.

“His reasons are his own,” the goblin said. “But, yes it was his duty to make that decision.”

“Can the Weasleys receive the money since I'm there?” Harry asked.

“That would be the fairest of choices,” the goblin agreed. “How much would you like them to be compensated? Whether they know you are there or not, costs for your care are involved.”

“Well,” Harry considered. “Uncle Vernon once said that it cost a hundred to keep me. Would that be okay?”

Harry remembered that night in vivid detail, but not happily. He frowned. Vernon had been ranting about the cost of the ungrateful whelp, Harry, and the rising costs in Great Britain. Harry was glad, at the time, to be sequestered to his cupboard early that night. Vernon had figured the costs based on the food eaten at Number Four and the monthly energy bills to keep the house running. He had divided the totals up and come up with a figure of a hundred pounds a month for Harry's existence, a total that both Vernon and Petunia thought conservative.

“Yes, Mr. Potter,” Pickrake said. “I will make arrangements for a hundred galleons to be transferred to the vault of Arthur and Molly Weasley on the first of each month, starting in two weeks. Is this acceptable?”

Harry looked to Ginny for confirmation, which she gave freely. She had five sickles total with her today, which was a lot for her, so the amount of a hundred galleons was inconceivable. But if his uncle said that it cost that much to keep him, she would agree with the arrangement.

“Yes, sir,” Harry agreed.

“I have your vault keys here,” Pickrake said. “You may have them. I had to make a copy of one that was still in the possession of the executor of your parent's will. I suspected that he would have discovered your relocation if I had recalled it from his person, so I chose to make another.”

“Thank you,” Harry said, accepting the ring of keys.

“You may wish to visit the Potter vault before you leave,” he offered. “You may find some interesting and useful items for you there.”

“Thanks, I would like to,” Harry said again. “Can I ask a question?”

The goblin nodded clearly and Harry continued with the question, “You sent me the Potter rings. Am I Lord Potter?”

“Not yet,” the goblin said. “Not until you are an adult or married, which would make yourself and your wife legally adults. You may find a book on wizarding traditions and marriages in the vault that would give you all the information you need.”

“Is that why you sent the rings?” Ginny asked.

“I was unsure when in the future they would be required,” Pickrake replied. “So I sent them in the case they were needed. Now, if you like, I will have someone take you to the Potter Family vault.”

“Thank you,” both Harry and Ginny said, taking their leave. A goblin waited outside the office that would take them and the Lovegoods to the vault.

Behind closed doors, Pickrake basked in the memory of the two polite human children. He could well see that they would cause quite a stir in their own time. A stir was good from his point of view, as long as it was not one of evil origins, and the departing couple could never be described as evil. Ah, the entertainment found by the outside observer.

Family Inseparable

Chapter 4

Family Inseparable: Chapter 4

By: Musings of Apathy

The cart descended at speeds and angles that Harry thought Dudley would appreciate, assuming the whale didn't just break the cart altogether. Dudley had been taken to roller coasters, while Harry had been left with Mr. Figg and her house that smelled of cabbage soup. Dudley had told stories of the fantastic rides often enough in Harry's presence to make him wonder if the Gringotts carts were comparable. Harry lost track of the turns the cart made; left, right, right, left, left, center. He realized the big difference between the bank carts and Dudley's tracked fun was the changes in direction possible in the tunnels under London. At seemingly random intervals, the cave they were traveling in would branch and they would go straight or quickly turn to another branch. Harry had no idea how far they had traveled beneath the surface, but he knew they weren't at the bottom yet. Harry craned to look over the side when they entered a large cavern, getting a brief glimpse of another speeding cart on lower tracks before Lukasha pulled him back by his collar.

"The goblin said to keep your hands in the cart," he told Harry. "If your hands have to stay inside, so does your head."

Harry settled back next to Ginny, still looking to the left and right down the branching caves. Another difference between the Gringotts carts and Dudley's roller coasters; roller coasters had restraints to keep you in the seat.

A glimpse of flame down one cave could be the promised dragons or just a torch lit cavern. A strange thing to Harry; he hadn't seen an electric light since he joined Ginny, but at least in the Weasley and Lovegood house, candles were used...in Gringotts, naked flame was the order of the day.

They finally came to a halt at a ledge sticking from the rock wall. The goblin bid Harry to exit the cart, which he did while looking around for any sort of door or passage that would explain their stop. The ledge surface was flat and smooth, in contrast to the rough Limestone of the walls and caves.

An explanation was given when the goblin said, "Step up to the wall."

Shrugging to Ginny, who was still in the cart with the Lovegoods, Harry stepped forward. He took another and another step until his nose almost touched the rock wall. He felt silly standing there with his face in a rock wall until it wasn't.

Rapidly, the face of the rock receded, moving away from him. The vertigo caused by the wall moving and him not rocked him on his feet for a moment. He looked to his feet to regain his bearings. When he looked up, the wall was proceeding down a hallway made of the same smooth stone as the floor, lit by open flame torches in wrought iron fixtures. The ceiling was ethereal, made of sparkling white arched stone that reflected the light from the torches to illuminate the entire space. The hallway ended where the receding stone melted into the far wall.

Revealed was a pair of smooth iron doors, emblazoned with a shield, its face colored with deep red and stark white quadrants and a border of rich gold. Standing on the shield were three golden, mythical animals; centered, a dragon with its wings spread facing the same way as the shield; facing it from one side was a winged lion with hints of bronze in its mane opposing a bird with its wings spread high above its head, its feathers wild with hints of copper that gave the bird a fire like quality.

Harry could only exclaim, "Wow!"

"That is your family vault, Mr. Potter," the goblin informed him.

Harry removed his vault keys and looked for a keyhole. "Which key is it?" he asked.

"No key," the goblin said. "Place your hand in the middle of your family crest. If it is your rightful vault, the doors will allow you entrance."

"If not?" Harry asked, worried.

"Your next of kin will be informed," he was told.

Luckily for Harry, he didn't understand what the goblin meant and so wasn't nearly as worried as he could have been. He walked up to the door and reached his hand up high. He was short, owing to his youth, shorter than the adult frame the door was made for, which forced him to reach for the center of the crest. When his hand rested on the point where the four fields, red and white, came together, he felt a sharp prick, causing his hand to recoil. There was a patch of blood left on the shield, strongly obvious on the stark white, but nearly invisible against the deep red. He looked at his hand but saw no wound.

"In just a moment, sir," the goblin said from his side.

When the door started to make sounds, a deep mechanical grumbling, Harry was comforted when the goblin didn't move from beside him. The doors' seam grew from a faint line to a dark crevasse as the doors slowly swung away from them.

"Congratulations, Mr. Potter," the goblin said, "the vault has accepted your lineage."

"Wasn't that already established?" Harry asked. "What would have happened if it hadn't?"

"The original family vault doors hold magic of their own," the goblin said, "that is beyond the control of Gringotts. Your signature and blood allowed

us to access it to fulfill your request before, but without that, we have no control of its access. Money alone can be deposited by Gringotts Goblins without that much.”

“Can my friends come with me?” Harry asked.

“Certainly, Mr. Potter,” the goblin said. “However, you may only remove familial objects from the vault, not money, unset jewels or unformed metals. The same goes for your party.”

Harry thanked the goblin and rushed back to the cart to bring Ginny and the Lovegoods with him back to the vault. They eagerly came with him, when asked, but they found the goblin standing in front of the, once again, closed doors.

“Why did you close it?” Harry asked.

“I didn't,” the goblin claimed. “When none with the correct lineage is at or in the vault, the doors seal until opened again.”

“Blasted,” Harry exclaimed. “I have to do that again?”

At the goblin's nod, Harry stepped forward and reluctantly reached his hand to the shield, wincing at the repeat sampling of his blood. The spot left behind solicited matching exclamations of, “Eewww,” from the girls.

“What should we be looking for?” Mr. Lovegood asked.

“I don't know,” Harry answered. “Mr. Pickrake mentioned a book about wizards and marriage. That might help.”

“What are you thinking, Harry,” Luna asked as her father moved off to the shelves crammed with books along the far wall.

“I don't know,” Harry said. “I just don't want Ginny and me to be separated.”

Beside him, Ginny nodded and clutched his hand.

“Okay,” Luna responded. “I'm sure daddy and I can find something that'll help.”

“Thanks,” Harry said to her retreating back.

“Let's go search the magic things over there,” Ginny pointed. With a shrug, Harry agreed. They proceeded to a series of display cabinets extending the long length of one wall, directly opposite the raw valuables that the goblin said were forbidden from the family vault at that time. They looked at jewelry and gadgets, but most were just plain things, unenchanted. Some of the things that had slips of parchment beside them that were hand lettered to give a history for the object, along with an explanation of anything that would make the item special. There was a ruby necklace that was charmed so the person the woman was talking to could not lie. According to the history written on the card, the piece was charmed by a female matriarch three hundred years ago that married a rising politician. According to the notes, it had been used many times since then.

There were many other pieces of jewelry that had specific histories, although most had no special enchantments like the ruby necklace. Harry was intrigued by a pocket watch with many hands and the nine planets but no numbers, but he couldn't think of a use for it for the life of him. Ginny looked at the many engagement rings given to Potter brides over the many years, row upon row of them, some garish, but most were simply elegant.

Ten feet down the displays they found the wands of Harry's ancestors that had been stored over many hundreds of years, if the parchment labels were to be believed. Never bashful, and having handled a wand before, Ginny hinged the display open, pushing the stays in place to prevent the lid from falling closed.

“Oh, Harry,” she called. “Look at these. Aren't they beautiful?”

Harry came over to look at the wands. He hadn't seen many before, but they all looked like variations on the same sort of design; a shaft of wood, tapered from a wavy grip at one end to a round tip on the other. Some were dark, some light. Some were unremarkably brown, some were fiery, with a maroon finish that seemed feet deep when the light caught them the right way.

“Well...I,” Harry said, “I don't know anything about those. You wan'na see if one is right for you?,” he offered.

“Well...I,” she stammered. “I'm not supposed to...we're not supposed to...Dad said that we can't buy a wand until we turn eleven.”

“So we won't buy one,” Harry reasoned with a sly grin. “Go ahead. Let's try.”

Swayed by his argument, and the fact that she really did want a wand of her own, despite her age, Ginny reached out to feel a random wand, a wonderful cobalt blue one with a defined grain to the wood. At the same time, Harry's hand hovered hesitantly over a nearly white wand with worm wood workings.

By the time the group left the vault, the Lovegoods had several books that they thought interesting. A few on wizarding customs and traditions, a set on wizarding law, at least as it existed in the early nineteenth century, and two soft leather bound books detailing family rituals, including those to create personal bonds such as marriage. Lukasha held a book that his daughter had found amongst the many books in the vault library that seemed to be an interesting treatment on the subject of lesser known mythical creatures of the magical world. Though it was outdated by more than five centuries, the information might still be interesting, at least to some. Harry readily agreed to loan him the hand written and illustrated book.

“What did you two find?” Mr. Lovegood asked.

Harry and Ginny each held up a leather satchel, both evidently holding several things. “We found some jewelery and some clocks and some wands.,” Ginny volunteered.

“There was a watch that didn't have any numbers,” Harry said. “It had a bunch of hands and things that looked like the planet pictures that Mrs. Crobople showed us last year in school.”

“Interesting things, those type of watches,” Lukasha told the children. “They tend to only be owned by people who do a lot of things, and can only be understood by their owners. I tried to read the Headmaster's watch once,” he stared off unseeingly to the far side of the vault tunnel that they were standing in. “I couldn't understand it in the least. The hands didn't move and Mars was moving in front of Jupiter at the time, whatever that would have meant to Professor Dumbledore.”

His thoughts were interrupted when the goblin joined them, the cave containing the vault doors vanished, leaving them on the original ledge sticking from the stone wall.

“Would you care to go to your trust fund vault, Mr. Potter?” the goblin asked.

Harry removed his ring of keys from his pocket and looked at them, as if one would jump out and declare itself and its use. “Which one is it?” Harry asked.

The goblin took the keys from his client and quickly flipped to one of the keys, which looked remarkably like the rest, and handed the mess back by the shaft of the key in question. Harry accepted it back and agreed that he should go there for some of his available money. When asked, neither Mr. Lovegood nor Luna had any further business with the bank. The stop at his trust fund vault was interesting to Harry and Ginny, but not shocking in the least after seeing the Family vault earlier. Even with Ginny's memories of her parent's vault, Harry's seemed rich, but not obscenely so. The ride was between the two vaults was more interesting than the contents of the second vault.

The ride from the vaults back to the lobby of the bank offered something that the roller coasters Dudley enjoyed had never offered, acceleration back up the hill. The cart rocketed from a stand still and retraced the tracks to the starting point, in a small room that transitioned from the rough stone of the tunnels to the polished stone of the bank proper.

“Is there anything else that anyone needs to do?” Mr. Lovegood asked.

Harry started to shake his head in answer, but was interrupted with Ginny's shy questioning answer, “Can...can we go to Borry's?”

Mr. Lovegood considered the children before him. “Certainly,” he answered after contemplation. “What do you need?”

“Harry needs some clothes,” Ginny replied. “We've been borrowing clothes from my brothers.”

“I'm...” Harry started in a protesting voice, but was stopped when Ginny laid her hand on his. She clasp his hand in hers, threading their fingers together.

“Harry...” she whispered to him alone. “You need this.”

Harry nodded and started off slowly, Ginny following in his wake, still holding his hand tightly. The emotions that Harry seemed to have escaped Luna and her father, but they were more than willing to follow along and help however they could. Harry told them that his relatives were 'not nice' but that didn't tell them what he had gone through, and Mr. Lovegood, at least, understood that there was more depth to Harry's experiences than he could know. They followed Harry and Ginny from the bank.

Harry had never been clothes shopping before. He had, occasionally, been allowed to accompany his Aunt when she took his cousin to by the gigantic clothes that would be Harry's after they were either too small for the beached whale or too worn. His trip to the clothing store with Ginny and the Lovegoods was different than his previous experiences. First, Petunia Dursley would never have contemplated buying anything less than new and name brand clothing. No matter what her obese son did after he received the clothes, the neighborhood would know that he got the best. By the time Harry received the clothing, they were little better than stitched together cloth with scuffs, fades and tears. Brand didn't matter when the clothes you wore were many sizes too big. Brand didn't matter when those that were to see to your care, gave you no care. But, Harry had been at the mercy of what his Aunt and Uncle would give. Second, Petunia Dursley would never have bought clothes that were any older than perfectly new. Where Harry was led was where Ginny was used to going for clothes, either for herself, or the occasions when her brothers received clothing that had not been passed from their older siblings. A store where clothes that had already been worn by other witches and wizards were repaired, with magic, restored to the best of the proprietors ability, and resold to those that were looking to save what money they could for other purposes. No, Harry had never been clothes shopping before.

Harry's first experience in clothes shopping was brief, buying the things he would need for a concealed life at the Burrow, and little else. Harry had never worn underclothes before he appeared in Ginny's bedroom. He had always had to make due with clothes from his cousin, a year or so out of date, and his cousin's waistline was more than twice his own, making briefs or boxers useless. Pants he could modify; old belts with many more holes punched or a length of rope would decrease the waist to fit as well as possible. Shirts would simply hang to mid thigh, their neck holes nearly spanning Harry's shoulders and their armpits hanging nearly to his elbows. Harry made do as well as possible; cinching his belt, rolling his pant legs and rolling up his sleeves.

So, when Ginny told him that they needed to go to a different clothier for the unmentionables, Harry told her that he preferred not. He grabbed a couple pairs of pajama pants for night and a good supply of t-shirts that would fit him better than any of her brothers' shirts. Finished at the used

clothier's, the group left the magical shopping sector with just one more stop stop.

"Wow!" Harry exclaimed, caramel dribbling from the corner of his mouth. "I never knew there were so many kinds of ice cream! Or that they were so good!"

Harry and Ginny shared a truly monster sized ice cream sundae with the Lovegoods, complete with every topping Harry had ever heard his cousin whine for and many that had never crossed anyone's mind in the first place. Under the rainbow of toppings, however, was the true variety; more than a hundred small scoops of ice cream, each just enough for a single spoon full, and each a different flavor.

"All that," Mr. Fortescue agreed, "with treacle, raspberry, blueberry, snozberry, twenty kinds of chocolate, two dozen kinds of fruit, more berries than you can name, and the most popular flavor is still the same as in the Muggle world," the ice cream man testified, "vanilla."

"I had vanilla once," Harry proclaimed with unbridled excitement. "Mrs. Figg said that it was for my birthday, but it wasn't my birthday. My birthday is on July 31st but I had to tend the lawn on that day. It was really good."

"Well, now," Mr. Fortescue laughed, "you've had six different kinds of vanilla."

"But," Ginny said. "How can there be six kinds of vanilla? I thought vanilla was supposed to be plain."

The ice cream master turned just a bit more serious before he answered, but his eyes still held a twinkle of amusement. "Never mistake subtle for plain. Vanilla is a subtle flavor, but complex, if you take your time to understand what it really is."

"Yes, sir," both Harry and Ginny agreed, but missing the underlying message.

"Thank you for the ice cream, Mr. Fortescue," Harry genuinely smiled. The others at the table echoed his delight and thanks for the treat of gargantuan proportions.

"You are very welcome, Mr. Potter," the man said.

They had entered the dessert establishment as the last stop before catching the public floo home and found the proprietor to be both kind and outgoing. He had treated them like royalty, eagerly producing the table filling treat after Harry had run up and down the display and peering at the frozen variety to be had and commented on how impossible it would be to try each and every single of the man's flavors. Mr. Lovegood knew that this was not unusual for the man, as he treated each of his customers with the same respect, just as his father had before him. In fact, the Fortescues had been supplying the magical world with the frozen desert as early as the 18th century from the same storefront on Diagon Alley.

"I am glad to see you with such wonderful families as the Lovegoods and the Weasleys," Florean declared.

"Thank you," Mr. Lovegood said as he put some sickles on the table to settle the bill as he and the children got up to leave the store. However, Harry, Ginny and Luna all ran up to thank the ice cream man personally, with an added hug from the girls that put a large smile on the middle aged man's face.

Harry and Ginny returned to the Burrow with Harry well concealed once again. They had spent the entire trip to the Alley walking around with the Lovegoods without worrying about concealing Harry's existence. For Harry, being seen really had mixed feelings for Harry, he found. He had gotten used to only being seen by Ginny, and only then when he chose to remove the cloak, usually at Ginny's request, and the invisibility was starting to be like a security blanket for him. It made him feel secure that he was safe, even when he was in the room with other people, because they didn't know he was there and, therefore, couldn't hurt him. However, it was nice to walk around like everything was normal, for the first time in his memory.

Harry's shopping was under the cloak with him, concealed. For all the world to see, Ginny was alone as she approached the Burrow. Without warning to Harry, Ginny suddenly stopped and pulled him by his invisible hand behind a mud shed beside the house.

"Harry," she said. "Where are we going to put your clothes?"

"My clothes?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Ginny confirmed. "Mum puts my clothes away all the time. What's she going to think when there are boy clothes in my dresser?"

Harry thought for a second, becoming more and more alarmed by the conclusions that he was reaching by the second. "In your dresser!" he exclaimed in a hushed voice. "What'll your mum think when she sees my clothes in the hamper?"

"You bought the same sort as my brothers'. She won't be able to tell the difference," she proclaimed, sure of herself.

"But Gin," Harry argued, "If she puts all of the clothes away, where'll she put mine?"

"Oh, um..." Ginny paused. She thought hard to try to remedy the problem. "Oh! Mum's been wanting to teach me to do the laundry. She can teach me and then we can do them without her knowing. You can sneak them back up to our room under your cloak."

Harry thought about that for a second. His mood steadily brightened as he realized that the plan could actually work and he would continue to be safe at the Burrow, as long as no one knew he was there, besides the Lovegoods of course. "It'll work," Harry declared. But then the beginning of their conversation came back to him. "But you're right," he agreed with her belatedly. "Where will we keep my clothes in your room?"

It only took a moment of thought before Ginny had the answer. "Of course!" Ginny exclaimed, not keeping her voice low enough for their hiding spot. Harry shushed her and looked around the corner. No one was around to hear her enthusiastic response. "We can use the chest that my Gramms

sent me last year," Ginny told him in a hushed voice. "She showed me when we visited her. It's got a second, secret inside that only she knew about. Mum'll never know. You could use that and it'd never be seen. I'll ask mum to bring it from the attic."

"Are you sure that this is okay?" Harry asked.

"Sure," Ginny answered. "Up until a couple of years ago I bathed with Ron every day. Then Mum said that I was old enough to bathe myself so she didn't bathe us together."

"But..." Harry said nervously. "I'm not your brother...and you're a girl."

"Yeah, but I've seen boys before," she said. "I have six brothers...and I did change you out of your bloody clothes that first night."

Harry's arguments fizzled similarly after that. Under his cloak, Ginny led him to the bath room with her night clothes bundled under their arms; Ginny's old standard and Harry's 'new' ones.

By now Harry was used to skipping the squeaky step and the rough edge that would catch his cloak and try to pull it off. The bathroom door would squeak if it was opened too slowly and the latch would not close properly unless the handle was turned just so. Many of the things Harry had learned to conceal himself in this comforting family home didn't so much apply now, what with Ginny pulling him along and the entire family expecting those sounds and quirks while Ginny was bathing. But a whole new group of peculiarities presented themselves. Towels were not a problem, as the whole family kept their own in their room; the bathroom was simply too small to allow seven towels to hang dry every day. One difference in particular was that Harry was used to erasing any sign that the bath had been used, but with Ginny bathing, he would have to only clean up to her normal standards. Harry's baths were normally completed as quickly as he could manage to get himself clean, but Ginny, he noticed, took her sweet time, most likely bathing until the unenchanted tub cooled. Ginny had told him that in some houses the tub was enchanted to keep that water at the same temperature, but theirs was just the standard cast iron. She didn't offer an explanation, but Harry suspected that no one needed to encourage anyone to take a longer bath than the forty-five minutes that the cooling water would allow, especially in a family of nine.

Eventually they did find themselves stripped before the cast iron claw foot tub, exploring each other with their eyes. At their age the differences were few, besides the obvious.

"But, how do you pee?" Harry asked after he had embarrassed himself by pointing out what was missing on his best friend.

"I sit on the loo and pee," Ginny told him. "Why, don't you?"

"No," Harry replied. "Boys stand, usually."

Somehow, either through Ginny's parents' rules of propriety about what was appropriate for young boys and men, or by sheer dumb luck, when it came to knowledge of how the opposite sex performs private functions, Ginny was on nearly equal footing with Harry. Their discussion led to demonstrations on both of their parts, although mainly to blame on their actual need, not to satisfy the other's curiosity.

The bath that started awkward, turned to something fun for Harry and Ginny. Once he got over his embarrassment and shyness, he managed to have an experience closer to what close siblings everywhere had experienced while growing up. Ginny taught him to play in the tub. From the family's perspective, she was just a little bit more playful in the bath that evening. By the end of the bath, Harry and Ginny were comfortable with each other, even in such a state of undress. Future baths would see a small repeat of his shyness, but he got over it.

With Harry kitted out in clothing that was newer than anything he had ever gotten from his cousin, and plenty of reading material to occupy the couple's time, the weeks were slipping by and the first of the month was approaching. On the weekend Harry and Ginny arrived at the door to the Lovegood residence and were greeted by a tall, wise looking woman that Ginny introduced Harry to as Labibah Lovegood. She seemed unsettled at first, but after hearing how Harry's aunt and uncle were 'not nice', she stared into Harry's green eyes for a long minute. Harry was worried that she would not allow him to stay concealed at the Burrow and he would have to go back to live with the Dursleys. In his head, he saw the many times that he was treated as less than a human, the times he was treated as just a slave, but when the images shifted to how he was punished over the years, he forced himself to not think about such hard things. He had a good life now with Ginny. He didn't have to worry about going back to the Dursleys again. Mrs. Lovegood embraced Harry with a tear in her eye and promised that she wouldn't break his confidence. She promised to help him in any way she could.

While her husband was a bit eccentric, Labibah Lovegood was a very sensible and logical woman. She knew that the responsible, adult thing to do would be to report Harry's abuse and have him taken in by a foster family. But the problem was the duration of Harry's abuse, in her mind. She knew that he had endured more than seven years of abuse at the hands of his relatives which had either gone unnoticed or ignored, both of which didn't bode well for his future. The position Harry managed to find himself in; the invisible ward of a good family, was a better one than his previous one.

Harry's birthday was celebrated quietly between Harry, Ginny, Luna, Lukasha and Labibah Lovegood. For the first time in his memory, Harry was on the receiving end of a cake, this one three layers of chocolate, and ate all that he was served with appreciation. Harry received a hand made bracelet from Luna and several books from her parents. Ginny's present was one that she had worked with her mum on, without her mum knowing the purpose. Ginny had given Harry a pair of fuzzy slippers that her mum had showed her how to sew together with her mum's wand. Without questioning why, Bill had placed a permanent silencing spell on the slippers to complete the present. Harry was happier than he could ever remember being before.

Financial life for Arthur and Molly Weasley was difficult. The entire year they saved up as much as possible so they could do one thing, provide for their children's educations. Throughout the year, they provided for their family's needs; food on the table, clothes on their backs, a roof over their

heads, homemade presents for Christmas and birthdays, and love all around. All so they could send their kids to boarding school. Their life was dictated by their responsibilities.

On the first of August, the Goblins placed a hundred gold galleons into the Weasley vault amongst the saved stacks of coins, as arranged, when the month of August rolled around new. Minutes later, another goblin, this one tasked with distributing payroll to Ministry employees, rolled by in another cart. Into the Weasley vault he deposited coins, but instead of a small stack of gold coins, he distributed Arthur Weasley's monthly salary from the Ministry, for his position as head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, in silver sickles and bronze knuts.

Arthur's three-hundred and seven galleon, six sickle and eleven knut salary worked out to more than five thousand silver sickles in neat stacks filling the small vault, easily concealing the stack of gold and, in fact, pushing nearly half of the gold off the back of the raised stone dais, into the shallow gutter that was formed around the edge of the vault. The gold would rest there until it was noticed and straightened.

The money sat there in the stagnant air for just a day before another goblin opened the sealed vault once again. This goblin's area of responsibility was transfers. He transferred money from one vault to another each morning; a payment arranged by contract, or by the hand written drafts of some of the more wealthy families. Making a tick on his list, he removed eight-hundred forty-one sickles to be transferred to another vault, one of a family that owned great stretches of land throughout England and Wales, including the portion of Ottery St. Catchpole that the Burrow rested on. The receiving vault had been dormant for quite a while, the only activity was the monthly addition of coins from many sources as contract payments were fulfilled.

The following day, another cart came by. This time to remove the tuition cost for the following school year, which was to start in twenty nine days for Charlie, Percy, Fred and George Weasley. This goblin, with more vaults to visit today than he would have liked, spotted the top of a stack of gold in the vault filled mostly with silver sickles. With a one hundred forty three galleon tuition for each child enrolled in Hogwarts, that made for a lot of silver to be counted. He instead reached around all of the silver to collect as many of the gold coins as was there, even reaching into the gutter for what had fallen. These one hundred galleons reduced the silver sickles he had to count by one thousand seven hundred, and saved him several minutes, for, even though goblins were amongst the fastest at counting coinage in the world, it still took time.

A Tuesday morning would make a good day for a trip into the forest with their new sack of wands, or so thought Ginny. She was dragging Harry by his invisible hand through the still inhabited kitchen to the back door. She had prepared a basket with enough food for the two, which failed to raise any flags for any of the rest of the family, due to the tendency of any meal being more than enough for any unexpected or invisible guests. So, really, Ginny packing enough for two wasn't momentous. However, before she could exit with Harry, her mum had something to say about it.

"Ginny," Molly stopped her daughter. "I received a letter from Grandmum Prewett this morning. When was the last time you owled her?"

"Um..." Ginny temporized. "I don't remember?" she answered quietly. In truth, she hadn't remembered to write her Grandmum since Harry had come to stay, but she was not about to tell her mum anything about *that*.

"You know that your Grandmum is getting on in age and she likes to hear from her only granddaughter regularly," Mrs. Weasley scolded Ginny mildly. "She may be...eccentric...but all she asks is that you keep in touch with her. And it wouldn't hurt for some of you boys to write to her while she is around, too," she said to her sons that were still in the kitchen.

She received a chorus of apathetic, 'yes, *mum*'s from her sons, but didn't pursue the subject because her mum only really paid much attention to Ginny. In her old age the woman had become...strange. She had her fancies, and not much else got through.

"I'll go get parchment and write her this morning," Ginny told her mum. "I'll be right back," she said to the air, to the curiosity of her family, which lasted all of two seconds. She returned shortly and left the kitchen with a 'goodbye' to her family and an invisible friend in tow. Once outside, they turned to the path between the garden and the house that led to the orchard, amongst other destinations.

They were nearly even with the orchard before Harry asked, "Where're we going?"

"We're going into the forest so that we can see what we can do with all of these wands we brought from your vault," she told him.

"Wow," Harry expressed his approval. "What'll we learn?"

"I'll show you some of the things mum taught me," Ginny answered. "It's mostly cleaning spells, but it's something. OH!" Ginny exclaimed, "I can teach you that spell Bill taught me."

"That bat one?" Harry asked. "I don't know," he said hesitantly. "I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't," she told him with confidence. "Now, let me write Grandmum before we get started, or my mum will have it out for me."

Harry watched as Ginny sat at the base of a trunk well within the stand of trees that they had entered while they were talking. She had a small roll of the strange, rough paper that was so universally used in the new world that Harry found himself in. She placed a box in front of her that was made of some dark wood, from which she removed a bottle of ink and a feather quill. This intrigued Harry because he had not seen her write a letter in the whole time he had stayed in her bedroom, so the mechanisms of the activity were new for him.

Soon, though, the interest of her writing a letter was lost on him and he looked around for something else to do. If he had a book, that would have occupied his time, but he hadn't brought any. With little else to do, and knowing that it was what they were there for in the first place, Harry removed the satchel of wands that they removed from his vault. Carefully wrapped around each wand was the parchment that held the explanation and history of each wand; Elphias Potter this and Darius Wilkins that.

He spread the empty cloth satchel smoothly out on the ground and proceeded to lay the wands on the cloth parallel, their tips pointing away from

him. One by one, he lifted them, to see if they were more than just wood to him. Surprisingly, he found that a few were. He could feel a warmth and, sometimes, a tingle when he handled the wands in his right hand. When he tried the same with his left, he found that just one gave a clear response and only one other even seemed alive to that hand.

"What'cha doin'?" he heard Ginny ask.

He looked up and met her eyes. She was done with the letter and he could see that she was pulling a metal object, a candle and a bar of wax from the box that she had gotten the ink from and had been using as a writing surface.

"Seeing if any of these feel any different," Harry responded.

"And?" she asked.

"A couple with my left and about half with my right," he said. "Finished? What're those for?" he indicated the candle and other things she had removed from the box.

"To seal the parchment," she waved her hand at the roll of rough paper by her knee.

He watched as she lit the candle and melted the wax in the flame. Once satisfied with her efforts, she smeared on a dollop of wax to hold the parchment roll shut and then quickly pressed the metal stamper into the hot wax. It left the impression of a looping 'W' in the wax that Harry recognized from the letters that he had received from her.

After she had cleaned up her writing instruments, she declared that it was time to try out the wands, much like Harry had been doing, but also with some of the spells that she had come across that she could remember.

Being a house of nine, there was always someone near whatever another was doing, or so it seemed. Sometimes it was out of curiosity, but mostly it was through coincidence. Even inside the tree line of a corpse of trees near the Burrow, Ginny and her companion were not immune to the intrusion. Luckily, the late summer had dried the various tree fall detritus that littered the ground enough to render the childish sneakiness moot as the ground crunched under the intruder's feet. They had heard his approach from far off, and Harry was silent and beneath his cloak long before the youngest of the Weasley boys was in view.

"Come out from behind there, Ron," Ginny called into the forest.

"What are you doing?" Ron called back as he came around the trunk of a large tree. "Where'd you get that?" indicating the wand in Ginny's hand.

"It's none of your business," Ginny told her brother. "But, since you asked, Bill gave it to me," she lied. She bolstered the lie with the truth, however, "And he taught me a great hex, too!"

"Yeah, right!" Ron teased. "You're too young to be doing magic. You couldn't get thing to work for anything but digging for bogies!"

"Yeah, you'll see!" she said. "*Bates Mocus*!" she enchanted. A burst of magic shot out from her wand and struck true, right in Ron's face. The effects were rapid; his nose started to run worse than any illness had ever caused before and the thick bogies formed into wings and clawed feet which attacked his face.

"Ahhhh!" Ron ran around screaming and trying to claw the creatures from his face. Ginny let him suffer like that for a bit before she did the other thing Bill had taught her; to cancel it. Without her intervention the hex would wear off on its own, but not for a couple of minutes.

Ron came up from the ground as soon as the hex was canceled and faced off against his sister.

"You're not supposed to be using magic!" Ron screamed.

"Bill taught me," Ginny told him. "What're you going to do?"

In truth she was a bit nervous, despite her newfound confidence. What she didn't want to happen was for her brother to run to her mum. Her mum and dad were not fools. Enough evidence and she'd stand no chance of keeping Harry concealed.

"Nothing," Ron said. "Not going to run to mum," he continued. He knew as well as any other that that wasn't tolerated amongst the siblings. Problems were to be taken care of without using their parents as weapons. "Though I might warn the twins," he said under his breath.

Ginny pretended not to have heard her brother's last comment. She turned away from him and raised the wand again. She started to go through some of the cleaning charms that he mum had taught her with her own wand. Her mum had only intended to let her daughter use her wand, not any others, until Ginny started school and was given her own wand. That way Molly could supervise the training and use until appropriate.

"So..." Ron said, not deterred. "What're you doing?"

"Practicing some spells that mum taught me," she told him without turning back to him.

All through this Harry was doing what he was good at, with all of his practice; standing out of the way, quiet and invisible. Harry's slower movements made him naturally quieter than his unknowing house mate.

"What!?!!" Ron exclaimed. "Mum's teaching you spells and not me? Is she teaching the twins, too?"

No, Ronald," she insisted with annoyance. "But if you wanted to learn housekeeping spells, I'm sure that she would teach you, too."

"What?" Ron asked skeptically. "Like sweeping and laundry?"

"Yeah," Ginny told him. "Like laundry, but sweeping can be done with a broom. Your room could use it, too."

"Like manually...without magic?" Ron asked, displaying horror. "It's bad enough when mum forces me to do that stuff. I'm not going to do it voluntarily."

"Whatever," Ginny dismissed. "Some of us want to keep our room clean."

"Fine," Ron scoffed. "Goody-two-shoes."

This just angered Ginny more, causing her to pack up her things quickly so she could storm off.

"I'm going to owl Grandmum!" she called back to justify her departure. "Wouldn't hurt you to do the same!"

"Whatever!" Ron called back. "At least I don't have to!"

Ginny stormed away without further comment. It did get to her occasionally, how she was treated differently, being the only girl in the family. She was the only one that had to owl their Grandmum every week. She wasn't allowed to climb trees when her brothers were, mostly because she didn't want to run back into the house for a pair of jeans. And, occasionally, she was expected to act the pretty little girl for wizarding gatherings. She liked the pretty princess play imaginings, but she didn't like that her parents played any part in the traditional pureblood wizarding traditions of getting all of the children and their parents together. The children could play, but the girls were always in the lace and ruffles, which made them unable to play any of the games that were fun at home. She knew that some families struck deals at these gatherings, but she didn't know if her parents were involved, or what kind of agreements were struck.

Harry followed her from the forest, putting his cloaked arm around her shoulder to offer her some comfort, and to, hopefully, calm her Weasley ire.

Dear Grandmum...

Marilyn Prewett knew that her lone surviving daughter found her to be dotty, at best, in her old age. She didn't mind, though. She had lived a good life and earned whatever quirks she had. She had outlived her husband, her two sons, and much of her friends from when she was younger, and all left the mortal coil before they should have, their lives cut short by men and women who had no moral compass to guide them.

In her old age, she had distinct thoughts on what was best. Her and her husband had their children late in life, even for magical couples, and so she was truly of a different era than her lone surviving offspring. In her day, the magical world regularly arranged marriages for beneficial reasons; the preservation of a line, the joining of two great houses. And some not so worthy reasons, such as to settle a debt or to break an inappropriate relationship before it could develop. Her own marriage was arranged, of sorts. She had grown up with her husband, Charles, and had grown as the closest of friends. The arrangement was enough to change the close friends to lifelong companions and eventually loving parents. However, her efforts to provide the same opportunity for her daughter was for naught, as Molly's only male friends growing up and through schooling was her twin brothers.

And then, as the times started to turn their darkest, turning their country to a war that would take Marilyn's husband and only sons, Molly was just completing her schooling. The countryside was in a terror at the killings and defilement that was taking place throughout England. Just as it seemed that Molly would find no love, thus giving her father direction in his search for a husband for his daughter, Molly turned up with a ring and a magical bond with a man that they would have never considered, a man who would never have attended, much less fit into a gathering that the Prewetts frequented. The man was just from a different crust, one her daughter would have never been around growing up, their families just too different.

Marilyn Prewett had a different feeling about her little granddaughter. She had a feeling the girl would find her future husband early in life. She got those; feelings. Sometimes she just knew. Like how she just knew when someone was telling the whole truth, to her face or in a letter. The letter she received from her daughter, Molly, had told of what was happening in that ramshackle, loving house they called the Burrow, and, despite her and her husband's initial misgivings, they were happy for their daughter to have found a family and home she loves, even if it was not with someone they would have paired her with. Her feelings, deep down she knew that everything Molly told her in the letter was the complete truth.

Then she read the letter from her granddaughter, and the same feeling was not there. From reading the girl's careful scrawl, Marilyn knew that Ginevra was holding something back and something big. What confused her was that Molly Weasley was usually completely informed about everything in that house of hers, but in this case, the veracity of the letters spoke for themselves. Whatever it was that Ginny was holding back, her mother didn't know about it either.

The next day Ginny and Harry were back in the forest, where they could talk face-to-face without worrying about anyone entering Ginny's room. Harry spent nearly all of his time in the Burrow under the cloak and wearing the galaxy around his neck, so that he was used to not really being where ever he was. Still, being seen as well as heard was so much the nicer when a person has gone without for such periods.

"What do you think?" Harry asked. "Should we?"

"Well, dad said that you'd be family if we were married," Ginny said.

"I'm not sure that he specifically meant me," Harry smiled broadly, "but, okay."

And mum and dad said that a marriage bond was based on love," Ginny continued.

"And the books from my vault agreed," Harry said.

"Harry," Ginny asked nervously, "do you love me?"

Harry didn't answer with a thoughtless yes. He paused to make sure that his answer was the truth. "Yes, I do, um," Harry wrung his hands, looking down into his lap. "Do you love me?"

"Oh, yes I do," Ginny answered. "You're my best friend and everything more. I love you."

"Do you think we should?" Harry asked again.

"Yes," she said. "But Luna says that you have to ask me."

"Ask you?" Harry returned curiously.

"To marry me, silly!"

Harry blinked and then smiled. He rose from his position on his bum to where he had one knee on the ground and the opposing foot flat on the ground in front of him. He had seen this in the Muggle telly shows that he was allowed to watch if he were good and quiet at his Aunt and Uncle's. He fished in his pocket for the Potter rings and removed the smaller of the two. With the ring flat in his right hand, he took Ginny's left with his own and cleared his throat, just as he had seen on the telly.

"Ginevra Molly Weasley," he started, trying to keep a serious demeanor despite Ginny's giggles. "Will you marry me?"

Ginny sat up straight, but didn't remove her hand from his. "Yes, Harry James Potter," she said. "I will."

Harry smiled. Another step down.

Blinking, he frowned. He had just one ring, and it was the Lady Potter ring, not one for engagements. "Bugger," Harry said. "I only have the one ring. What are we going to do for an engagement ring, if this is the one that shows you to be Lady Potter?"

Ginny immediately saw his point, without being disappointed that there was a snag in their plans. She simply pulled the book Lukasha retrieved for them from Harry's Family vault from her shoulder bag and opened to the section of marriage rituals. They had determined when they first opened the book that each culture seemed to have contributed at least one traditional ritual to the magical world, and several were in the book.

"Hmm," she hummed as she read through the available rituals. "This one doesn't require another person."

"Another person?" Harry asked. "I thought ~~we~~ we were getting married, not us and another person."

"Some of the rituals have another person involved," Ginny told him from the book, "someone of authority to officiate and cast a bonding spell on the new husband and wife."

"Oh," he responded. "But you say that one doesn't require anyone?"

"No," she said. "But it does need a length of rope."

"A length of rope," he asked with incredulity. "I thought the bonding was magical, not that someone was supposed to just tie us together."

Ginny giggled at Harry immediate assumption. "No, silly," she said. "The rope is to wrap our hands together during the ritual, not to tie us together."

"Okay," Harry said. He looked around almost comically, finding no rope around them. "No rope here. Could it be something else? Maybe some vine or a bit of a willow tree or something?"

Ginny leaned her head over the particular passage in the book and reread it again. Finding nothing to disprove the question, she nodded her acceptance of his plan. On this, Harry jumped up and ran off deeper into the small wood, hoping to find something to fit the bill.

The wood offered little at first to remedy Harry's need, until he came out of the trees to a grassy glen with flowers of all varieties and lush grasses that was only interrupted by thin trails leading in random directions. Harry followed the trails through the grass, although he could have easily forged his own path through the short overgrowth.

In the center of the glen was a venerable, old tree with gnarled, rough bark and a sparse crop, high up, of leaves and few blossoms at the extent of each branch. The tree was twisted and turned from its collection of roots where they reached from the ground to the tip of the highest branch where it proudly displayed a clump of leaves around a single blossom. At the base of the tree was a large rock with roots wrapped tightly round, and from under the rock came a spring of clear water that flowed slowly down a rocky stream bed and into a deep pond that supported all manner of local wildlife.

One of the first things the spring fed, after the tree, was a beautiful plant that dug its roots into the lush, moist soil beside the rock and shot its vines up the tree's trunk to hang like drapery from one of the outstretching branches.

Harry made his way, carefully, to the old tree and around to the branch that supported the flowering vine. He brushed his hand over the healthy plant, having no idea what kind it was, only admiring the silver-blue flowers whose seven petals seemed almost paper-like in texture. The center of the

flower was graced by a thick stand of yellow shoots, stamens, clumped together, with just the outside layer flaring wide, creating a dish. He coaxed one of the vines from the supporting branch and severed it with a nod of thanks to the plant and glen, using the only tool at his disposal, his thumb nail.

When he returned to Ginny, vine in hand, she had prepared a spot for them on a patch of green grass with a goblet from the kitchen sitting just in front of her knees. Harry wondered about the goblet, but trusted in Ginny's knowledge of the ceremony.

"Here, Ginny," he offered the length of vine. "Will this work?"

Ginny looked up and took the vine from his hand. To Harry's satisfaction, a huge smile appeared on her face as she held the vine.

"Oh, beautiful," she said, appreciating the flower blossoms the size of her open hand and the deep green leaves that were speckled in yellow. The vine itself was small but sturdy and would wrap around their joined hands easily without being bent and forced. "It'll be perfect."

When Harry was kneeling opposite her and the vine and goblet were prepared and between them, Ginny handed Harry the book so he could see the traditional words that they would have to speak and what they would have to do. Harry handed the book back, which Ginny placed, open, to the side. He reached across the expanse between them and took her right hand in his.

He recited from memory, "I, Harry James Potter, do offer the binding of my love, my heart and my soul to Ginevra Molly Weasley, with no caveat in voice, mind or heart."

After his lines, Harry took the vine from the blanket between them and draped it over their joined hands, an equal amount hanging over each side of their hands.

She responded, "I, Ginevra Molly Weasley, do accept the binding of Harry James Potter with no reservation and do offer the binding of my love, my heart and my soul in return, with no caveat in voice, mind or heart."

When she accepted his binding, Ginny grabbed one end of the vine and wrapped it several times around their joined hands and up her wrist.

He continued, "I, Harry James Potter, do accept the binding of Ginevra Molly Weasley with no reservation."

With his acceptance of Ginny's offer, he took the other free end of the vine and did the same, wrapping it several times around their joined hands and up his own wrist.

Ginny then led by grasping the goblet full of pure water and lifting it to Harry's lips, "So mote it be."

Harry took a sip of the cool, pure water from the goblet and could feel the tingling throughout his body. He accepted the offered goblet from Ginny and lifted it to her lips, tilting it for her to drink, "So mote it be."

Ginny also felt the tingling with her acceptance of the clear water from the goblet. For a second they both glowed ethereally. The glow traveled from their centers and down their extremities. When it traveled down their left arms, it just dissipated. Down their right arms, it reached their joined hands and binding vine. The vine glowed brightly for a moment, and, as it faded, their joined hands took on the glow. The glow of their hands seemed to absorb back into them, sending another tingle back up their arms. The glow that reached their feet shot directly into the ground, causing the grass and foliage to glow momentarily before it, too, faded.

"Wow," Harry said.

"Yeah," Ginny answered. "Wow."

"That was..." he continued. "We got to do that again."

"Yeah," Ginny agreed. "But not today. I'm tired."

"Yeah."

The ring that started the whole mess lay forgotten, momentarily, with its partner in Harry's pocket.

Ginny and Harry dragged themselves back to the Burrow, Harry once again quite invisible. Upon entering the kitchen, they were greeted with the sight of lunch and her mum waiting for her daughter.

"Hello, Ginny dear," Molly greeted. "Go wash up and you can have your lunch."

Ginny managed a smile for her mum, but that was about all she could manage. "Can I take lunch in my room, mum?" Ginny asked. "I'm really tired."

"Oh, dear," Molly said as she rushed forward to check her baby's temperature in the fashion of mother's everywhere; with a hand to her forehead. "You don't seem to be running a fever, but you are a bit flushed. Let me see your hands."

Mrs. Weasley took her daughter's hands and checked their color. "Doesn't seem to be any circulation problems. You must have just tuckered yourself out."

She was just about to release Ginny's hands when she saw something on her wrist that was not there before. "Ginny, did you draw this?"

“Hmm?” Ginny responded. She looked at her wrist, as did Harry from under his cloak, and saw a faint, colorful marking that resembled the vine that they had used, which was now in the bag, over her shoulder. Even the leaves and flowers were well represented in a complete circle around her wrist. Harry looked at his own right wrist and saw an identical marking that wasn't there before. Ginny struggled to contain her surprise and lied, “yes, mum, I put it there.”

“Well, if this is supposed to be a hand fasting mark, they are usually done with a rope or braid, not a flower, but it's beautiful anyway,” Molly praised her. She went on to tease, “And if this is a hand fasting mark, where, pray tell, is your husband?”

“He's invisible,” Ginny said truthfully.

“I see,” Molly responded with as much belief as she could convey in her voice, even if she knew it was just her daughter's imagination. “Well, dish yourself up a tray and take it to your room and get some rest. Do still wash up before you eat, though. And you received a letter from your grandmum as well.”

Mrs. Weasley took a tray from the cupboard and put a large and a small plate on it along with a glass for her pumpkin juice and a small decanter, good for three or four glasses, which she filled with pumpkin juice from the cold cupboard. Onto the edge of the tray she placed the sealed envelope from her mother.

“Here you go,” Mrs. Weasley handed the tray to her daughter. “Dish up and you may take it to your room. Be careful with the tray. Don't move too fast.”

Ginny accepted the tray and dished up all of their favorite lunch foods. Harry followed her silently from the room as they ascended the stairs to her room slowly.

Once they were cleaned and situated behind her closed door, she opened the envelope and started to read as they ate. The letter almost caused her to spray the juice in her mouth all over Harry in surprise.

Dear Ginevra,

While I appreciate your letter to me, I realize that you are not telling your Grandmum the truth when you related what had been happening in your life since your last letter. And since I also received a letter from your mum telling me the same things and what she was telling me was the truth, to her knowledge, I know that she is unaware of whatever you have been up to that you failed to say in your letter. If it is something that you cannot share with your mum, that is one thing, but you will, in the least, share it with me. If it is appropriate, I will agree to keep your confidence on the matter, but if it is dangerous, your mum must know.

I expect an answer as soon as your family owl is able. Given his age, I will expect an answer no later than Friday. I love you Ginevra and I hope that you will trust me.

Love,

Grandmum Prewett

Family Inseparable

Chapter 5

Family Inseparable: Chapter 5

By: Musings of Apathy

With a mouth full of sandwich, Harry asked, “What’s up Ginny?”

At Ginny’s lack of answer, Harry swallowed what he had in his mouth and put the sandwich down. “Ginny?” he prompted. “You alright?”

Ginny had gone pale behind her freckles. Harry really started to worry what could be wrong in a letter from her grandmum. “Ginny?”

“She knows!” Ginny whispered.

“What?” Harry asked. “What are you...”

“Grandmum knows something’s up,” Ginny expanded. “She knows I lied.”

“Okay, Ginny,” Harry said to her as he sat beside her and gathered her in his arms. Ginny let him hug her, but still held the letter in both hands in front of her face. “It’s going to be fine. What does she know?”

“We have to tell her,” Ginny said with certainty. “She knows whenever we lie. We have to tell her.”

“It’ll be alright, Ginny,” he said. “Just tell me what she knows and we’ll sort it out.”

“She...” Ginny replied as she reread the short letter. “She knows that something is going on and that mum doesn’t know. She wants me to trust her.”

“Well...” Harry responded. “We’re married now. We’re family. Could it hurt if they knew? Is your grandmum going to tell them?”

“I don’t know,” Ginny told him. “I don’t think so. She says that she won’t tell if my secret isn’t dangerous or anything.”

“Then...” Harry began.

“But they can’t know yet,” Ginny told him, a little wild eyed. “They won’t understand.”

“You wanna go visit Luna and her parents?” Harry asked. “See if they can help? Some advice or something?”

“Yeah,” Ginny said, momentarily subdued. “Oh, but, we can’t! I told mum how terribly tired I was. She’ll check and see if I’m resting.”

“And she certainly would be suspicious if you suddenly wanted to go see Luna,” Harry finished her thought.

“Yeah.”

“Well, can we wait to write her ‘till tomorrow?” Harry asked, trying to reason through Ginny’s blind panic.

“She said she’d be expecting an answer by Friday,” Ginny answered. “That means that I have to post it with Errol by dinner tomorrow for it to be to Grandmum in time.”

“Then we can at least visit with Luna and her Father tomorrow,” Harry reasoned. “For now, let’s rest.”

Their nap over, the couple, newly vowed, set about to have a bath before dinner, where, of course, Ginny would eat with her family and her new husband would wait for a more private time. It wasn’t anything normal for newlyweds, but Harry and Ginny didn’t know enough better to worry about it.

With glee, Ginny poured a bit of the bubble bath that she had left over from a Christmas gift from her eldest brother. A bit was all that was needed, as the bath filled with water and foamy bubbles. They both undressed and sank into the bath, their clothes piled on top of a stool with the cloak draped over so that neither it nor the clothes themselves would be touching the floor if or when water managed to slosh over the rim of the claw foot tub. All that was left visible was the very tips of each stool leg.

With a giggle and a smile, Ginny splashed Harry with the foamy water. He laughed and returned the favor. Soon, the whole bath situation had devolved into a short splashing war, the bare kids sending spray after spray of water, when, in truth, nothing could happen to make them any more soaked than they currently were.

“Ginny,” they heard from outside the door. “Are you playing in there?”

Ginny was quiet for a moment before calling back, “Sorry, mum.”

“Alohomora ”

They both heard a click from the door and the knob being turned. Quickly, Harry ducked his head below the foam, his nose and mouth sticking above the water and his fuzzy, glassless vision only taking in the underside of the white foam layer of bubbles.

“Mum!” Ginny said, sitting up in the bath to give Harry room under the water line, as her mum entered the bathroom. “What are you doing? I’m taking a bath!”

“And making a mess, I see,” her mum chided her. Molly bustled in with her hands full of bathroom products. “I’ve got some more soap and some hair potion. You should wash your hair, dear, while your in there.”

Molly walked over to her daughter in the tub and handed her a new bottle of Sacharissa Tugwood’s Original Fabulous Hair Elixir. “And don’t make too much of a mess. You’ll have to clean up after yourself, young lady.”

“Yes, mum,” Ginny agreed as her mum finished replenishing the bathroom supplies and exited the loo. She waited a couple of breaths after she heard her mum spell the door latch back to locked before she raised her husband up by his shoulders. “It’s safe. She left,” Ginny told him.

“Good,” Harry said as he squinted to see her. “She didn’t see our clothes?” he asked.

Ginny pointed to the place where the stool legs disappeared under the invisibility cloak. They were both glad that they didn’t have to explain that sight.

“Here,” Harry said, reaching for the bottle of shampoo, “I’ll do your hair and then you can do me.” He squeezed some out onto his hand and moved to rub it into her hair, but she stopped him before he could.

“What are you doing, Harry?” she asked.

“I was going to shampoo your hair,” Harry told her.

“But that’s not how you use hair elixir,” she told him. She took the bottle from him and showed him the label. “See, it says right here that you drink it and then work the lather into your hair.”

Completely confused by yet another strange thing in the magical world, Harry watched as she took a gulp of the viscous elixir from the bottle and swallowed.

The next day Harry and Ginny once again made their way across the meadow to Luna’s house. Harry, as usual, removed his cloak at the first chance once out of site of the Burrow. When they arrived, they found Lukasha and Luna in the yard, stalking the shrubbery.

“Hey, Luna,” Ginny called out.

“Shhh,” Luna shushed back. “You’ll spook them!” she whispered in a surprisingly loud voice.

“Wha...” Harry started, but stopped at Ginny’s insistence with a hand on his forearm and a shake of her head.

Mr. Lovegood was off to the side of the house, just within sight, sneaking up on what looked like an out of place, but well sculpted boxwood. Luna, however, just about had her hands on a small green and yellow leafed bush with little blue flowers. Harry and Ginny stood back, not wanting to disturb whatever plans the Lovegoods were enacting at the moment.

Lukasha looked just about ready to pounce when a clear bell sounded ten times from within the house, a sound that reminded Harry of the Grandfather clock in Mrs. Figg’s house. Harry looked down at his watch, a beat up one that Harry had rescued from Dudley’s second bedroom which had no chance of fitting his cousin’s pudgy wrist. If he read his watch right, the time was not ten o’clock, but eleven forty-three, and, as he hadn’t had any difficulty when they taught how to read a clock in school, he didn’t doubt his assessment of the time.

On the tenth ring, both Lukasha and Luna straightened up from their sneaky crouched positions and turned to face their visitors.

“Hello,” Mr. Lovegood greeted. “How are you this lovely day?”

“Um...” Harry started eloquently. “Fine. How are you, sir? Sorry for scaring your...the, um...scaring them away, sir.”

“Nonsense, dear boy,” he dismissed. “You did no such thing. The hunt is over after the strike of ten, after all.”

“But it’s...” Harry started, looking at his watch, but trailed off when he reconsidered. He’d just have to trust that he would be happier not knowing all of the mysteries of the father and daughter.

The young couple followed the Lovegoods into the house and happily sat down with them for tea and a platter of sandwiches. Harry was amazed at what could be accomplished with a few waves of the wand, at least as Lukasha Lovegood demonstrated with ease. A tea pot in the drainer filled with water from the cast brass sink fixture. After the water in the pot was brought to steam, without even being placed on the stove, Mr. Lovegood spooned five or six good heaping teaspoons of loose tea leaves from a colorful tin. Meanwhile, sandwiches assembled themselves from ingredients around the kitchen that were prepared expeditiously with knives and utensils seemingly of their own volition. The sandwiches came to rest on a platter which was followed to the table by four plates, utensils, napkins and the tea service, now sporting all of the necessary elements.

As Mr. Lovegood sat, Luna was already serving tea, asking how Harry liked it.

Ginny, seeing Harry's dazed look from watching the ballet of magic, answered for him, "Sugar and cream for both of us, please."

Quickly, Harry overcame his awe of magic, at least for that moment, and joined the conversation. Their talk ranged from the inconsequential to the strange, which was to be expected in the Lovegood household.

"...and that's why they can only be caught before the strike of ten," Mr. Lovegood said. "And so rarely at that."

"I assumed..." Harry stammered. "I thought you meant ten o'clock, but it was past half eleven. Didn't know the ten chimes meant something different."

"Why are they so hard to catch?" Ginny asked.

"Well," Mr. Lovegood answered. "Many centuries ago, they existed in great numbers throughout the isles, but their skins held many uses and great value to the trappers, so they were nearly hunted to extinction. In the beginning, the ability to turn invisible was a minor trait of very few of the breeding lines, but after a time, as there were less and less of them, the survivors were the ones that were better able to hide from the trappers and to escape. What was left by the time that they were protected were the ones that could teleport and turn invisible, amongst other protective traits. They developed great amounts of caution, and now don't reveal themselves to humans at all. Their existence, because of that, is now considered myth. Yet another species that relies on the attitude, 'if I can't see it, it's not real.'"

"Daddy," Luna asked out of the blue. "Can I get married, too?"

Harry and Ginny looked at each other in near panic. They hadn't meant for everything to happen like this. What would Mr. Lovegood do?

"No, dear," he said with a responsibility that would surprise anyone that only knew him for his eccentric views and beliefs that were published each month. "As you know, they had exigent circumstances and we both should have seen this coming. Getting married just to be married is wrong."

Ginny sat stunned. "We're..." she choked.

"We're wrong?" Harry completed her shocked thought.

Mr. Lovegood stood from the circular table and rounded it to settle on his knees between the overly young couple. "No, Ginny, Harry," he soothed. "If Luna had sought out a boy and gotten married just to be married without anything more, it would have been wrong. You two love each other, in a way, or the ritual that you used," he pointed to their tattooed wrists, "would have done nothing if you didn't already have a bond of love to reinforce. A handfasting creates a bond between two people based on a preexisting bond of love. Without the love, the handfasting would fail."

Ginny visibly took a breath. She reached out and clasped Harry's hand in hers, entwining their fingers. "You mean, you're not mad?"

"No," he assured them. "Is that what you were worried about?"

They both nodded to him. He drew them into a reassuring hug.

"Is that why you are worried?" he asked. "You're marriage?"

"My grandmum," Ginny said. "She can tell when we lie, even in a letter."

"Ah," he said. He got up from his knees and went back around to his own seat so they could talk proper. "And she has written you to tell you that she knows something is up?"

Ginny nodded.

"Well, your grandmum is a wonderful woman," he said. "She has lost a lot in this life. I met her a few times before my mother-in-law passed. They were friends, you see. I think you would be well thought to trust her."

"We..." Ginny started. "I didn't see any other way. I don't want my mum and dad to know yet."

Lukasha took a swig of his drink before giving her a smile. "That is your choice. I believe that they will surprise you, young lady, but it is still your choice."

Sensing the ease in the conversational tension, Luna asked, "If I can't have a husband, can I have a crumple horn snorkack?"

"No, dear," her father answered automatically, as if it were a common request. "As you know, we have not captured one yet, and when we do, we don't know if they will make good pets."

"If we catch one, will you reconsider?" she asked.

"If we catch one, *and* it is tame," he told her, "Your mother and I will consider it then."

"Thank you, daddy," she said as she rounded the table and hugged him in as crushing a manner as an eight year old can. "Can we go chase the blascurl nectar beetles in the the back field?"

That evening before dinner, their decision made, Ginny wrote to her grandmum and introduced her husband in letter form. She explained their meeting and friendship. She explained about Harry's arrival and her nursing him back to health. She explained what they had come to understand about family and marriage and how that led them to their current matrimonial state. She expressed how much they both enjoyed the magic of the

bonding itself and their desire to do it again. In the end, she asked that her grandmum keep it all in confidence.

Sending the letter that evening sparked an anxious waiting game for her and her husband that would last until they knew her grandmum's reaction. After dinner, she quickly sequestered herself with Harry in her room, hoping that the gig wasn't up.

"Calm down, Gin," he said, pulling her into a tight hug. "Your grandmum sounds like a great person. It'll be okay."

"But..." she argued, stopping and, instead, choosing to trust in Harry's comfort.

They whiled the rest of the evening away until a reasonable bedtime by reading. Still uncomfortable not knowing when or if one of her large family would burst through her door, Harry still spent his time under his cloak beside his wife. At bedtime, they snuggled together, the blankets covering them both from head to toe.

"There she is, Gred," Forge pointed out to his brother.

"Yes, indeed, Forge."

"Shall we?"

"We shall," Gred agreed as they made their way across the rambled garden to where they could see their little sister sitting against a tree.

Ginny had tried to not let her nervousness show, at least when around her mum, dad and siblings; around her husband, she didn't mind. They shared their nervousness in mutual support that made it alright.

She immediately knew that she hadn't been successful when her twin brothers came up to her without a prank in hand.

"Gin Gin," one said.

"Glad we found you," the other continued.

Ginny stared back and forth between their alternating phrases, trying not to laugh, but finding it hard.

"I've been thinking..."

"We've noticed..."

"That you look unsettled for some reason."

"We thought..."

"As the good and caring brothers..."

"That we no doubt are..."

"That something is bothering you..."

"And since Dearest Ickle Ronikins wouldn't have noticed..."

"Even before you used that wonderful hex on him the other day..."

"What was that anyway?"

Ginny stifled her giggle for a second to answer the boys who were trying so to act nearly serious. "Bill taught it to me," she told them. "It's the Bat Bogey Hex."

"Cor! Brilliant!"

"You'll have to show us that one!"

"Say you will!" they pleaded.

"No," she answered firmly. "Someday you'll earn a close look, though."

"You know, Gred, I think she's serious."

"You're right! Best us hope that she doesn't have a wand when the time comes."

"Anyway..."

"Back to the original topic..."

"Ronikins is too busy avoiding your wrath to worry about your current mood..."

“And the elder brothers...”

“Bilius...”

“And Charlemagne...”

“Mum's bad with names,” Ginny interrupted, “but she didn't name Charlie, Charlemagne. It's just Charles, after great-great-grandfather, or something.”

“And *Charlemagne* ...”

“Have their noses buried in books...”

“So serious lately, those two...”

“School and work and whatnot...”

“And poor...”

“Poor...”

“Percival...”

“Seems to have come down with the Pox...”

“Dragon or some sort...”

“And is therefore not coherent...”

“Seeing all kinds of wonderful things that are not there...”

“Hours of entertainment, that one...”

“Too bad that, while he's sick...”

“And on the couch where mum can keep care of him...”

“She's keeping us clear of the living room.”

“So, they've been so busy...”

“That they, our older siblings, have let our dear...”

“Only...”

“Little sister languish in whatever she is worrying about.”

“Without asking her...”

“What is wrong...”

“Or barring that...”

“What can we do to make it better?”

By the end, Ginny was laughing outright, joined silently by Harry under his cloak on the far side of the tree. The weight of waiting for her grandmum's response seemed a bit lighter after the twin's performance.

“Won't tell us, then?” Fred asked quietly after he let her laugh for a couple of minutes.

Ginny silently shook her head back and forth through her giggles.

“In that case,” George huffed. “You can at least tell us what you would like for your birthday...”

“In just two days...”

“So that we can request of dear Bilius a trip to Wonderful Wizarding London...”

“For whatever it is you desire most in this world...”

“Sky's the limit...”

“Anything you want...”

“Long as it doesn't exceed a galleon two sickles...”

“Or is larger than our floo...”

“Unless you want a pony...”

“We could see about that...”

“Long as Farmer Murphy wouldn't miss one...”

“Without much cost...”

“Save those ski masks and black gloves...”

“But we've been needing those anyway...”

“For other...”

“Similar...”

“Activities.”

Ginny was back to full tilt laughter, but was reassured deep down that her brothers really do care about her. On the other side of her, Harry was also amused, but was conscious of the bit where it was going to be his wife's birthday in two days, the eleventh. If Ginny's grandmum sent Errol back soon, he'd have to owl one of the stores in Diagon Alley for something for her. He'd love to select a present personally, but there was no way he could just go to Diagon Alley undiscovered. He was sure that there was some owl order catalogs somewhere in the living room that would be useful.

“Come on, Gin Gin,” Fred pleaded.

“Think of something,” George added.

“Anything...”

“We saved money just for you...”

“Didn't even buy that potions book we saw...”

“The one last month with all the prank worthy potions in it.”

“What do you want?” they asked together.

“Well,” she considered. “Could you see if there are any of those adventure books in the used section? You know, the ones where you pick the story?”

“Hmm,” George turned to his twin. “An adventure book.”

“Me thinks she's looking for a knight in shining armor type.”

“Me agrees. You could be right.”

“Of course, she's got the order all wrong, you know.”

“Why is that, Fred my brother?” George asked, echoing Ginny's silent question as she watched them bandy back and forth.

“Well, my brother, she seems to have given herself the mark of a handfasted woman,” he indicated, pointing to her tattooed wrist, “before she shopped for the husband.”

“You could be right, dear twin of mine,” George agreed, “but, then again, she has been distant lately...”

“And secretive enough to be after our own hearts...”

“That she could already have a suitor selected.”

They both turned to their little sister. “So, what is it?”

“Shopping for the perfect knight...”

“Or has that night already passed?”

Ginny just looked at them in confusion, and not a small amount of amusement. Sometimes she didn't completely understand the conversations of her older brothers, but at least the twins didn't hold back and talk to her like she was a baby. She thought they were referring to her marriage tattoo, thinking it a fake, but asking in their own way.

“Oh, won't talk, will you?” Fred started in an ominous voice. “Well, we'll see about that. I think it's time for some tickle interrogation!”

He started for her, thinking his twin would be right with him, as they always were for each other, but instead felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned to George with an inquiring look.

"I am afraid that, for the moment, my dear brother," George answered the look, "Little Ginevra is to be granted clemency if we are to catch Bilius in time to make the Alley on this day."

"Ah, but you are correct, my equal."

"Let us away!"

Ginny was laughing uproariously as they left, and a bit relieved that they were not going to drag the information that they didn't even know was there out of her. The two might have just been able to get her to spill the beans about her husband with the tickle torture.

"Ginny. I think they're completely cracked," Harry whispered to her. "I like 'em!" he concluded enthusiastically.

"Don't we all," she agreed.

"Mum," came a loud call from the living room, where the floo was. "We're back," said the voice that belonged to one of the twins.

"Stop making so much noise," Molly Weasley called back. "You'll disturb your brother!"

Fred and George came into the kitchen, one toting a plain white shopping sack.

"Wouldn't worry, mum," Fred answered.

"Percy's so far gone," George said.

"He probably thought we were personal representatives from the Ministry..."

"With his Order of Merlin..."

"First Class..."

"In recognition of his stellar grades and organizational skills."

"Leave your brother alone," Mrs. Weasley admonished the twins. "He's only got another day or so before the pox are burned out of his system. Leave him to heal and he'll be better for Ginny's birthday."

"Okay, mum," they agreed reluctantly.

"Did you thank Bill for taking you to the alley and seeing you into the floo back?" their mum asked.

They shared a look before they answered, "Yes, mum, we thanked him."

"Find everything?" she asked, showing motherly interest.

"Got it covered," they replied in a rather than definite way.

Harry knew from the looks on Fred and George's faces that they had not been completely successful on their shopping trip to the Alley. With a squeeze of Ginny's shoulder, he left her side and silently followed the twins up the stairs to their room. Luckily for him, they were still too young to be altogether cautious of their privacy around the house, so they didn't completely close their door when they entered. Harry simply perched himself where he could hear the twins without them knowing he was even there. His invisibility helped with that a great deal.

"Think she'll like it?" one twin asked. Harry still couldn't tell the difference.

"I think she will," the other answered.

"Bugger we couldn't get the other," the first lamented. "What was that thing, the story book?"

"Yeah," the other agreed. "But, can you imagine? Four galleons for a book?"

"It's magical."

"I don't care how magical it is," he ranted. Harry hardly had to strain with the outraged volume of their conversation. "Sure it's a magical story book, but it's still a kid's story book!"

"Maybe next time."

"Yeah, maybe."

Harry backed away from the door. Now he knew both what his wife wanted, and that her brothers hadn't gotten it for her. The hard part would be buying it in time.

It was the next morning, after their anxious waiting the entire day before, that saw the arrival of Ginny's Grandmum's return letter. Ginny could hardly sit through breakfast after it arrived, she was so anxious to open it, but there was nothing to be done. She couldn't open it in front of her family, for fear of what it would say and one of her brothers reading over her shoulder.

"What do you have there, Ginevra?" her mum asked, seeing that Ginny had received an owl during breakfast.

In her mind, Ginny cursed her luck. Her mum had suddenly taken an interest in the letter in her hand, even though Ginny had hoped that the commotion of the breakfast table would have been enough to distract the housewife. With as much confidence and nonchalance as she could muster, she held the envelope out to her mum and told her, "A letter from Grandmum, mum."

Ginny was confident that her mum would not do more than look at the outside of the envelope and would never open something addressed to her daughter. She was less confident that her mum would not ask to read the letter after Ginny had opened it. Sure enough, her mum made no move to remove the letter from Ginny's hand, much to her relief.

"Aren't you going to open it?" Molly asked.

"Not at the table, mum," she responded. "I'll read it in my room."

"I wonder why she wrote you," Mrs. Weasley pondered to herself. "She'll be here for a time tomorrow for your birthday. Hmm. Well, finish your breakfast first, dear."

Meanwhile, while the bulk of the family was eating breakfast, Percy Weasley was still camped on the couch, having been levitated from his bed in his sleep when his mum came down the stairs to cook that morning. She had experience both from her youth when her twin brothers were down sick with the Dragon Pox and when her son Bill had the same. She knew that today, the third day after the scaly spots formed on her son's face, would be the toughest. His illness would spike today before it broke and he would be showing the strongest symptoms. He'd need fluids and care. Aside from when she was taking care of breakfast for the rest of her family, she'd keep a close eye on her third child.

"Santa?" Percy called from the couch. "Is that you? You can't be Santa."

Harry had figured that, if the twin's description of the dementia was accurate, he could use the fireplace as Mr. Lovegood had told him before and make a call to the book store that he saw in Diagon Alley. Such a strange name, Flourish and Blotts, it stuck with him so he could make the call in the strange green flames. He had a stack of galleons in his hand, hoping Fred was accurate that the book cost four of them.

"You can't be Santa," Percy repeated. "Santa is supposed to be rotund and dressed in red fur. And, besides, it's not December, is it? What month is it? What is the date?"

Unsure if he should answer the redhead that was looking directly at him, despite his cloak and notice-me-not necklace, he didn't.

"You're all small and thin," Percy went on when Harry didn't answer. "So you're not Santa. Are you a fairy? Please tell me, are you a fae? You're all see through and why are you here?"

Giving up on not answering, Harry pulled the cloak from his head and folded it over his arm. "I need to make a call. Do you know how?"

Percy tried to sit up from under the heavy blankets, but found it took too much energy. "Sure," he told Harry. "The floo powder is on the mantle in the pot. You can't be a fae, you don't have any wings, I can see now. Are you an elf?"

Harry looked above the high mantle and saw a clay pot, similar to those that would hold a small plant, but couldn't reach because of the high wizarding mantle, undoubtedly so high so adults could step from the fireplace without braining themselves. He looked around from some way to reach.

Percy pointed him to a stool in front of a red leather wingback chair that had obviously seen many generations. "What's the date?"

Harry paused as he was reaching from the top of the worn stool to reach the powder pot. "Um...August tenth."

"Oh, thanks," the delirious young man offered automatically. "I don't mean a house elf. Are you a high elf? They're supposed to be able to turn invisible and have delicate bodies like yours."

"I don't have a delicate body," Harry answered back as he stepped from the stool with the pot of powder.

"Fine, lanky," Percy conceded.

Harry ignored him, which was easy with his blinking eyes and barely there cognizance.

Harry kneeled on the low hearth and stuck his hand into the pot of powder. With a half hand full thrown into the fire, the green flames told him it was correct, just as he saw at the Lovegood house on their trip to Diagon Alley. With a firm, "Flourish and Blotts," Harry bravely stuck his head in the flames.

The sensation of his head spinning, but his body not, reminded him a bit much of when his cousin had spun him around and around and then shoved him into the sandbox at school. His head spun and his vision tilted and twisted. Finally it all came to a rest as he was looking at a desk stacked with catalogs and parchment. No less than a half dozen feather quills, each more colorful and fancy than the ones he had seen the

Weasleys use, were sickening from pots on the desk and overhanging the edges. The room had several stacks of boxes, some open to reveal books of every description. Adding to the boxes were at least a dozen stacks of books, large and small, that would reach anywhere from Harry's knees, had he been standing by them, to over his head.

A second after his head emerged in green flames in the back office of the book store an elderly man entered the office calling, "Coming, coming. Malfrida, mind the counter while I handle the floo."

As the man entered the office fully and Harry could see him, he found it curious. Harry hadn't seen too many people in wizarding robes, but he had gotten used to seeing how the Weasley and Lovegood adults dressed. This man, however, was dressed in what looked like many ornate layers over a white dress shirt with a small bow tie. The man's outer layer was a common rich brown color, but underneath were blue and orange. All quite strange. Around his neck, on a silver chain, was a pair of wire rimmed reading glasses that looked to be very old.

"Hello, young man," the shopkeeper greeted Harry as he rotated the wooden rolling desk chair from the desk and took a seat facing the fireplace. "How can I help you?"

"Oh, um, hi," Harry returned. "Ginny's birthday is tomorrow and she mentioned a type of book that she wanted."

"Well, it seems you came to the right place," the man answered with a grandfatherly grin.

"Good," Harry continued. "She wants a magic adventure book, the type where you pick what happens," Harry told the man as best he could remember from what Ginny had said.

"Ah, I think I know the one's you mean," the man scratched his chin. "Starts off and lets the reader choose the names and some of what happens to the character at points. Really rather a brilliantly charmed invention, that one. A bit pricey because of it, but rather brilliant anyway. Four galleons, they are."

Harry didn't even have to consider the purchase. He already knew as much. "Okay, sounds good."

"Well then," the man bustled about his desk with a quill in hand. He turned back around with a parchment in hand. "And which one would you like? I have four of muggle knights and princesses, two of magic heros fighting to save a village or castle from the dark army and two about a desert prince saving the sultan's daughter from monsters as he returns her to her father's palace."

"Could I have the first of the knight ones?" Harry asked.

"Sure," the shopkeeper summed. "It'll be four galleons. An extra ten knuts for gift wrapping and two for owl post delivery if you want."

"Okay," Harry agreed. The shopkeep could see some movement of Harry's head, but didn't know what the boy was doing. In truth, Harry was reaching blindly for his money, first to his sack to add the necessary knuts to the four galleons that was sitting by his knee, then for the galleons themselves. Although each of the three wizarding coins were different sizes, it was little more than a guess for Harry that he had grabbed the right amount. However, when he tried to put his fist with the money through the fire to the book shop, he found himself reaching to the back of the fireplace rather than through into Flourish and Blotts. "Um...how do I pay you? My arm won't come through the fire."

"Oh, well, yes, that usually is a problem," the man said. "Just tell me who it should be addressed to and then you can pull your head back to your house. Throw another pinch of floo powder in and just stick your arm through with the money and drop them in my hand. It'll all be taken care of."

"Well, her name's Ginny and she lives at the Burrow."

On his return, Harry's luck shined through. While he was conspicuous on his hands and knees, with his head in the green flames of the fire, the Weasley family, minus Percy, went on eating their breakfast, oblivious to both the existence of another spouse in the house and his activities. He managed to end his conversation with the store manager and send his payment along the network without discovery. The shopkeeper promised delivery, by owl, the next morning, much to Harry's satisfaction.

"Mr. Elf?" Harry heard from behind him. On turning, he saw Percy once again bundled in blankets, his head facing the fireplace and his eyes slightly glassy with an out of focus look to them. It was obvious to Harry that the worst of the illness was with the poor boy that morning.

"Can you conjure me a glass of water, please?" Percy asked. "I'm so very thirsty."

Harry recalled that Percy's mum had said that Percy should drink plenty of water, but had no idea what it meant to 'conjure a glass of water'. Assuming that the boy just wanted a glass of water, Harry took a glass from the end table, filled it with the surprisingly cool water in a pitcher beside the glass and handed it to the ill boy.

"Here you go," he said.

Percy sat up a little so as to not spill the cool water down his front. He took a long drag before removing the glass from his lips.

"Thank you," Percy said with sincerity. "You...you look so young, but you can't be. You're too skilled in magic to be so young. You didn't even use a wand to conjure a glass of water."

Confused, Harry answered, "You're welcome."

Before anything else could be said or the situation could get any stranger, Harry donned his cloak and swept from view. He quickly exited back up

the stairs to Ginny's room to stow his money bag and wait for her patiently.

At the expected time, Harry heard bustling footsteps ascending the spiral stairs below. He was disappointed that the footfalls didn't sound like his wife's, as she was normally more patient and controlled as she climbed the stairway, but whomever was coming was making all the racket of an elephant with the hurry of a cheetah. When the person came to Ginny's door and burst through, Harry threw himself off the bed to the far side, hoping that he didn't make a great thump, but knowing that there was no way that whichever of Ginny's brothers had burst into their sister's room could not miss the sound of him hitting the floor.

"Harry?" Ginny called.

"Oww," Harry finally let out once he realized that it was Ginny and not one of her brothers. He had managed to hit his shoulder hard on the hard wooden floor, which was painful. Had he rolled off the other side of the bed, he would have been protected slightly by the rug covering the center of the room, but the far side of the bed was just very old, very hard bare wood flooring.

Ginny rushed around her bed to find Harry halfway coming out of his cloak. She removed what was left covering him to find him rubbing his shirt covered shoulder. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah," Harry said. "I thought it was one of your brothers coming into your room."

"Why would you think that?" she asked.

"They usually make so much noise, I have no problem hearing them coming," Harry told her. At her scowl, he quickly added, "You're usually so light on your feet, but you must have been excited. Did you get a response from your grandmum? What'd she say?"

"Thanks," Ginny said, her expression softening. "I could hardly sit through breakfast after grandmum's owl arrived. It's right here."

Ginny pulled the parchment envelope from the pocket in her dress and cracked the wax seal. They both settled on the bed to read the response.

Dear Ginny and Harry, the letter started. They both took a second to believe that this was a good omen; her grandmum acknowledging Harry with her granddaughter.

I am pleased that you have trusted me with this secret. First, knowthat I won't break your trust. Having said that, I hope you will find it in your heart soon to allowyour family into this part of your life. Family truly is a witch or wizard's greatest strength, whether you are born into them or gain them later. I recall the many good years with your grandfather's family and howthey welcomed me with open arms from the first day. I only wish you had the chance, Ginny, to meet the whole extended Prewett family, but, alas, they did not live to see your birth, for the most part.

Harry, dear, welcome to the family. I look forward to meeting you soon and seeing if my granddaughter selected well. You had better treat her right, or you will have to answer to the entire clan, that is a promise.

Dears, I will be attending the celebration on the morrowearlier than originally planned. I nowexpect to showbefore noon to take my granddaughter to lunch, or at least that is what your mum will know. Harry, I expect you to come along so that I may judge your measure.

I look forward to seeing the family tomorrow

Love,

Grandmum Prewett

After they read the letter together, Harry and Ginny just sat, stunned. It seemed that she was accepting of the news, but that seemed unsure. At least she had agreed to keep their secret.

"What does she mean," Harry asked, "'judge your measure'?"

Ginny reached past Harry to put the letter on the night stand. She sat quietly for an excruciating period while Harry waited for her response nervously.

"I..." Ginny started, but paused. "I've heard someone say that before. I think it means to see what kind of man you are."

Harry thought about that for a moment. "But I'm not even a man yet," he proclaimed. "How disappointed is she going to be when she finds that I am just a boy?"

"Harry," Ginny reassured him, "you'll be fine. She'll see the kind of person you are and it'll be fine."

"Okay," Harry reluctantly agreed. "If you say so. But I don't think the whole 'becoming a man' thing'll happen for a while yet."

The rest of the day was a bit of torture for Harry. Tomorrow he would be going to lunch with his grandmother-in-law, and his mother-in-law didn't even know that he existed yet. He and Ginny were busy most of the day with cleaning and preparing the house for Ginny's grandmum's visit, much to Molly's surprise; first that her daughter was voluntarily cleaning, and second that she seemed to get so much done for one little girl, when she was left alone. Amongst other things, they did the laundry for the whole family, easily slipping Harry's dirties in the mix and then retrieving them in the sorting. They had thought to do that so Harry would have his best for meeting Grandmum Prewett, wanting to make a good impression.

As Molly was around throughout the day at surprise moments, and they never knew when one of Ginny's brothers would show up to bug their little sister or such, Harry stayed under the invisibility cloak and they didn't talk for fear of being overheard. They were getting good at other interactions, though. Ginny seemed to be getting better at keeping track of where Harry was at any moment when he was near; from the little sounds and scuffs that he made, and the touches that they exchanged that sent as much of a message as a verbal exchange.

As Harry was pointing his wand at a hard done stain on the knee of Bill's trousers, trying to remove the stain with a spell cast through his cloak that Ginny had learned from her mum, Ron rushed into the laundry room while trying to yank his shirt over his head. The boy had been wearing the brightest, loudest orange shirt that Harry had ever seen, with a black cartoonish cannon embroidered on the left breast and a large black number '53' on the back under the name 'Stevens'.

“Ginny,” Ron shouted unnecessarily. “Fred tripped me while I was running and got grass stains all over my favorite jersey!”

Harry looked and, indeed, there were green streaks all down the right side of the shirt sleeve and shoulder. The shirt was quickly shed and held out in front of him at his sister.

“So?” Ginny returned.

“So, it's my favorite!” Ron whined. “Mum said you were doing laundry and you were back here. Come on, please? Fix my shirt. It'll be ruined.”

Ginny looked at her bother, as pathetic and pleading as he was, and relented. “Okay, but you owe me.”

She took the shirt from his hands and spread it out on the cleaning counter next to the laundry tub. She pulled a wand from her dress pocket and pointed it intently at the garment. “*Scourgify!*” she enchanted loudly. Like magic, the stain faded from view, leaving the cloth the same horrid orange that it was before the accident.

“Hey,” Ron complained. “How come you have a wand and I don't?”

“Well, silly,” Ginny answered in a teasing voice. “I help mum with the housework, so she gives me a wand while I am so I can do things like remove all the stains from *your* nasty clothes. You don't get to use a wand because you don't help clean.”

“But...”

“Don't complain,” Ginny said. “I saved your precious shirt.”

“It's a jersey,” Ron corrected. “Can I have it back now?”

“No,” she said. “It still has to be washed proper.” She reached to the stack of folded clean clothing that would be sorted to Ron's room later and gave him a plain blue shirt with three buttons. “Here, this'll keep you decent.”

“But...”

“No,” Ginny insisted, punctuating the point by throwing it in the sudsy wash water that the washboard was magically working on at that moment. “It needs to be washed before you can have it back. Wear it tomorrow or something.”

Grumbling a “thank you”, Ron trudged off back out the door.

By dinner time Percy's fever had broken and he was back to the real world. He sat with the rest of the family for the first time in several days. Thanks to luck and a few parenting spells that would prevent cross infection, the whole family sat down to a dinner of roast chicken and potatoes from their own garden.

“How are you feeling, Percy?” Bill asked. He was still outfitted in his muggle work suit, as today had been his day at work to interact in person with the muggle banks of London, placing transactions and moving valuables at the request of Gringotts customers.

“Better,” he said. “It's great to be back from that. It was the strangest thing.”

“What happened?” Bill asked. He shared a look with his parents, each of them remembering his bout with the same illness when he was nine years old.

“Well, this morning while I was sick and you guys were having breakfast, a high elf stopped by and talked with me. Said he wanted to use our floo to make a call. Made two in fact. Nice chap, even conjured me a glass of water when I was thirsty.”

“A high elf?” Arthur asked, incredulously. Bill was trying to hide his amused smile. Charlie and the twins were a lot less successful, mostly due to lack of effort. Ron was not paying attention to anything but food, but Ginny was paying close attention, as always. “Are you sure,” the father asked.

“Yeah, I think so,” Percy answered. “He wouldn't confirm it, but he was small and spindly, delicate, you know? Just like the books say, and he had the brightest, magical green eyes. Could only be an elf. Conjured me a glass of cool water before he left.”

“Percy,” Molly said. “There was water beside the couch by your head. You must have poured yourself a glass and forgot.”

“Really?”

"Yes, Percy," Arthur assured him. "High elves moved on from this realm long ago. Not anything left of their race in this dimension these days. I'm sure it was nothing."

"Really?" Percy scratched his chin. "I could have sworn."

"It was just the illness, dear," Molly cuddled her middle child. "You're all better now."

The boys each had a smile to their faces, but were silenced from comment with a look from their parents, effective even on the twins. Missed was the look of worry on Ginny's face at her husband being seen by one of her brothers when he was doing Merlin knows what while they were eating breakfast in the next room. It could have been a disaster.

Family Inseparable

Chapter 6

Family Inseparable: Chapter 6

By: Musings of Apathy

Ginny burst into her room as soon as she could leave the table. Her brother had seen her husband, creating a near disaster. When she saw her husband where he usually was, on the bed under the protections of the cloak and galaxy, she took a breath and calmed herself. She slowed down and turned her face from Harry. She slowly walked over to the closet and retrieved her pajamas.

“Ginny?” Harry asked, startled at her coldness. “What’s going on?”

She did her best to ignore him, stripping and changing into her night clothes.

“What’s going on Ginny?” Harry asked. When she continued to ignore him, he shucked his invisibility cloak. He had never had to worry about that before. Ever since their marriage, she seemed to be able to know where he was. At least, she always talked to the right spot. Now she wasn’t acknowledging that he was in the room. “Ginny, honey, what’s going on?”

Ginny heard Harry sounding more and more worried, but she was mad at him for risking their time together so he could make a floo call. And what was he doing making a floo call while they were having breakfast? She wasn’t prepared for him to be taking risks like that. It worried her, and that made her mad.

Harry was still feeling ignored completely by his wife. Thinking his galaxy had malfunctioned or reset or something, he looked at it closely. Not seeing any indication that it was doing anything, much less doing it wrong, he removed that as well. Now he sat in only his trousers and t-shirt, with no magical aids. “Ginny?”

Ginny tried her best to ignore her husband, but he was sounding so...and he had taken off his protections. Was he trying to be seen?

“Ginny, dear,” Harry started, using the terms that he had heard her father use for her mum. “Is something wrong?”

Was something wrong? Ginny snapped. “Is something wrong?” she asked hotly. “Is something wrong? I’m playing merry-hell at you right now. You stood there in front of Percy when you knew that I wasn’t ready for you...us to be revealed. And now look at you! You’ve taken off all your protections. Get your galaxy and cloak back on. Mum could come in here any second. Bats Hollow! I wasn’t going to talk to you, and look how well that lasted!”

“He was out of it,” Harry pleaded for a second before her evil eye had him putting on his galaxy and cloak. Even after his head disappeared from view, her eyes never left his, although they softened a bit once he was again protected. “He didn’t think I was anything real, some hallucination of an elf or something. Called me Santa before I even took my cloak off. I wasn’t discovered, was I? Your family doesn’t know, do they?”

“No,” she answered. “You’d have been dragged out of this room long before now if you had been discovered.”

Suddenly they both seemed to deflate. Their argument, for what it was, was moot. Ginny questioned him on what he was doing, and he avoided telling her, claiming a surprise. It wasn’t long before Ginny had to make an appearance downstairs with the rest of the family, after departing so soon after dinner. Harry might have normally been at her side, invisible, but the scare earlier had her forbidding it. Harry didn’t think that such a bad thing.

Later that night, after Ginny had returned for bed, Harry thought to ease the tension a bit and make them both feel better. Through the days since their marriage, they had both been thinking about how wonderful the ritual felt that bonded them. It seemed a good distraction for them both, only, Harry felt shy about it and was cautious on his approach.

“Ginny,” Harry said, breaking the silence. “You ... you enjoyed the marriage ceremony ... um ritual the other day, right?”

“Hmm? Oh, yes! It was great, Harry. Why?”

“Well ... when it was done, we both said that we should do it again, and I was wondering ... would you? Like to do it again?”

Ginny didn’t have to consider it for more than a moment before answering, “Yes, of course. You mean right now?”

“Sure,” Harry said with a little more confidence.

“But it’s bed time and we don’t have another vine. Do you think that one,” she pointed to the still flowering vine that had been stuck in the planter box outside her window. It seemed to be taking root and happy, “would work again?”

“No,” Harry said. “I think it’s better to let it grow. It seems to like it there. Maybe there’s another ritual in that book where you found the last one.”

Harry walked over to where the book was haphazardly layed between an old issue of Witch Weekly recycled from her mother and a vase of wilting wildflowers that had been picked before Harry’s birthday. In it they found a couple of possibilities, however most of the others were out of the question with Harry being still in secret. Having a minister or someone else to the Burrow to officiate a marriage between the youngest and a boy the family had never seen was completely out of the question.

In the end, they selected a simple idea, one that wasn't too dissimilar to the core of modern muggle marriage ceremonies. Using the guidelines in the book, they swore an oath to each other to support and honor the other for the rest of their lives. Unlike in the similar muggle ceremony, there was a flare of magic to seal the deal, adding another layer to their marriage bond, and seeing them off to sleep with smiles on their faces. The feeling they received in the first ritual was repeated in the second, maybe even with a bit more to it.

The next morning was nearly a catastrophe. Harry was, as always, firmly planted below the covers with his arms and legs intertwined with Ginny's on the small bed. Disaster nearly struck when Arthur Weasley, Ginny's dad, decided to be the one to wake his daughter on her eighth birthday. Even days later, Harry would have no idea how he was not discovered. He heard, in his half awake state, someone entering the room. Ginny was still breathing slowly, still asleep completely. He heard Ginny's father whispering, "Happy Birthday," while he gently shook her shoulder. In all that, his hand was less than an inch from Harry's face, through the blanket, and Harry could clearly hear his whispered greeting to his daughter as she awoke, owing to the fact that his ear was not more than a dozen inches away.

Ginny must have managed to keep him covered, but Harry could not recall how, just that it had worked. He stayed laying in the bed still as a stuffed dragon while Ginny got up, pausing only to put on her robe, before following her dad to breakfast. After the door was firmly shut Harry heaved a sigh of relief. Now he just needed to find something to do while he waited for his wife to finish her birthday breakfast. He hadn't even got the chance yet to wish her a happy birthday, or even a good morning.

Ginny's birthday started out as any newly minted eight year old little girl could want; she had all of her brothers, her mum and her dad around the breakfast table, which was overflowing with every thing she loved to eat. Her mum had even made eggy bread with a basket of berries, rashers of bacon and fluffy scrambled eggs piled high, along with many other breakfast delights. The sideboard behind the twins was piled with presents. The array of brown paper wrapped gifts was enough to bring a smile to her face. In a family that traditionally saved its knuts for better uses; presents were not normally wrapped in expensive, colourful paper. Why waste the a sickle or three for a roll of fancy paper, when each of the children were used to plain packing paper?

Bill called out an enthusiastic, "Happy Birthday, Sprite!" which was echoed by the rest of the family. Her mum came over from the stove and gave her a huge hug, which was, as always, returned with just as much enthusiasm. She had no sooner been released from her mum's grasp then she was enveloped in Bill's birthday hug, and from there to the next. Even Ron, the one most likely to dismiss his little sister, was ready to issue his hug on her birthday morning.

"See, sis," Ron said, "I'm still a year older than you."

Her answering tongue was enough to earn her a serious tickle in return from her youngest brother. She laughed as she was released and ushered by Ron to her normal spot at the table. Expected but appreciated, her normal chair was changed for a regal looking gilt throne. Breakfast flowed in a happy cacophony, each and every one of the family happy on this celebratory occasion.

It didn't take that long for Ginny to finish to her stomach's satisfaction, at least compared to her bothers. Bill and Charlie were having a contest, seeming to see who could have the most plates of eggy bread, each with a pile of the red raspberries that filled the woven basket at the center of the table. Ginny watched with rapt attention and laughed along with the rest of the family.

"Go ahead and have another serving of berries, Ginny," her mother said from her side. She looked up into her mum's smiling face. "There's plenty. Whatever doesn't get eaten will just spoil."

"Somehow, mum, I don't think that will be a problem at the rate they are going," Ginny answered. "Besides, I don't think I could eat anything more."

Molly smiled at her daughter, "That's alright dear. Save some room for lunch with your grandmum. She'll be by to pick you up at twelve. She's taking you out to lunch, so dress in your best."

Ginny allowed an excited smile to grace her face as she agreed. Quickly after that, breakfast ended and Bill was levitating presents to the cleared table. The brown wrapped packages, floated over single file, covered a good portion of the table.

"Okay, Ginny," her father said. "You know the drill. Open presents this morning and eat cake tonight."

"Come on, lets see what you got."

However, before she could tear into any of the packages before her, an average size owl alighted into the kitchen and landed between her and her presents. Clutched in the brown owl's talons was another brown package, tied in string. Blinking, Ginny relieved it of its burden. The owl nodded its head slightly before leaping in the air and leaving through the kitchen window, just as it had arrived.

"Go ahead, Ginny, open it."

"What is it?"

"Okay," she agreed.

She pulled at the loose end of the bow, unraveling the tie and causing the paper to fall away, revealing brightly coloured paper, wrapped around a small rectangular object. The paper showed a meadow scene with different size books flapping their covers, flying from tree to tree and bush to bush. Other books masquerading as animals scurried and strolled across the scene, making an unusual package indeed.

"Wow," she exclaimed. "I think it's from the book store."

This was echoed by most of her brothers as she held the wrapped book up for the others to see.

"Flourish and Blotts?" Percy clarified. "Must be. Nice wrapping anyway."

"Who is it from, dear?" her mum asked.

"I don't know. There's no card," she answered before turning it over and slitting her finger in the paper folds to loosen the sticking charm the wrapping was folded with. Inside she found just the kind of book she had mentioned to the twins. The cover was embossed with *Sir Gwondol's Quest* at the top and *John Isaic Pennyworth* at the bottom with a windowed scene of a knight on a white stallion in front of a majestic castle. She opened the cover to find no note or inscription to identify the giver, and at the start of the first chapter there was naught but the greeting; *Hello. Welcome to a tale of a brave knight and a beautiful princess. What is your name?*

Ginny giggled and closed the book. She smiled greatly. "Fred, George, did you get this for me? It's the one I asked you for."

"No," they denied. "Ours is the long one on top of the stack."

Ginny thought for a moment before realization struck. "Oh! I know who sent it!" she blurted out. Luckily not mentioning exactly who it was.

"Who, Gin?" her father asked.

"Hmm," she stalled. After a bit of thought she answered, "a friend of Luna's. They must have found out when my birthday was and had it sent."

"That was nice of them," Molly smiled. "Be sure you send a thank you note. Errol will be available for a delivery tonight."

A good portion of the morning was taken up with the family watching Ginny unwrap and appreciate the gifts they, and family further afield, had gotten her. In the stack were several from long time friends of Arthur's from the Ministry that had known her from birth. She made sure to thank each of her brothers and her parents when she unwrapped a gift from each of them with a sincere hug and a kiss on the cheek, much to Ron's embarrassment. With the gift portion of her birthday morning taken care of, she enlisted help to take her newly gained clothes and sweets to her room. She now had enough fudges, cakes and pasties to enjoy for weeks, even with her hidden husband helping her enjoy them all. Entering her room, all evidence of Harry's existence was well hidden, just as she knew it would be. She quickly ushered her brothers out of the room, claiming the need to bathe and change for lunch with Grandmum, getting them all out of the way and the door firmly closed.

That taken care of, she turned around for her first ever Happy Birthday wish from her husband.

With Grandmum Prewett due at noon, before preparing lunch for her boys, Molly Weasley made sure to venture up the stairs to remind her daughter to ready herself with a fresh bath and nice clothes. She found her daughter well into a long bath, covered in her foamy bubble bath and laughing uproariously. Molly simply reminded her that she had just an hour before her grandmum would show.

By the time Ginny and Harry exited the bath, they had started to wrinkle and prune from the long sit in the water. They dried and robed, saving dressing for their room. Their teeth brushed and ears cleaned, inside and out, they exited the bathroom and made their way to their bedroom.

As they passed Percy and Bill's room, they saw the two of them sitting on one of the two beds with a chess set between the two in concentration. Bill looked up and smiled. What he saw was his little sister, nothing giving away that there was another with her.

"How you doin', Moppet?" Bill asked. "Having a good birthday."

Ginny smiled brightly and skipped into the room, latching onto her eldest brother to give him a neck crushing hug. "Yes, I'm having the best time in the world!" She let Bill go and surprised her middle brother with an identical hug for him, which elicited a smile and a return hug, despite Percy's taciturn nature. She exited the room as she had entered; with a happy skip to her step.

At noon Ginny and Harry were ready and waiting in the kitchen watching Molly finish fixing lunch for the boys. Harry, fascinated with the family clock once again, nudged his wife when the "Grandmum Prewett" hand moved from home to traveling to visiting, accompanied with a light popping noise outside the back door, in the garden. Almost before the pop had ended, Ginny was on her feet and opening the door to greet her Grandmum. To not give himself away, Harry stood at the same time as his wife, but merely placed himself out of the way in the unused corner of the room.

Outside the door, Ginny flew into the arms of an older woman. She was rubenesque with plump, rosy cheeks and an obviously happy demeanor. She hugged the petite girl, enfolding her with her short arms and carrying Ginny into the air with a laughed greeting. Harry had to smile from under his cloak at seeing his wife happy.

"Molly, dear," the woman greeted as she entered with her arm over Ginny's shoulder as the child hugged her grandmum's waist. "How are you and your lovely family?"

"I'm well," she answered with a smile. "As are the boys and Arthur. Bill has been enjoying his time working at the bank and the twins are eagerly waiting for their sorting. With their enthusiasm, I just hope they'll leave the castle standing."

"Oh, they're just after some harmless fun. Reminds me of your brothers, Merlin rest their souls."

"I'll just be happy if they can still their jokes long enough to concentrate on their school work. Had the toughest time getting them through their preparatory learning. The only way they'd learn anything is if it was for fun."

"Nothing with a bit of fun in their lives," Grandmum Prewett stated. "How is Arthur doing with those Muggle Protection laws the Wizengamot had him on?"

"Honestly mother," Molly answered with a sigh. "He finished those ages ago. I owl you every week. You know he's head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Department now. Finds the most ghastly things that witches and wizards pass off to muggles. Had an antique tea pot last week that was laced with Everlasting Sleeping Drought. He had to visit the poor victim in the hospital to get them out of the coma the muggles thought them to be in. Came back all excited about the beeps and whistles their machines made."

"At least you've both found what you love," Mrs. Prewett said, her voice infused with love and sincerity. She turned to her granddaughter, still hugged at her side, and asked, "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes, Grandmum."

"If it's alright then, Molly, we'll be going. I think the floo is the best way, don't you think?"

"Of course," Mrs. Weasley agreed. She then set her eyes authoritatively on her daughter. "You be good for your grandmum, Ginevra. Don't forget your table manners."

With an explicit agreement to behave, they were off. Discretely Harry managed to get behind Ginny, hugging her tight through the invisibility cloak to get them to the same place with one trip. Luckily no one noticed that Ginny seemed to take an extra large pinch of floo powder, or that the flare of green flame that took them from the Burrow was especially large, or the flutter of the end of the invisibility cloak as it danced in the harmless flames as they disappeared.

With a kiss on both of Molly's cheeks, Mrs. Weasley's mum bid a final farewell before following Ginny and her invisible husband, calling out, "Diagon Alley."

Upon arriving at the Leaky Cauldron, Harry quickly found his feet and ducked behind Ginny to remove his cloak without gaining suspicion. It took a reminder from his wife, however, to get his necklace off. Had he worn the galaxy through lunch, who knows how poorly the day could have gone. Mrs. Prewett might have been able to 'see' him, but fat lot of good it would have done when she couldn't look at him. Harry stuffed the galaxy in the pocket of his robe with the folded invisibility cloak just before Mrs. Prewett's entrance through a flare of green flame. Unlike Ginny and Harry, she maintained her footing elegantly.

The trip through Diagon Alley to the restaurant was quick and easy. Harry might have wanted to visit some of the shops, but it wasn't the day for such dalliances. Before he knew it, they were sitting down at a nicely appointed table with a white table cloth and golden candles.

Suddenly more nervous, Harry began to fill the silent void, "Thank you for inviting me Mrs. Prewett. I'm sure you must have a lot of questions about your granddaughter and I, and I want to answer any that you have to make you feel more comfortable about this. Ginny's been so nice and all bringing me in to be with her, giving me all the food I could eat and such a nice place to sleep and..."

Harry was stopped by a raised hand. He looked at the jolly woman, giving her his full attention as she spoke, "Harry, none of that is necessary at all right now. First we will enjoy our meal and then we can discuss such things. Let's hurry now and make our selections before the waiter comes back with our drinks."

This settled Harry down without fuss. With his limited experience in situations such as these, Harry relied on mimicking Ginny to the best of his ability. Seeing Ginny reading her menu, Harry did the same. By the time the waiter came around with their drinks, Gilly Water for Mrs. Prewett and pumpkin juice for both Harry and Ginny, Harry had read the whole menu, but understood little. What descriptions he did understand, had things that he didn't think of as food. He had seen ducks in a local lake he was able to visit once with the Dursleys, but had no idea that anyone caught them and ate them. No, he didn't think duck would be the best thing to try.

At the other edge of the menu, he was sure the notations were of prices, but couldn't understand the single number that was listed. Wasn't wizarding money in three different coins? What would one number alone mean?

Fortuitously, his dining companions were the first to order, giving Harry that extra time, but, unfortunately, he had not paid attention to what they ordered. At the last, Harry finally saw something that he had at least heard his uncle mention, and that was a godsend.

"Harry..." Ginny said calmly to gain his attention, "It's your turn."

"Oh! I'll have the beef wellington."

"Very good, sir. And how would you like it cooked?"

This reminded Harry of when he had heard of the dish ... at the time, his uncle had not been impressed with the idea. *"What kind of a strange idea was that,"* his uncle had complained when the Dursleys had returned from a company dinner. *"Take a good piece of meat and wrap it up in pastry? At least the cook got it right, medium-rare. Probably would have been tough otherwise."*

"Medium-rare, please," Harry answered quickly.

The salad course arrived quickly, saving Harry from participating in the conversation, beyond looking interested and engaged. Ginny and Mrs. Prewett carried the conversation, leaving Harry where he preferred in his shyness; inconspicuous and quiet.

Lunch's main course arrived shortly, which surprised Harry. He wasn't sure how long the particular dishes they ordered took to cook, but the things

Harry and the Dursleys had always taken longer. The table lapsed into full silence as they all ate their ordered dishes. Soon enough the plates were finished and gathered by the waiter. Mrs. Prewett asked for an after lunch tea while their meals settled, promising a special desert later. Thus, Harry sat knowing the interrogation was about to start.

"Relax, Harry. I'm not about to break out the *Spiny Needles Hex*. I just want to get to know you. You are, after all, my granddaughter's husband. That's not going to change because of this conversation, let's hope."

"*Spiny Needles Hex*?"

Ginny grasped his hand in a show of solidarity, offering him comfort and letting him know he wasn't alone. Mrs. Prewett proceeded on ignoring the questioning repeat.

"Well, now. I know some things about you because of your fame and the legends surrounding you, so first," she paused, "let's throw all that out the window as mindless speculation and inaccurate fairy tales. Tell me about yourself and your life from when you can first remember."

With that broad request to fulfill, Harry launched into a version of his childhood. He sanitized it, only alluding to the treatment he received at the hands of the Dursleys, but told a rather complete tale for not imparting those things. He paused only for the arriving tea and picked his tale back up once each of their cups was properly augmented. His tale finished, all he could do is wait for the response from his Grandmother-in-law.

Mrs. Prewett, in her turn, wanted nothing more than to just bring the two children into her arms and tell them it would be all right, but she had a responsibility to know that he would do what was best for Ginny. Any signs that everything was actually all right would have to wait until her duty as a grandmother was satisfied.

"What are your intentions for my granddaughter's life, safety and happiness?" she asked with a stern face.

Harry didn't respond immediately. In truth, he didn't know how to respond because he didn't know exactly what was being asked. The question, while blunt, used concepts that were above the reach of a nine year old, no matter how mature he seemed.

"I'm...I...what..." Harry stammered and stuttered through trying to understand and answer. Luckily Ginny decided to speak up.

"What do you mean, Grandmum?"

"Sorry, dears," she apologized. "What I mean to ask is; what will you have Ginny's role be when you are both grown up? Will she tend house? Will she have a job? What will your job be? How will you support yourselves? Will you protect her?"

"Of course I will!" Harry exclaimed. "And as to the rest; what will she do? I don't know. I reckon she'll do what she wants to do."

"That is a very good attitude, Mr. Potter. I realize that you have no way of answering or even understanding the questions I asked, which doesn't surprise me. Tell me, which marriage ritual did you use?"

Harry looked at Ginny to see her reaction. "Do you remember the wording?"

"Yeah, the first time..."

"Wait," Mrs. Prewett interrupted her, "You've already done more than one?"

"Um, yeah," Harry answered. "There was a lot of tension last night and after Ginny forgave me, we wanted something to make us feel better, and the first marriage ritual felt so good, we tried another."

"Ah, such a drastic way to feel better after a fight. You'll find better ways when you are older," she assured them. "So, which rituals?"

"The first one," Ginny said again, pausing where she was interrupted the first time. "...went, 'I, *Ginevra Molly Weasley*, do accept the binding of *Harry James Potter* with no reservation and do offer the binding of my love, my heart and my soul in return, with no caveat in voice, mind or heart.' His lines were the same, only with our names reversed."

Harry was just amazed at her memory to remember the line so well. If he had to, he might have been able to, but not on the spot like that, without any doubt.

"Hmm, I've always liked that one," Mrs. Prewett said with a far away smile. "It was said that my own grandparents, my father's parents, had such a simple ceremony, using a rope that she braided from her own locks. May I see your wrists?"

They presented their right wrists to her, letting her examine the flowered vine that encircled both. "How wonderful. I wasn't aware that there was any such vine around your parents' house."

"Harry found it in a meadow."

"Enchanted one, I am sure," grandmum Prewett opined. "And the second ritual? Was there flora involved in this one as well?"

"No," Harry answered. "We were in her room at the Burrow and couldn't get any more, and the one we used before was still rooting in the planter outside her window."

"Of course."

Anyway," Harry said, recalling the second, if for nothing else than to prove that he also remembered his own weddings. "The second was just words. 'I, Harry James Potter, do take Ginevra Molly Weasley to be my wedded wife, to honor, support and cherish, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, for as long as we both shall live.' Like the first one, there was a flash of light and a warm feeling after we both said it."

"An old rite," Mrs. Prewett informed them. "Goes back many centuries. There are many older ones, like your first, but that one was before traditions changed in the wizarding world." Seeing a curious and interested look in both of their faces she continued, "These days, another line was added to that ritual, '*forsaking all others*,' which is in the muggle one as well, if I remember correctly. Centuries ago, a lord in the wizarding realm could take multiple wives. Of course, that really died out long before Hogwarts and long before that ritual, but it left the door open anyway, until a century or more ago, when it became practice to add the line. It's not always done, but that's why it was added. I'm glad the second rite worked. It could have failed because of the names you use. By any right, Ginny's new name should be Ginevra Molly Potter."

"Really? Could that make the ritual fail?" Ginny asked.

"Not the one you've already performed, but it could complicate any more that you do, if there are more."

"You seem to know so much about these things!" Harry complimented. "You must be some sort of expert. Is that what you do for a living?"

"No, no. I always kept the house and raised the children. I never had a job like my husband did, but ceremonies such as these have always caught my interest."

"Can you recommend more of them for us, just in case we want more?" Harry asked.

"More? Haven't you had enough?" she joked. "I certainly can. Why?"

"The first and second felt good and were fun," Ginny answered. "Plus, maybe they won't send Harry away if..."

"I'm sure they won't," Harry comforted her. "We're married now."

"Well, even so, between just those two rituals you are certainly not going to be split up," she said with a chuckle. After a breath, her demeanor changed. She became more serious, but also more like a wise mentor, leaning forward and connecting with both of them, eye to eye. "Let's be serious, now. You've stepped into a lifelong situation here. At this point in your lives you probably can't even understand *that* much, but just remember this; this is for the rest of your lives. You will be together for the rest of your lives. Grow up together. Live, love, learn together, but always remember that your spouse comes first. For you, Harry, Ginny should always be your first consideration. What is best for *her*. And you, Ginny, your first consideration should be what is best for your husband, Harry. Even before your brothers and parents, your duty is to your husband, just as his is to you."

Ginny and Harry sat quietly and absorbed as much of what she was telling them as they could understand. What made it through was what needed to, and they had no doubt, in their young age, that they would do as she commanded. With age and experience, maybe they would have seen bumps and not been so sure of themselves, but then again, love has a way of making any blind to the rocky roads ahead.

"Enough of that flap," Mrs. Prewett clapped her hands. "What say you two to some cake for such an occasion?"

Traveling back was just as difficult as the trip out. Mrs. Prewett went first to cover the way, with Harry and Ginny following together, just as before. They arrived in the middle of a chess game between Ron and his father, the elder at an advantage, but not by considerable margins. Harry and Ginny could both see that this was their sixth game, Mr. Weasley with three figurines and Ron with two, a sixth sitting on the side of the board between the two players awaiting the winner. For as long as the oldest child could remember, Mr. Weasley used the figurines to encourage the children to engage in group activities, redeeming them after the game for biscuits or some other treat. Molly would just shake her head, but it was all in fun. The biscuits would be eaten in the end whether they were given away as prizes or sneaked from the jar.

They had returned from lunch with just a few hours before the party was to start for the 'formal' celebration of Ginny's birthday. Ginny hugged her grandmum with a wide smile, greatly encouraged by the fact that she had accepted Harry with open arms, when she didn't have to.

"Thank you for lunch, Grandmum."

"You're welcome, Ginevra. Happy birthday."

Ginny split off with a final squeeze of her hug. Her mum was up off the couch ready in her place. Quietly, Ginny heard, "Thank you for taking her to lunch, Mum. Did you have a good time?"

"Oh, yes. It was most interesting and entertaining. So mature she's getting."

"Yes, she is. She met a boy at a shop a bit ago and heard about his home life and wanted to take him home. Begged and pleaded for weeks afterward for us to check up on him. We made the inquiries, but, really, one boy named Harry in all of England, there was little chance. But she still cared. I do hope that it turned out all right for that boy."

"I'm sure it will. Now, I must be going. Tuckered me out today."

"You aren't staying for the party?" Molly asked. Hearing that his mother-in-law was leaving, Arthur told his chessmen to stand down for a bit, while he got up for a stretch. Harry was amused to see the knights and rooks calling out to him, questioning his dedication to the battle, while the pawns seemed to be unrolling bedrolls or setting up for a meal. Where two white pawns were next to each other, they seemed content to share duties. The black pieces seemed to be staring Ron down, waiting for their leave.

“Okay, fine, but we're coming back to this, so don't forget where you are!” Ron reminded his pieces. He, too, made his way toward the fireplace. There he joined the queue of his brothers saying 'goodbye' to their grandmum.

After finishing her own goodbye, Ginny proceeded up the stairs, away from the rest of the family, knowing that the right person would be following her. Once inside the room, Harry wrapped his arms around her from behind, giving her an absolute feeling of comfort.

“Happy Birthday, Ginny.”

“Thank you, Harry. And I did love your gift. I think we'll enjoy it.”

“Good,” he said, allowing her to turn to face him. “Now what will we do until you have to go to your party?”

“Well, I think it'll be expected that I spend time with my brothers, so, I don't know...”

“I wanted to spend time with you, but you probably should spend time with your brothers. I'll just be under the cloak, nearby.”

“Just be up here for a bath at around five. I need to be ready for the party and I can't have my bath without my husband.”

“Of course,” Harry said, placing a kiss on her cheek through the cloak.

Downstairs, Ginny went straight to her dad and gave him a hug, which didn't make him suspicious at all. After all, she was a physically affectionate child. However, she had learned how to get what she wanted from her father, just as any little girl was apt to learn. On this occasion, what she wanted was a wand. Among wizzarding families, there are many games for children that involved magic, which, naturally, required an adult to part with their wand. Any wands from the school age children could have set off sensors in the Ministry of Magic's Improper Use of Magic Office, and it was an unwritten rule amongst the purebloods not to bring any attention of that office where their offspring was concerned, making it easier for the Ministry to ignore any early or extra training given to the young.

“Daddy,” Ginny said in as innocent voice as she could. “Can we use your wand for a game outside?”

Mr. Weasley, who had been in a conversation with Mrs. Weasley, smiled at his little girl and briefly hugged her shoulders to his abdomen. “Now, Pumpkin, you remember what happened last time you used my wand for those games of yours. You turned Percy green and Fred turned Ron's clothes into a dress. We can't have accidents happening.”

“But, dad...” she whined in return.

“And you know better than to use Charlie's or Percy's. And no using Bill's wand for the same reason as mine, you could have accidents. Ask you mum to let you use your Great Great Uncle Wyferus's wand.”

“But, dad. It hardly works for any of us at all! It's such a pain to use.”

“And that is why I'll let you use it. It's good enough to shoot sparks out of, and, unless you've changed the game since I was your age, that is all you need to play wand tag.”

What she didn't want to tell him is that they had changed the game. The original had the person who was 'It' using the 'It Wand', which was just a wand with a bright red ribbon tied around it, to chase down the others and try to shoot them with sparks. The common sparks that any wizzarding child knows how to shoot would shoot straight for some distance before fading out. If they hit someone, they would explode harmlessly, showering sparks in all directions, rather than just straight from the wand. It made good visual evidence that a person was struck. The person struck would then be 'It' and would be given the 'It Wand' to begin chasing the others once again. The game, as it was played the previous summer by the children had them casting a slightly different spark that Charlie taught them which left coloured marks on the person, be it their clothes or their skin. The marks would eventually fade, but was great fun for children while they lasted. The only problem was that the sparks Charlie taught them would not work from their Great Great Uncle's old wand. The man had used a vinewood wand with a core from the spinal cord of a Cornish Pixie; a wand combination that would do little but sparks for anyone else, leaving one to wonder how he came across such a wand in the first place.

Ginny, knowing that it would probably be the best they could do, turned to her mum and asked for the wand. Molly would never refuse now that her husband had already just about given permission. She may have talked to him later, had she not agreed, especially for her daughter's birthday.

“I'll get it in a second, honey. Why don't you gather the others and see who wants to play.”

With a 'thank you' to both her parents, Ginny ran off to gather all of her brothers. Each of them agreed to play up in the orchard where the trees would make the game more interesting. Even the reserved Percy agreed to play after Ginny put the heavy persuasion to him. He, like his brothers, could not resist when there was something Ginny truly wanted.

They all gathered outside the kitchen, next to the garden, where Bill and Charlie reiterated the 'rules' of the game with such things as; 'no tag backs', 'no running to mum if someone manages to shoot something other than sparks' (this one with sharp looks to Ron and Percy), 'no peeking while you count to ten' and 'no fast counting! Say '1 Cauldron Cake, 2 Cauldron Cake, etc.', 'but Charlie that just makes me hungry for cauldron cakes,' Ron would complain and Bill would tell him, 'fine, say 1 clauricorn, 2 clauricorn,' 'What's a clauricorn?', 'It's a leprechaun,' 'Why can't I say I 'leprechaun' then?' 'Say whatever you want, as long as it's a long enough word that you aren't counting too fast.'

As soon as Mrs. Weasley retrieved the wand from where ever it was stashed, the whole group took off as a whole for the orchard at an excited jog. When they got up there and prepared to start, Ginny kept the wand and declared she was 'It' first. This made Ron shudder at the thought of his sister with a wand in her hand chasing after him and his brothers, no matter how ineffective the wand was supposed to be. Harry placed himself outside

the action where he could see somewhat, but wouldn't get struck by the sparks shot at one of the others. Even if a tree were struck, the sparks would not explode as they would if it hit a person, and Harry was taking no chances that he would be struck and lit up in his invisibility. He wouldn't trust the others to not notice, even if he did have the galaxy around his neck still.

The antics he saw made him laugh, which was luckily covered by the laughter of the rest of the children. Ginny being the first shooter, Harry counted at least ten shots of red and purple sparks before Percy was lit up like Guy Fawkes Day. The next time Ginny was 'It', after Ron had been 'It' twice and Charlie had yet to have been hit, Harry could have sworn that Ginny hit both of the twins and Bill at the same time, sending out all three shots in quick succession. At five o'clock Harry carefully made his way to his wife and placed his invisible hand on her shoulder to gain her attention without facing the 'It Wand', which was in her hand for the fourth time that afternoon. He whispered the time in her ear, to which she gave a small nod. She quickly shot Charlie, who had come from behind a tree to her right to find shelter further from his sister. She quickly begged off, saying she had to take a bath before the party, hinting also that they could use some cleaning up as well.

The bath was just as it always was, with both Ginny and Harry getting themselves clean and having some fun along the way. They got out in time for the boys to do a quick wash-up before the guests arrived. At the party, Ginny was able to say hello to some cousins, uncles and aunts. She had already opened her gifts from each of them, but enjoyed the cake after blowing out the candles that floated above the icing.

That night, Ginny and Harry snuggled under the light blanket on her bed happily. Neither wanted anything to change at that point.

The next morning was punctuated by owls and letters. While Percy was poring over his book list, including for the first time, a list of books for his electives, Fred and George were dancing arm in arm, spinning around the table, generally making a ruckus.

"We got our letters! We got our letters!" they chanted and sang over and over. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry would never be the same. Fred and George Weasley had been accepted as first year students.

Family Inseparable

Chapter 7

Family Inseparable: Chapter 7

By: Musings of Apathy

“We got our letters! We got our letters!”

“Boys!”

“We got our letters! We got our letters!”

“Fred! George! That’s very nice, boys, but if you would just sit down and open them, you might just know what they actually said,” their mum chastised them.

“But, mum, we haven’t finished dancing around yet!”

“Sit down and open your letters. If you are good, I’ll let you visit Gambol & Japes when we visit Diagon Alley for your school lists.”

Like two little angels, the twins both immediately took their seats at the table. Their behavior was nothing new, however. They fooled no one. While the twins were opening their letters, Charlie and Percy were reading theirs, having forgone the theatrics.

“Mum,” Charlie called for his mum’s attention. “Have you read this?”

“Of course not, dear. What does it say?”

“It’s my NEWT classes. I wasn’t expecting this,” he mumbled, a stricken look on his face. “I wanted to take NEWT Care of Magical Creatures, but…”

Molly quickly moved over to see what was the problem. With a flick of her wand, the bacon and eggs would tend themselves for a few minutes. “What is the problem, dear?”

“It’s the requirements for NEWT Creatures. It says here that there are weekend trips to some farms and preserves here and in the Carpathians. The school provides a tent for the students and food, but the portkeys aren’t free and some of the weekend classes have fees,” he said, sounding distraught. His dream jobs all included a requirement of a NEWT in Care of Magical Creatures. Dragons in Romania, Nundus in Niger, Sphinxes in Egypt and Chimaera in Greece all required that applicants to their programs have the more advanced certification before they could start. “All together, the letter from Professor Kettleburn says that students must be able to afford seventy galleons in expenses.”

“Seventy galleons?” Molly gasped. She took a couple of breaths and started to go over figures in her head. The great extra expense would be hard for the family to manage, but they would in the end. Perhaps it wasn’t all needed at the beginning of the year. If it were spread out, they could come up with the money as they needed. “We’ll find a way, Charlie. You’ll get to take that class, if that is what you want to do.”

“Mum, George and I have a bit of savings,” Fred said while his twin nodded his head. “It’s not much, a galleon and some sickles if it’ll help.”

“That’s very generous…”

“And I have some as well,” Percy chimed in. “And I don’t need new books. Bill has all of his old ones. The defense book is the same as he used in his fourth year, if that’s all right with him.”

“Sure,” Bill agreed. “And I’m making money at the bank, and well, if I take a lunch with me every day, I really don’t have any expenses. What I make there would help cover.”

“And I have money too, mum,” Ginny chipped in. She knew that she and Harry had a sack of galleons in the trunk that they could give. She knew Harry wouldn’t mind. She remembered that Harry was there when he squeezed her shoulder, as if to agree with her on the use of their galleons.

“That’s all very generous, kids,” Molly praised her children. “Your father and I will discuss this, but I don’t think that everyone in the family needs to spend their own money. You all earned that money and I expect that you have stuff that you need to buy. Percy, don’t forget that you have Hogsmeade trips this year. Is the permission slip in with your letter?”

“Yes, mum, it is. But I still have money that I can…”

“Not necessary, any of you. We’ll work it out.”

After breakfast, Ginny saw Charlie slinking up the stairs to the room he shared with Ron, her youngest brother. The rest of the Weasleys seemed to have things to do on the ground floor or outside in the spotty sunshine, while the weather was not so wet. Faintly, she heard the second step creak with no one on it, telling her that Harry was heading up the steps as well. She politely followed after placing her plate in the sink to wash.

In her room she saw the trunk open and could tell that Harry was sorting their money sack. She closed the door, making sure the latch clicked closed.

“Harry?”

“Here, Ginny,” Harry pulled the cloak off his head so he could speak to her face to face. “I thought we should give Charlie this money.”

“But mum said they were going to take care of it,” Ginny reminded him. She had no hold on the money, but she was used to trusting her mum and dad to fix things.

“Sure,” Harry agreed. “But when we went on a field trip last year, Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon gave Dudley some money so he could have something to spend on the trip. Is Charlie going to have anything to spend on his trips?”

“I don't know,” she answered. “Okay. I'll give him the money.” With a smile, Ginny kissed her husband on his cheek and took the moneybag. Without a hesitation, she exited the room and ascended the step to the room at the top of the stairs.

“Charlie,” Ginny called softly while lightly knocking on her brother's door.

“What's up, dragonfly?” he answered while opening the door. She followed him into the room and goggled at the decoration. Surrounding Ron's bed were posters of the only Quidditch team he supported, the Chudley Cannons. Her youngest brother had gotten involved with the team when his uncle took him, and just him, to a game between the Cannons and the Heidelberg Harriers, a German team. Ginny couldn't explain how the resounding defeat in an exhibition match had cemented Ron's support, but it somehow had. Since then, what walls he could were covered in the most violent orange you could imagine. His older brother who had to share the space kept it to a minimum, but it still hurt the eyes if looked at directly.

“I wanted to give you this,” she said, thrusting the leather sack into Charlie's hands.

“What'cha got here? Have you been saving your allowance?”

“Yeah,” she said truthfully, although the money sack was barely weighted by her contribution. The money was hers, as it was Harry's, through community property, not that either child thought about that.

“Ginny, that is really nice of you...” Ginny interrupted him with a great hug. She squeezed the life out of him, to which he returned a firm hug. “But I can't...Mum and Dad are going to take care of it, you heard her.”

“That's alright, Charlie. You're going to all those great places. You'll need spending money or something.”

“But...” he started until she fixed him with a glare, easily communicating that she had made up her mind. Under her insistent eye, he opened his trunk and placed the sack of money firmly in the corner, under his overturned cauldron. “Okay, dragonfly. Maybe I'll find something to get you in some exotic locale.” Ginny gifted him with a smile in return, one he answered with his own, from ear to ear. “Thanks, Ginny.”

Just after the kids had eaten their lunch, Charlie was drafted to look after his siblings. His mum was visiting Diagon Alley, although she used the excuse of stopping at the apothecary rather than Gringotts. Charlie knew that she needed to check the balance of the family vault to find how dire his class choice would prove to be. With just a look-up for wizarding money, the goblins of Gringotts were there to control access, not keep a detailed count of a wizard's money. They effected transfers from vault to vault quite efficiently, and kept records of such transactions very well, but did not have a record of the value of the interior of any vault. After all, anyone allowed access to the interior of the vault could take out or entomb any amount of coins or other objects without the goblins knowing how the balance had changed. However, for a fee, any service, including a vault inventory, could be rendered.

“Sweet Merlin,” she exclaimed upon opening the Weasley family vault. Before her stood towering stacks of sickles and knuts. “What on earth? Did Arthur get a raise and forget to tell me? Have we won the Galleon Draw and not been notified?”

The escorting goblin paid her no mind, the contents of the vaults being strictly none of his business. The patrons would have to pay extra for *him* to care what they chose to store in their vaults. Thus, anything Molly Weasley said, in any form of exclamation or surprise, fell on apathetic ears. What would someone think if goblins started listening in and responding to the myriad of absently asked questions asked each day inside the bank. If they wanted questions answered, they could deal with those grouches on the teller desks. Those guys could really stack on the fees when the mood hit.

Molly quickly gathered a large sack of sickles and knuts, enough to handle her purchase at the apothecary and a trip to the alley for the kids school supplies sometime later. To herself, she thought she should wait until the mystery of the fattened vault was solved before the yearly Hogwarts shopping trip. She hoped the reason was found soon, because the children wouldn't want to wait long with their letters in hand.

As she was exiting the bank, she didn't even think of asking the tellers to explain the bloated vault contents, knowing of the fees the bank was known for. Instead, she planned to ask Arthur when he returned home that evening. Maybe her husband would know about the mysterious good fortune that had bless the family.

While the others were distracted, Ginny slipped into the woods with Harry carrying a basket filled with her idea of picnic food from the cold cupboard.

The twins took no notice as they set an old, rusty cauldron to heat in the middle of the garden, poised over a fire ring built by their father before they

could remember from clear mornings during the full moon. They built a small fire with just a couple of split logs and managed to get the cauldron filled with water from the tap by the shed to the fire each holding a side. With the cauldron heating and an old book standing open on a bench, the two ran off to harvest the magical plants found around the garden and in the nearby wood. Really the variety of magical plants were a boon for experimental youth such as the twins.

Charlie kept a close eye, but his philosophy of child minding was to prevent any disasters. At the worst, he knew that the garden and surrounding area didn't have anything violently reactive, so the twins would be relatively safe. However, his minding of the twins left Ginny to her own devices. Charlie knew that she was a generally safe and good child, so he didn't worry. Besides, the half eye he had to spare was occupied with Ron's attempt at a simulated war involving a muddy puddle, a stick that seemed to still have a green leaf or two and two forts he was building from flat stones and wood from the wood pile.

Harry and Ginny ran along with the picnic basket held between them until they found a dense enough patch of trees to leave them concealed well from her brothers or any other intrusion.

As Ginny spread the blanket and set out the food, she asked, "Would you go and find some more vine like you did before, so we can try that again?"

"Sure," Harry said, standing up and spinning around, trying to get his bearings. "I don't know ... which ... which way did I go before?"

Molly Weasley left the bank and made her way to the apothecary for the very real needs of ingredients for the household. There she took her time to find the ingredients she needed, still with care as to what would get the job done most economically. She needed to make more healing potions to replenish her depleted supplies. Lucky she was a competent potions student in her day, or a family of nine would be paying a king's ransom for commercial potions, rather than the more reasonable ingredients.

Throughout her shopping, she could not shake the mystery of the larger bank account. To tell the truth, it worried her a bit. They needed the money, but if they spent it and it turned out to be a mistake, they would have no way of paying it back when the goblins came looking. While they paid rent on the land the Burrow was built on, Arthur and Molly prided themselves on being without debt. They had built up their lives and family without flexing their credit or living above their means. Money was always tight, but they managed to provide for their children and themselves.

They both loved their children, and loved having so large of a family around, but it did put a strain on the income at times. Soon ... soon, Molly knew, her oldest would be moving away from home, just because that is what adults did. However, with Bill in training at Gringotts, essentially, the pay was just at a minimum, so it would likely be that he wouldn't move out until his certification and first assignment as a full employee of the bank, much to the mother's joy with him being around for just that little bit longer. One less mouth to feed wouldn't save nearly anything, not nearly as much as it would effect her and her husband to have one of their children leave the nest.

When Harry explored the direction Ginny indicated, he didn't find the meadow that he remembered from before, just a farmers field on the far side of the wood they were playing in that stretched quite a ways in each direction. Nothing he saw would make him think there was a meadow anywhere in or around the woods behind the Weasley Family house. Nonetheless, he did find something that would work for the handfasting. Up in a tree he could see a large nest, and hanging from the nest was some pale tan silk, like the sash from a dress.

It didn't take him long to shimmy up the tree; he had lots of practice in getting away from his cousin in any manner that availed him, and trees always stumped the rotund boy. He quickly snagged the prize before the nest's owner could come to reclaim their treasure. Before long he was back on solid ground and headed back to his wife in the middle of the wood.

"You're back," was his wife's friendly greeting upon his return. "What do you have?"

"Couldn't find the meadow," Harry explained a bit out of breath. He had his hands on his knees as he bent over, filling his chest with air. "Found this though. Think it'll work?"

She took the silken ribbon from him and measured its length with her eye, finding it satisfactory. "It'll work. Sit down here with me."

They proceeded as they had the first time, this time with the silk rather than the vine. They were disappointed at first when the ritual wouldn't work as it had before. Right hands clasped, silk wrapped, vows given and received, but it didn't respond.

"Maybe it won't work for the right hand again," Ginny thought allowed.

"What about your name?" Harry asked. "What did your grandmum say about your name now?"

"Oh! It's Ginevra Molly Potter, not Weasley. That might be it. Let's try it on the left with my new name and see if it works."

When Charlie saw his mum return from the bank, the look on her face was less than promising. He had hoped that she would return full of assurances, but instead she looked bewildered and confused. From her expression, everything had not gone as planned at the family vault, which didn't leave him very hopeful.

"Mum?" Charlie greeted her. "How was your trip to the alley? Did you get what you needed from the apothecary?"

"Hmm?" she replied absentmindedly. "Oh, yes I did. It shouldn't be a problem to replenish the potion cupboard now. I don't know what you boys get into, but it seems like you use more potions every summer. Were the others good while you were in charge?"

“Oh, sure!” he replied quickly. “Just ... well ... okay, the twins needed a minor burn potion each, but we got it all handled. Nothing serious. Ron's up having a wash-up in the tub. Seemed today was a mud day.”

“At least you could get him to wash with little fuss, I should hope. The twins aren't trying anything out of your Uncles' book again, are they? I swear, Fabian and Gideon ran Mum ragged chasing after them when they were the twins' age. Fred and George seem to be determined to follow in their fading footsteps.”

“What can you expect with a birthday of April 1st? They seem to think it was an omen handed down by Morganna.”

“Merlin save us all,” Molly agreed.

“Were you able to take care of the other ... business?” Charlie asked nervously. “Can ... can I help, any?”

“No dear. No help is necessary. This is your father's and my responsibility. You don't have to worry about it a bit.”

“Okay,” he said, accepting his mother's assurances as a son should. “Need help with anything else?”

“How did you do on burn and scrape potions in class?” she asked, pulling a number 4 cauldron from the cupboard.

By the time Arthur returned home, dinner was just coming to the table and the kids were done with whatever they had been doing throughout the day. Ron had an extra bath, due to his fascination with playing in the mud that particular day, and the twins had washed the cauldron they had used over the fire in the garden at Charlie's insistence. They seemed happy despite the need for a minor burn potion and the lack of success at brewing their potion. Charlie was just happy that he had prevented the ingestion of the sickly brown liquid. He had to shake his head. The twins were so eager to invent things and have fun. At least they hadn't used the day to prank any of the family.

“Arthur,” Molly said after the rest of the family had cleared out from the table. “I had to check on the vault balance today, and I got a surprise.”

“What was wrong dear? Have we overspent again?”

“Oh, no, not at all. From the looks of things, there was at least sixty or seventy galleons extra in the vault. I was wondering if you got a raise at the Ministry and forgot to tell me.”

“Well,” Arthur contemplated. “It has been a while. Maybe the new fiscal numbers came in favorably and the Wizengamot approved some for the department. I'll check with accounting sometime this week to make sure.”

“I just didn't want it to be a mistake. The boys received their letters today, and you know that Charlie selected NEWT Care of Magical Creatures. Well, there was a letter from Professor Kettleburn about the additional costs of that course to pay for trips to professional farms and reserves.”

Arthur could see that his wife was a bit distraught, but needed to know more before he could fix it and give her some substantive comfort. “How much?”

“Seventy galleons.”

“Seems pretty fortuitous, all right, that we have the right amount extra.” Arthur reached his wife's hands on the table across from him and held them both in his as he reassured her. His composed acceptance more than anything calmed her. “I'll check with accounting and see if I never got the notice about a raise, or something.”

“And if it isn't?” she asked, still unsure. “I didn't take the kids to get their books and supplies yet, because I wanted to know how deep we are going to have to scrape. You know with four in Hogwarts...”

“I know, Molly. It's a lot. I wouldn't worry about where the money came from. If the accounting department doesn't clear this up, I'm sure Gringotts can tell us where it came from. I've never known them to make a mistake yet.”

“You're right, but let's wait until the weekend for shopping anyway.”

“Probably a good idea.”

As the records of the magical world made their changes to reflect the day's events, Ginny's acceptance of her new name was recorded. By using the name Potter as her own in a ritual, she affirmed the change without ever having to register in person with the Ministry. The same changes were made in the registry at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Unseen by school official in Hogwarts or by ministry official in the Ministry of Magic, Ginevra Molly Weasley was changed to Ginevra Molly Potter. Strangely enough, if Ginny had used this one opportunity to state her name as Ginny Molly Potter, she would have never had to worry about her dislike for the full pronunciation of her first name. She would have just been Ginny, rather than that being short for something else. But at eight years old, she didn't even know saying in a ritual that she was a Potter would effect so many changes.

Just as no official saw that he name had changed, none of her family could see the pale tan tattoo that now adorned her left wrist. Indeed, the silk sash was so pale as to be nearly invisible when represented as a tattoo on her creamy skin. The silk itself would be a keepsake with the rest of her treasures stashed away in her room.

And so, the summer would roll on without the Weasley house guest being revealed. The steps Harry and Ginny took to ensure this were becoming

automatic in their effort. With a third bonding between them, Ginny could look Harry in the eye no matter if he was wearing the cloak and galaxy or not. The differences multiple bondings were making were subtle, but they certainly noticed them as they added up.

"Excuse me," Arthur asked at the information desk. Beyond he could see many other desks covered in parchment and personal nicknacks.

"Yes, how can I help you, sir?" the middle aged man who manned the desk asked.

"Good afternoon," Arthur greeted, a little kindness could go a good ways in finding what information he needed. "I needed to enquire about my pay."

"Certainly. Who is your specialist?"

"My specialist?" Arthur asked. "Oh, my. It's been years since I have been in here. I think it used to be Maryanne, is she still here?"

The clerk huffed out a breath. "No, she retired, the lucky witch, but she put in a good seventy five, so can't say anything against her for it."

"Hmm. Hope she is enjoying it. Got quite a bit ahead of me before I can consider that myself."

"As do I. Too many if you ask me," the clerk responded with the full sincerity of any government employee when discussing how nice life after the daily grind would be. "Which department are you in, I'll look it up."

"Misuse of Muggle Artifacts. I'm the head."

"Ah, yes ... that's under the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"You're specialist would be Mrs. Whithers. She's at lunch, but you can request an appointment with her through the normal means, if you wish."

By the time Arthur was able to make an appointment that wouldn't interfere with his own work, it was two days later. The woman was curt at best, but did tell him that a small raise, less than two hundred sickles, had been approved and sent with his regular pay. Did he not receive a notice?

All in all, the meeting had provided some of the information he wanted, but not enough to explain the rather larger sum in the vault. The raise, according to Mrs. Whithers, had only been given starting in July. On Saturday, which was rapidly approaching, he could go with Molly and the kids to Diagon Alley and visit the bank to inquire with the goblins while she took the kids shopping. A solid plan, indeed.

Arthur would have been glad for the end of the week, come Friday by five or six in the evening, quitting time, if not for an anonymous tip that came in to the investigators on the auror squad, giving the location for some dark artifacts in Chelsea. As was common practice, if they suspected to find artifacts, Arthur or his partner were asked to accompany the Aurors on their raid of the property. This meant a late night watching doors being bashed in with bludgeoning hexes and countless hours sorting through the brickabrack that someone stashed where they had no business. Only a small portion was dark at all, and only a bit of that was muggle in origin. A couple of biting tea sets and a rather nasty book of limericks that were not only quite dirty, but the book was enchanted to force the reader to sing each and every limerick loudly, in a public place, before it could be removed from their hands.

By the time he arrived home, he had little more than a couple of hours before his wife's normal time to greet the day. He shucked his robe with considerable less care than his norm and climbed in to snuggle with his Mollywobbles. It had been a long day, which would correspond with a very short night's rest afterward.

Come Saturday morning, Ginny found the twins up well before her, surely in anticipation for their first school shopping trip. Amazingly enough, their mum's promise still stood to allow them to go to Gambol & Japes for their joking needs. For as much as Molly Weasley complained about her son's concentration and dedication to the pranking pass-time, she also never seemed to refuse them their supplies for long. Occasionally they would step over some line and she would take the tricks away for a while, but if they stayed within boundaries, she would leave them be.

The plans for the day were a fiasco in the waiting, as both of her parents had planned on taking the whole family to the alley en masse. All nine Weasley's through the floo at the Leaky Cauldron for one trip. Even Bill had been recruited on this, his day off, to help supervise all of the young children. Ginny might have taken offense, but she loved being around Bill and really didn't think of the number of minders her parents were planning.

Unbeknownst to Ginny or most of her brothers was that her father's part of the trip was not solely meant to mind the children. Molly had asked him to speak with the goblins to see if he could ascertain the rightful place for the extra sickles and knuts in their vault. Like most traditional wizarding families, the Weasleys were still split greatly along traditional lines; Arthur provided for his family through his career, while Molly reared the children and cared for the family. As traditional, the father of the family was in overall charge of the money, although the mother bought everything needed to keep the family running and well fed. To them it was natural. Once Molly had found the discrepancy in their finances, Arthur was tapped to investigate the source, or at least the validity of the extra money. He'd share what he found, and she trusted him to sort it all out.

Much to Ginny's disappointment, Harry had to stay at home. She understood why, and agreed, but that didn't make her any happier with the necessity. She plodded from store to store at her mother's side, not feeling as adventurous, running a ruckus through the alley from store to store, as she would have if she had been her normal happy self.

Hey, Gred," George said to his twin. They were in the book shop with the rest of their family, hidden from their mother's view where they could look at books she might not completely approve of.

"Yes, Forge?"

"Have you noticed anything ... wrong with our sister the youngest?"

"Now that you mention it, yes, our sister the youngest is not her normal bouncy self."

"I agree. The rose seems to have left her cheeks, indeed."

"It is more like a sister the oldest."

"Although she is that as well."

"Ah, but we always preferred to think of her as sister the youngest."

"Of course, with Percy to deal with, we don't need a sister the oldest."

"Agreed. Do you have a solution for the melancholy of our sister the youngest?"

"Without knowing the ailment, a cure will be most elusive."

"Perhaps, if a cure will not be attainable, a treatment could be found."

"And what, my dear brother, is the best treatment for melancholy?"

"This we have always known."

"Then a treatment shall be administered immediately."

"Perhaps our visit to Gambol will aid us in this."

"Do not forget the genius in Japes, my dear fellow."

"Of course not. Silent though he was, he provided laughter from the shadows."

"As any true entertainment genius would."

"Shall we?"

"Of course. She deserves no less."

Had anyone seen them coming, they may have had the sense to be frightened. However, before anyone knew it, the twins had scooped the young girl from her mother's side and plopped her down at a small reading table across from the counter. Immediately, George went back to their mother while Fred talked to Ginny.

"Mum, we're going to take Ginny for some ice cream. She doesn't seem to be having any fun, and we think she could use some."

"I don't know, George. I don't know if it's safe for the three of you to be running around alone. You two are just eleven, after all."

"We're just going down the alley to Florean Fortescue's and then to Gambol and Japes. We'll be fine. You can find us in the joke store when Percy and Charlie finish with their browsing."

"And your books, dear?"

"On the counter, mum."

"Did you get a set for each of you?" she asked. "I won't have you falling behind on your schoolwork because you don't both have your own books."

"It doesn't seem necessary. We'll be in all of the same classes, but yes we did. It's all there on the counter."

"Very well. Keep your sister safe. Here's two galleons for the ice cream," she said as she retrieved two of the few gold coins in her money sack.

"Buy your sister something fun but harmless at the joke shop, will you? Remember ... *harmless* ."

"Yes, mum. We will."

Meanwhile, back at the table ...

"What's going on?" Ginny asked suspiciously.

"Well, little sister," Fred said. "We noticed that you seem down. That you weren't really into this shopping trip. And, while we understand that you don't get to buy your school supplies for a little bit yet, plodding along at your mother's side with a melancholy expression is not the way a lively girl such as yourself should be acting. At the very least Mum should have had to yell after you as you ran off to one thing or another. Yet, you are just

moping along."

"I'm not *down* and I'm not moping," Ginny insisted vehemently. "Harry should just be..." By the time she realized that she had said the name of her husband, mind, the husband that her family didn't know about in the slightest, his name had already slipped her lips. Instantly she was stricken, her secret revealed, she was sure.

"What was that?" Fred asked with a dangerous smile. "That wouldn't be Harry as in the famous Harry Potter, would it?"

Ginny was trapped. She was struck dumb trying to find the words to defuse the mistake she had made and convince her brother that she had not just revealed something so secret. While Fred moved on in his musings, Ginny was mute in horror.

"And here I thought that mum and dad didn't poison your mind with the stories of the famous slayer of dark lords," Fred teased. "But it seems that their precious little girl fell in love with The Boy Who Lived nonetheless. What ever are we to do?"

"Fred, please," Ginny pleaded. "Don't say anything."

"What? That my little sister is in love with an icon of the modern wizarding world?" Fred asked. "You know ... I think there was some shots of little Harry some time ago in the Prophet. Seems someone saw him out amongst the muggles. You don't suppose that I could find a copy of that for you, some decoration for your walls, or some such?"

"No, you don't understand..." Ginny started but was interrupted when they were joined by her other current keeper and proposed entertainer, George.

"What is this over here, Gred? I trust you to make our sister happy, and she seems to be horrified at the thought. What in the world did you do? You didn't tell her that knock-knock joke. I told you not to tell that one to the kiddies."

"Not that," Fred said. "It seems that little Ginny here is depressed that her love, Harry Potter, could not join us on this little outing. I offered to find a copy of the Prophet from a year or two ago that had his picture, you know, for her walls, but she doesn't seem to be warming to the idea."

"Yes, I seem to recall that issue. Mum was looking at the photos, worrying that he was being cared for properly. So she has found the one, and it is he?"

"So it would seem, Forge."

"I seem to recall that, not so long ago, there were some more pictures of our sister's beau. Seems that he was here in Magical London, wondering around Diagon Alley. He was the right age, too. Just a year older than our little faery. Perhaps there is something there, Gred my brother?"

"Perhaps there is, Forge," Fred agreed. They both turned to the still horror stricken Ginny with smiles. "Would little Ginny like for us to find this potential suitor and show him the light that is our sister. Make sure he falls in love with you in return?"

Suddenly, Ginny realized that she hadn't revealed as much as her panic thought. She said his name and conveyed her wish that he could be shopping with them, but she hadn't mentioned her relation to him, or his current whereabouts. The relief flooded her nerves, opening the way for her to enjoy what her brother's were doing to improve her mood, now that she could see that that's what they wanted to do for her.

"You know," George said. "Harry Potter should be in the same year as Ronnikins, a full year before our sister. Perhaps we can work our magic when the time comes and sway the young lord to our sister's charms, if that is what she has her heart set upon."

"It would only be our duty, as good brothers, to offer such aid," Fred agreed. "That is, once we have made sure that he is at least good enough to be in the presence of our heavenly sister."

This worried her a bit. Her brothers would want to know if Harry was good enough for her, just like her grandmum had. She knew she couldn't count on the fact that her grandmum had approved being an indicator of the rest of the family. The dice would fall how they will.

"Of course. Wouldn't want any rabble around, would we?"

"Hey, guys, don't I get a say in my own future? You practically have him trussed up and at an altar already."

"But, of course, our dearest Ginny. We will be sure to ask you before you take your vows."

"In fact, I think that's one of the things the minister asks when he is performing a marriage ceremony. What is it..."

"Do you, Ginevra Molly Weasley, take this man, Harry James Potter, to be your wedded husband, bound magically from heart to heart, till death do you part?"

"Yes," Ginny agreed immediately. "They do ask you, but I'm talking before he's kidnapped and tied to an altar in dad's old dress robes."

For a moment after the traditional words were offered and she accepted, she was wistful, hoping that, someday she could agree to the words and complete the ceremony in front of all of those that cared about her, as she once again accepted a bond to Harry Potter.

"Of course we would, Ginny."

"We would never embark on such a high risk mission without making sure you would put the prize to proper use."

It would only be what's right.”

“Come along,” George bade them. “Mum gave us some gold to entertain our little sis, and it would be against some code to not take full advantage of such generosity immediately.”

“What say you to an adventure by way of Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour with an eventual destination of Gambol and Japes?”

The twins loose in the joke shop was something not to be missed, especially without their mum there to tell them 'no'. Ginny would be glad to go along for the fun.

“A man of pure genius,” George replied. “Great minds think alike.”

“More likely,” Ginny sniped with a smile, “one brain, even in two bodies, can still only come up with one thought.”

“Oh, she doth wound us, Fred.”

“Yes, a sister after our own hearts.”

Amid Ginny's giggles, her twin brothers dragged her from the book store, towards one of the most liked stores on the alley, by adult and child alike; Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour.

The answers Arthur was receiving at the bank were informative at the same time they were more perplexing than the original questions. So far, the goblins' nature to not put their noses into the private business of others, at least as they would talk to others about, had given him plenty of brick walls to run into. He asked his questions, but the answers were not helpful.

“Can you tell me why the trust that controls the land my house is on has seen fit to return a hundred galleons to my account? We have been paying the appropriate sum for that land for many years and this is the first time that anything has changed. Can you tell me anything about why?”

“I'm sorry, sir. I can only tell you what the transaction record has recorded, and, as you can see, we have never recorded the why's of the galleon transfers. Wizard's thought processes matter little to goblins. What does matter is that we follow the transfer instructions.”

“If you're sure...”

“I can assure you, without a doubt, Mr. Weasley, that the money was rightfully transferred into your vault, and is indeed your money to spend as you see fit. I would not worry about what others thought when they made such a transfer. Perhaps they will see fit to inform you by post as to the change in your agreement.”

“Maybe you're right. Either way, there isn't anything more I can learn today.”

“Of course. Anything else, or can I get back to the other patrons?”

Arthur thought about it and remembered that the school had requested another transfer, the one that had started this whole mess of investigation into the origin of extra coins in the Weasley Family vault. Though his wife had guessed the amount of their mysterious windfall to be the needed seventy galleons, he had found it to be greater, a round hundred galleons, according to the register of goblin transfers involving his vault. All he had been able to learn, even after more than once asking his questions, was that the money was in his account on purpose, and was rightfully there as far as the goblins of Gringotts Bank were concerned. For now it would have to be good enough for him as well. He had still to pay for his second son's specialized education.

“Can you initiate another transfer for me at this time, seventy galleons to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry?” Arthur asked. “And I would like a receipt in the name of Charlie Weasley sent to the Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts with a note of 'NEWT Care of Magical Creatures Travel Expenses'.”

When Ginny had to decide what to order at the parlour, it was all a bit overwhelming. Her parents had taken the family there in the past, but it was always with the question of what flavor they wanted their two scoops in, and now her brothers were insisting that she get something a bit more complicated. They, in fact, insisted on toppings and nuts and sprinkles, oh, and a cherry on top. They wanted to insist on adding something that would explode with each bite, or at least pop on the plate, but Ginny was quite certain that anything like that on *her* ice cream would just not be right. In the end, they had fun with family unity and ordered a single giant banana split with three bananas and six cherries. After the first bite, any negative emotion that she may or may not have been displaying earlier was washed away on a wave of joy and sugar.

The trip to Gambols and Japes was a rip roaring success. They had showed her the rubber chickens that could run after people and bash them over the head when they least expected it without a person to wield them at all. They showed her the dung bombs in all their variety, of which at least five packs were vitally necessary for the twins to purchase, at least according to their view of the world. Various colour changing potions and delayed reaction powders made their way into the twins' inventory, sure to be the terror of all coming Hogwarts students to one degree or another. Ginny selected something that wouldn't cause any harm, just as her mother had requested of George. Luckily neither twin saw the specific color of the hair colouring potion she selected, as she didn't have a credible excuse why she wanted a red that would be much the Weasley red, and so couldn't be used on the family. No one would notice if she did, after all.

Just at the doors to the joke shop is where the whole family reunited from three fronts. Molly was leading Charlie, Ron and Percy from the direction of the quill shop and Arthur was coming fresh from the bank, as they met their twins and daughter just outside the bustling shop.

Husband and Wife locked eyes for long enough to get through the questions that the children needn't know about. A small nod from Arthur let Molly know the money that mysteriously reached their vaults was legitimate and a small ease of her shoulders and the ghost of a relieved smile told him all he needed to know, that she was happy that it had been sorted and was theirs. The specifics, what little there were, would come later in private. Had there been any trouble with the kids, Molly would have let her husband know with a look and a scowl, but there had been nothing. The twins, in fact, had earned some points by looking out for their sister so well. Molly could see the bright smile on her daughter's face quite well, as could anyone in the alley that day.

"So, have we got everything we need?" Arthur asked. "Robes? Wands? Books? Cauldrons? Batteries?"

Ginny giggled, "Silly daddy! They don't need batteries at Hogwarts. They wouldn't even work!"

"Oh, yes," he said, hamming it up a bit. "My mistake. Never can have enough batteries, though, I say. Ingenious though they are, they don't last forever."

"Got everything just fine, Arthur. Come along, kids. Time to floo home."

Molly, Arthur and the kids returned home safely and to a cacophony as all of the kids took their purchases to their rooms for storage until school, or whenever they'd need them.

Molly went immediately to the kitchen to get dinner sorted. What she found was a clean kitchen, as always, but there was just something a little off about it. It felt, to her, like it had been disturbed, somehow, just a little bit. Like everything was just a little out of place. Not that anything seemed to have moved, but just that.... She didn't know what, but it was just off.

She decided that the long day herding children at Diagon Alley had just played with her senses and she must be imagining things. With a few flicks of her wand and a bit of direction, vegetables were chopping on the block, butter was melting in a pot and potatoes were shedding their skins like snakes. She busied her hands with preparing the piece of beef that was on the menu for the night's supper. It was easy to forget all else when she was busy preparing dinner for her family.

Family Inseparable

Chapter 8

Family Inseparable: Chapter 8

By: Musings of Apathy

Before long, the weeks of August had melted away in a burst of heat that sent the Weasley brothers for a stream fed swimming hole in the woods behind the Burrow most hours of the day. To keep up appearances Ginny went with them some of the time, but mostly she contented herself with spending time alone with Harry, her invisible husband, enjoying each other's company in the woods, her room or over at her friend Luna's house. The Lovegoods didn't have a convenient swimming hole, but if it got hot, the spring fed trough beside the road was big enough for all three children to play in and splash each other. It had the added bonus of having quite cool water flowing in constantly from the natural spring.

Harry was tempted to follow the flow from the trough to a grass lined, muddy hole that was pleasantly filled with water, but Ginny forbade it due to the mud. She was right, he reasoned. It would be hard to hide himself if he were covered in mud. Even so, playing in the mud just came naturally to boys, Harry included.

Percy's birthday passed more quietly than Ginny's, but Harry had to be fair that he had been more involved in Ginny's birthday, so he noticed hers more. Harry managed to stay incognito for much of August 22nd while a couple of Percy's friends joined the Weasley family for afternoon swimming and cake with dinner. According to Ginny, Percy received a lot of books, mostly on the qualities prefects and head-boys were expected to have, not anything she considered fun.

The morning of September 1st, Harry stayed hidden in Ginny's room as a matter of self preservation and concealment. The commotion in the rest of the house would have had someone bumping into him no matter how careful he tried to be. It wouldn't be long before the whole Weasley lot departed in a muggle car that Mr. Weasley had been fixing up for some time. Apparently it took quite a bit of magic to fix up such a car, as Harry had seen Mr. Weasley working on it for hours each weekend. Although, with all of the spell work the man had put on the car, Harry doubted if he should think of it as a muggle car any longer. Indeed, the Ford Anglia had no problem fitting eight Weasleys and all of the luggage for the four school age children, and no car he had ever seen could fit five across the back seat, not even his Uncle Vernon's latest company car. His uncle's oft bragged upon car would even had a problem with two people in the back seat, if one of those two people happened to be Harry's whale spawn of a cousin.

So Harry was a spectator to the Weasley confluence by the ear alone. He could hear footfalls go down the stairs thudding like domesticated elephants. He could hear footfalls come back up the stairs quickly. He could hear footfalls come back down the stairs slowly, one thump at a time, obviously burdened with extra weight. He could hear footfalls sprint back up the stairs two at a time. He could hear footfalls rapidly coming down the stairs in a staccato, like someone had run their hand down the keyboard of a piano from the extreme left to the extreme right. Under his cloak, Harry sat in the wooden rolling chair that complemented Ginny's desk and browsed the book on family traditions, more for a distraction than anything.

"Alright, Weasleys, lets get ready to go," Harry heard Ginny's dad speak loud enough to penetrate to Ginny's room. This caused a renewal of activity, this time the sounds were heading out through the back door, Harry estimated. It seemed the luggage had been gathered and was now heading to the car.

Before the family left, Ginny remembered something in her room, according to what she told her family, allowing her to rush up and give Harry a kiss on the cheek.

"I'll be back this afternoon. After we leave, go get yourself something to eat. I know you haven't eaten enough yet today, and there is some leftover bangers in the cold cupboard."

"Thanks, Ginny. I did have an apple from the drawer, but bangers sound good," he agreed. "Have a good time with your brothers before they leave."

Once Harry could see the car had made the road from the overgrown path leading to the Burrow, he peeled off his cloak and set off down the stairs. In the kitchen he found the food, just as promised, inside the spelled cupboard that preserved everything not yet eaten. He had just fixed his plate of bangers, with some bread and fruit, when the sounds from outside gained his attention. It sounded like a car was approaching the Burrow, which seemed impossible, as no car other than the Weasley's Anglia should be visiting, as far as Ginny had told him. A look out the window confirmed that it was the small blue car that the family left in, was coming back and parking just a short shot from the patchwork house.

From the passenger door popped the sixth year Weasley, Charlie. Harry scrambled as he saw the boy sprinting for the kitchen door. He placed his plate, filled with food, on the seat of one of the chairs, which he quickly pushed tight to the table. The knife he had used was dropped into the sink, and Harry himself found room in the cupboard under the sink. Luckily for him, he was small enough to hide for some time, dodged behind the potion bottle that cleaned the dishes and the bottle for cleaning the windows. Harry had seen both used, but never by hand, always with the flannels working seemingly on their own. Harry regretted for every second in the cramped space that he had carelessly left his invisibility cloak behind in Ginny's room, not thinking of someone forgetting something and the whole family turning back.

The kitchen door slammed open as someone, Charlie, ran through, yelling, "I just be a second, dad."

Harry stayed tucked under the sink, with no view of the outside world, listening to the boy's progress until he could hear no more from his position. He strained his ears for any sign, anything that would tell him it was safe to come out. For those minutes, fear clenched his heart, telling him that he would be discovered there, that day, and it would be completely the wrong time, with the rest of the family in a hurry, departing to school and then

Arthur off to work. Harry had a sense of the right timing to reveal himself, and having it done involuntarily, when the family didn't have time to deal with him or his presence, was not the time. So, Harry shrunk back and made as little noise as he possibly could. Church mice would be heard before him.

In his mind, Harry could see that the right time was when the whole family was back together again, happy and relaxed. He knew, in the Dursley household, unsettling revelations were best dealt with when the adults had time and started calm, at least before they found out something shocking. In the Dursley household, it meant the difference between being locked in his cupboard for days, and being beaten and locked in his cupboard for days, nursing his bloody and bruised injuries. Despite his urging Ginny to reveal his presence, Harry still held the fear that he would find his treatment the same as he had grown used to, either at the hands of his new parents-in-law, or simply being sent back to the relatives that had treated him bad before. He had escaped once, he didn't think it could happen again. If he was sent back, it would be for good.

With bated breath, Harry heard Charlie's footfalls once again, descending the stairs, hammering through the kitchen, and out the back door, which protested his throwing it open with a bang against the outside wall.

"I got it!" Charlie yelled as he sprinted down the path that led from the kitchen. Harry couldn't hear anything from the direction of the car to ease his worry, but he assumed that they had left promptly to not be further late.

His heart still racing, Harry stayed under the sink long after he heard the last whisper of the car leaving. Only once he was confident, did he back out of the small space, careful not to upset the bottles and boxes stored beneath the sink. As soon as he was free, he looked around and, with a sigh of relief, sprinted up the stairs to Ginny's room to find his invisibility cloak. He kicked himself mentally with each step for forgetting such a simple, and now normal, measure to ensure his anonymity. Sliding the ethereal material over his head once again gave him some peace of mind and made him feel safe, already like a security blanket. Only once he was properly concealed, did he go back downstairs to finish his breakfast. Even then, despite the empty house, Harry decided that the safest thing he could do was sit quietly and read a book, even if it wasn't the most exciting thing in the world to do.

From what Ginny had told him, he could expect that it would be him leaving for school in two years, along with the youngest Weasley brother, Ron. Two years seemed a long time away, and Harry had no idea what the intervening time would do for him. Would it be kind or cruel. He could only hope for the best.

The week following the departure of Charlie, Percy, Fred and George found the Burrow being cleaned within an inch of its life. Harry was easily used to the cleaning, and helped out with whatever Ginny was doing, despite his non-existence in the household. Ginny and Ron, however, were not used to the level of cleaning that Mrs. Weasley insisted on. In years previous, Molly had thought her two youngest too young to give substantial help in the yearly ritual of cleaning the house after summer break was over. But, with Ron nine and Ginny eight, she felt they could do a much greater variety of chores than they had in the past. Besides, they were her only children left at home, and it was high time they learned an honest day's work, even if, in truth, she really could only call it a healthy morning's work each day. Ginny thought to protest that Ron had gotten off easy until he was nine while she was still just eight and had been doing more for the household all along, but Harry stopped her short, reasoning with her that it wouldn't be enough more for it to matter that much to them.

Ron, however, did protest; loudly and in ever more nasal of a whine. It finally came to a head in the house just a few days after their brothers left for Hogwarts. It would seem Ron had given the matter as much patience as he could muster, until there was none left and the situation had to be remedied.

"Come on mum," he argued. "All this sweeping, cleaning, scrubbing and polishing? It's girl's work. I can understand wanting Ginny to do it, she's a girl. She should be doing housework. She's been doing it for years so it's no big deal. I'm a boy and shouldn't have to do housework. I do the boy chores already. Cleaning is for girls."

While she let his steam run out, Mrs. Weasley was building quite an impressive head of her own steam. She silently became more and more incensed at her youngest boy as his argument continued. When he finished, she took a deep breath. If she opened her mouth right away, the first words would have done no good.

She considered what he said before leading off with a heated dressing down of the vane of, "How dare you..." and going decidedly down hill from there, from Ron's perspective. She chewed him up one side and down the other before deciding that he would be doing all of the chores for the month of September that Ginny would have to normally have done. For that month, Ginny only had to tidy her own room, not help with the wash or kitchen chores. Ron was correct, Ginny had been doing it for years and it was high time he saw the other side of the sickle.

This caused a small problem, once again, with Harry's wash, and how it was to get done. The only solution he and Ginny could think of was for Harry to do it himself after everyone else went to bed. The charms didn't really need to be done on the ground floor in the wash room where Molly had taught Ginny, after all. Harry would just wash whatever he had worn that day after he disrobed for bed. In practice, this worked so well that neither could say why they hadn't thought of it before. This way, there was never a pile of dirty boys clothing to be found in the youngest girl's room, with just a little diligence.

Ron's punishment looked like it would indeed last the entire month of September, which gave Ginny more free time than the previous years while the older boys were away at school. Harry didn't notice, however, having been in a far worse place at the time a year ago. To him the free time they both had was very similar to before September. Instead of chores as they performed over the summer, the second week of September brought local schooling for the youngest Weasleys. As was proper, Ginny was schooled separate from Ron; Ron with local boys, Ginny with local girls. This year Molly was taking responsibility for schooling the local wizarding family boys for Ottery St. Catchpole and the surrounding towns and hamlets. Mr. Lovegood would continue to school the local girls at his home. Harry, however, was included in the little witches' schooling as a matter of convenience and secrecy. He would continue to go with Ginny to the Lovegood cottage under his cloak and galaxy's protection, shedding them only

When it seemed safe.

There wasn't a large contingent of young witches of magical families in the area, so the addition of another student, especially of the wizard variety, would be quickly noticed in the dining room or classroom. For Luna and Ginny it wouldn't be a problem for the obvious reasons. However, they were not the only little witches in the group. In fact, on the first day of the pre-Hogwarts schooling for the girls, Harry's presence raised a question from the only other pupil, the one Harry didn't know. She was taller than Harry, which was not surprising, given that Harry was just about the same height as Ginny. The girl, a brunette with short hair and a healthy colored face, was looking at Harry with a curious, inquisitive eye. She was trying to figure him out, it seemed to him. What she was trying to figure out, Harry didn't know. He wasn't that interesting to begin with, in his own opinion.

"Mr. Lovegood?" the girl asked from her seat at the Lovegood kitchen table. "I thought this schooling was for girls."

"It is, Sarah."

"But ... he isn't a girl. Who is he?" she asked with the normal tact of a ten year old girl that was decidedly not shy.

"Hmm?" Mr. Lovegood said as he turned from the board where he had been writing numbers for them to add and subtract. "What was that, Sarah?"

"I said that he isn't a girl, but he's here. Why?"

Harry and Ginny both sat up, just waiting without knowing what to do. She hadn't addressed either of them and no one had thought to introduce Harry, so they both just waited for Mr. Lovegood's answer.

"Ah, well," he said with a smile. "He is a special case. He couldn't live with his relatives any longer, and so he is living locally. I agreed that it was best if he took lessons with Ginny and Luna, as they're the only children he knows around the area."

"But ..."

"Sarah Fawcett, let me introduce you to our newest student, Harry Potter. I'm sorry I didn't think of introductions earlier. He was over here quite a bit over the summer, and so I just didn't think of it. Harry, please meet Sarah Fawcett. She and her parents live over the hill on the far side of the village."

At the mention of Harry's name, Sarah snapped around to look at him directly. She immediately shot her eyes to his forehead, where Harry knew his scar rested. He rarely thought of his scar, but when he did, it was one of his favorite things about himself. It made him different from his cousin and relatives, and with relatives like his, he had always hoped to be different, at least from them. He hadn't figured out the significance of that one difference when Ginny had told him about his fame. He hadn't known that his name being mentioned would have people looking for his prominent forehead and its decoration.

"You're Harry Potter?"

"Yes."

"And you don't live with your family anymore?"

"No, I couldn't. I like it better where I am now, though."

"Oh ... good," she said with finality and turned to the problems on the board. Harry wasn't sure the line of questioning was done, but at least it was done for now. Lukasha observed how the young witch dealt with the famous Boy-Who-Lived and was pleased that she took it all in a curious manner, but didn't hound the boy with questions. She let him be and got back to the lessons at hand.

With their new free time, they had to come up with something better to do than stare into each other's eyes adoringly. Deep in the woods they could have time to themselves, but there wasn't much to do in those times that they hadn't already done, at least that they could think of. Oh what the passing of years and years would do for the couple's imagination.

When the subject of another marriage ceremony came up, they were both in favor. The forming of bonds was fun for them and each bond brought them closer in some immeasurable way. The ceremonies available in their book were all interesting, but most required someone else to 'officiate', which apparently meant someone had to be there during the ceremony, sort of taking part in some way, besides just the two of them. It also apparently meant that they had to be something more than a common witch or wizard. It's not like they could just ask their friend Luna to officiate their wedding, could they?

"Mum," Ginny asked after Ron had left the breakfast table one day to see to the collection of the dirty laundry from the bedrooms. He left with a grumble, and only after his mum had nagged him and commanded him three times after he finished his third helping of eggs. "Can I use daddy's tools to make something?"

Molly wiped her wet hands while she observed her daughter. "What is it you want to make, dear?"

"An altar," Ginny answered, not seeing any reason to lie to her mum.

"To marry your invisible husband again?" Mrs. Weasley asked with an inward chuckle. When Ginny nodded, she continued, "But I thought you already married him once, your invisible husband."

I did.”

“Well, I don't know anything about your father's tools, so you'll have to wait until I can talk to him about it.”

“Okay, mum,” Ginny said brightly before she grabbed an extra roll and skipped out of the house. Molly just shook her head and recalled when she was a little girl and fascinated by the concept of marriage, just like her little girl was now.

The new cleaning routine was not as pleasant for her youngest brother as it was for Ginny. He had to do more than two hours in chores each day; helping with the washing and the cleaning as well as his standing chores of weeding the yard and flinging garden gnomes. He never realized how much more time his sister must have spent on chores than he. After all, the yard weeds didn't need tending every day and the gnomes wouldn't make themselves a pest for at least three if he got them far enough into the neighboring field. They'd come back by the next day, but they didn't start to be a nuisance for days. The wash and cleaning, however, seemed to be a daily chore, even with just he, Ginny, Bill and his mum and dad to generate a mess. What was even worse, his mum was riding him harder now than she ever had before about keeping his own room tidy. His fantasy of slacking off on his room's cleanliness with his brother and roommate, Charlie, gone till Christmas were in serious jeopardy. Two weeks into his punishment and he couldn't hold it in any longer. He saw Ginny headed for the woods and ran to catch up with her.

“Ginny!” he called.

She stopped and turned, giving Harry's hand a squeeze in reassurance. “Yeah.”

“What's with all these chores? You should be doing them. They're girl chores.”

“I thought you knew why mum was punishing you. She hears you and she'll give you another fortnight of my chores, not that I would mind, just a warning.”

“What'cha goin' to do, tell?”

“No,” she smiled. “I'm going to enjoy the time off without chores.”

Ron just seemed to growl at her statement and color somewhat in the cheeks. When he clenched his fists, Harry moved himself between Ron and Ginny, so the boy couldn't touch his wife. Harry had made himself a promise that no one would hurt Ginny and he would see it done.

Ginny, for her part, could tell that Harry was standing between the two, silent and invisible. She knew he was protecting her, which made her feel warm and happy in her chest. She just smiled at her brother, through her husband's invisible form, and said, “I thought you'd be happy to be learning spells and using a wand. Isn't that what you wanted over the summer, a wand?”

“And I told you then that I wasn't going to go look for work cleaning just to have a wand in my hand.”

“Looks like you didn't have to look for it, it found you.”

“At least when the month is over, I get to stop with the constant chores. You get them for years yet.”

“They seem pretty easy to me,” she goaded him. “Maybe I'm just better with a wand than you are.”

It was obvious Ron took her claim as an affront. Harry would have found it amusing if the boy wasn't acting like a threat to his wife. That his brother-in-law had such arrogance in his wand skills when he hadn't had any experience was ridiculous, but Harry had seen the pride, and occasionally, in the extreme, arrogance, that was a part of each redhead brother. Be it major or minor, pride was a common factor in the Weasley family. Not that Harry thought it bad. The Weasleys were a great family and they had a lot to be proud about. Their pride in their values, for one thing, is what made them such a great family. Occasionally, though, one of their prides would take a walk to the wrong side of the line and turn into arrogance, as Ron seemed prone.

“Just watch,” Ron jeered in return. “When you are still here cleaning the kitchen floor, I'll be at Hogwarts where I'll be able to use a wand for more than a scourgify. I'm a year ahead of you, so you'll never be as good as me at magic.”

“Yeah, right, Ron. You'll just get distracted with chess, or if it's not that, it'll be gobstones, snaps or broom lessons. We'll see. And even a year behind, what makes you think that'll matter. I'll still be better with a wand.”

“Whatever,” Ron huffed before stalking off.

Harry turned and walked with Ginny into the woods far enough to be concealed from the house before they broke up laughing.

“What was Ron trying to do there?” Harry asked. “Prove himself to be a git? He should know he got in trouble all on his own.”

“Yeah, it's not like it's my fault he can't think not to insult mum.”

“He probably doesn't even know he insulted her, belittling housework like he did,” Harry agreed.

“Yeah, he probably doesn't. You'd think he'd learn something, but he's still on about what's girl's work and what's boy's work. Not that he does much boy's work. He waits until mum tells him to do anything before it gets done.”

“I've seen. Drives her up the walls.”

Well, my chores would be harder if you weren't here to help.”

“Ginny,” Molly addressed her daughter after she had, once again, gotten her youngest son to head off to do his long list of chores. If the boy would learn to do them early and without all of the whining and complaining, he would find they took much less of his time. “I spoke with your father. He said you could use his hand tools, if you are careful. I will be checking in on you, so no playing around irresponsibly. You may use the planks in your father’s shed to build what you want.”

“Thank you, mum,” Ginny graced her mum with a giant smile before she hugged her and left the kitchen at full speed.

In Hogwarts Castle in Scotland, the instruments were still monitoring Harry Potter’s feelings. He was still feeling happier and safer than they had ever monitored. Likewise, the wards surrounding his aunt and uncle’s house had reported no hostile witches or wizards approaching at any time since they were installed. The composite picture was a rosy one indeed. For all that, the Headmaster was pleased.

However, someone who wasn't pleased was the minder that had been given her assignment when Harry was just a year and a half old. She was returning to her home where she had collected her pension since she was assigned. A widow, she accepted the assignment from her husband's mentor without question eight years previously, not worrying about what she would have to do. It wouldn't be hard work, after all. She had her late husband's pension to pay the bills. She lived near enough to her charge, her home provided by Albus Dumbledore. She had her kneazles crossbreeds and now she had a grandchild that she would visit occasionally and spoil rotten when she had the chance. Dumbledore didn't mind when she visited her daughter; after all, it made her look all the more genuine in the eyes of the neighbors. She wished she could spend more time with the new mother, but it wasn't to be helped.

In her duties of looking in on Harry, she had to be careful. She couldn't make it seem that she was too fond of the boy, else his wretched family would never let her near. She would never hurt him, but she still had no trouble making it seem like an unpleasant place for the boy to spend time. All it required to make a child think they are being tortured was unrelenting boredom. Mrs. Figg was no fool. She knew her stories and pictures of her kneazle crossbreeds were not exciting in the least to the young. Telling Harry the stories and showing him the pictures just served to enhance his boredom and, therefore convince the Dursleys that her place was the perfect place for their nephew. And, anyway, she was quite happy about her many cats.

Upon arriving at her home by floo, she quickly let her cats from their special carrier. The single box looked similar to ones other pensioners had in the neighborhood, only it had no problem keeping all of her finicky crossbreeds happy and healthy in it's magically expanded, well outfitted interior.

Considering how tired she was from her day already, she planned to check on her charge the next day rather than attempting to contact the Dursleys immediately. She had an ice box and a cupboard to fill, and asking Petunia for Harry's help would allow her extended time to gauge his health and well being. She knew Dumbledore was confident in Harry's upbringing and care, but, of course, the man had more faith in his instruments than she. Despite what she told him, he was convinced that whatever was happening to the boy could not be that bad, else his instruments would inform him. She had seen the same thing in her contact with the muggle world. Men trusting machines to tell them what they should be using their eyes to see. She would feel a lot better when she had her own eyes on the child.

Ginny's project, her altar, was coming to its final touches, to the excitement of both her and Harry. Of course, unknown to the rest of the family, Ginny had not been working on her own. Harry had been with her every step of the way, offering assistance and what knowledge he had. After all, he knew how to build a fence, so he knew all of the skills necessary to build such a piece of furniture.

Molly Weasley did look in on Ginny at different times, several times a day, just to make sure her daughter wasn't acting foolish with the tools. While she admired the work as a mother, she could admit that it was a piece of furniture as an eight year old could build it. It wouldn't win any awards, but it did look to be an altar. The lengths her daughter would go to for her pretend marriage ceremony easily outstripped what Molly had ever approached until her own wedding at more than a decade older than the girl was now. Why, who would think to build an altar for such a thing? When Molly was a child, she was content to marry the boy rag doll to the girl rag doll her grandfather and grandmother gifted her on her seventh birthday. They had declared that a girl must have both, a boy doll and a girl doll.

The morning after Mrs. Figg arrived back from visiting her daughter during the younger woman's first child birth and subsequent adaptation time, she gathered her grocery list and set off to ask Petunia for help from the woman's nephew. The trip was slow for a woman of Mrs. Figg's advanced age. Her joints were not as limber, and her muscles not as spry, as when she was herself a first time mother, so everything was at a sedate pace.

She pressed the doorbell button of Number Four Privet Drive. Inside she could hear the Dursley's attempt at high class, with their two tone bell chimes for their ringer, but, somehow, the effect fell flat. She had visited real manors and castles that had the genuine article, save the ones with no ringer or knocker, where a staff would greet a visitor at the door and announce their presence to the master of the house. No tacky bell would disturb the residents of the nicest domiciles in the Empire.

“Hello, Mrs. Figg,” the mistress of the house answered when she opened the door. As normal, she had a look on her face as if she considered herself better than whomever inflicted her with their presence. Her nose in the air, she looked down on every other commoner she came across.

“Hello, dear,” Arabella Figg offered a smile. “I was hoping your nephew, young Harry, could help me with my shopping this morning.”

In the background she could hear electronic the beeps and pows that permeated the house whenever the woman's rotund son was home rather than terrorizing the neighborhood.

"Oh, well, I am afraid that's not possible," was the immediate answer, no room for doubt.

When Petunia Dursley herself answered the door, Mrs. Figg naturally assumed the boy must be out back weeding or tending the roses, so she proceeded on that assumption. "Well, if the boy is busy, I could delay my shopping until later. It is just too much for me to carry these days. Perhaps when he is done in your back garden he would be available?"

"No, I'm afraid you didn't understand me. The ungrateful little freak has done a runner. We do our best to provide for him and he runs away without so much as a thank you or a by your leave. Just disappeared."

"That's strange," Mrs. Figg said, thinking it not strange at all with the treatment he receives at the hands of his relatives.

"Not especially for him, the freak. Don't you remember? He's done it before."

"No, no, I can't say I do remember. Of course, the mind is not what it used to be."

"Well, he has tried to run before when he didn't like one chore or another."

"If you say so, dear. You would know better than I," Mrs. Figg feigned agreement. "I still have to go to the grocers. Perhaps young Dudley could help?"

"No, I am afraid that he is busy and can't possibly help you with your shopping."

From inside the house, Mrs. Figg could clearly hear a large electronic explosion from one of Dudley's games, followed by loud cursing of the sort that Mrs. Figg would have laid hands on her own child, had she used such language when she was a child. Obviously Mrs. Dursley had no interest in having her son help an elderly local neighbor, nor could she bother to offer any more convincing reasoning to cover her decision.

"Oh, well, perhaps another time."

After they exchanged pleasantries, Mrs. Figg left Mrs. Dursley and her lies behind. Mrs. Figg knew for certain her charge, Harry Potter, had never run away from his relatives house before. Although it was surprising he hadn't, it was still true; this was the first time Harry had run from home. It was suspicious to her, and that left only one thing she could do. She rushed home as fast as her old body would carry her.

Harry was finding school to be quite interesting. They learned reading and writing, which he had down pretty well, although his writing lessons did help him improve. They learned basic math and history, which, of the two, Harry was much more interested in the history that Mr. Lovegood was teaching. Their books were standard ones published for all wizarding children of their age, but Mr. Lovegood was very detailed in the stories he augmented the printed material with. Luna told them, during a break, that the stories he told didn't necessarily take place in this happening, but assured them that they all did in some happening, even if it wasn't the one they were experiencing now. This confused the other children, but, confused or not, Harry had learned to accept and trust the different perspective of his friend and her father.

The most useful of the lessons as his time learning passed was with practice wands. The sticks were shaped like the wands he and Ginny had found in his family's vault, only they weren't nearly as warm, and certainly they didn't tingle in the slightest at his touch. There was something there, but just not as much of something as with his family's old wands.

"Go ahead, wave them around," Mr. Lovegood told them.

Harry did just that, causing a small stream of colourless sparks to rain from the wand in his hand. It was less than the better wands from the Potter vault, but more than the lessers. Exchanging a glance with Ginny, they quickly switched wands and tried again. Both of their wands emitted the same small fountain of sparks as before the switch, causing a small chuckle from their teacher.

"All of the practice wands are the same. Fairly neutral and rather low powered, so they will work for any witch, or wizard in this case. Wouldn't be enough to start Hogwarts with, but it'll be enough for now."

"Okay, Mr. Lovegood. What...?" Harry trailed off, not wanting to be rude.

"What are we going to do with them? We're going to learn wand movements, Harry. The others did this last year, so they can help you along."

Harry looked at the older girl, Sarah, and was unsure what help he could get from her. She was nice enough, but Harry was still basically shy and didn't talk to her much. This was her last year of prep before she started Hogwarts, just a year ahead of him, but she already seemed to know her work so much better than Harry. Shifting his gaze to Ginny, he knew he would be alright either with or without Sarah's help, with Ginny to help him..

"Dumbledore! Professor Dumbledore!" the fiery head yelled from the fireplace in the round stone office. "Where is he? Albus Dumbledore!"

Her cries were heard by several dozen portraits that contained the essence of men and women long passed, a quite disreputable looking old pointed hat, and a magnificently feathered, long neck bird on a golden perch. The portraits looked on and mumbled in curiosity, but none offered assistance. The hat was pulled from its musings on the twin redhead Gryffindor first years he had sorted a fortnight ago. He had been contemplating the mischief the two would get into over their academic careers at Hogwarts, especially if he could get the castle to make sure they found certain things. The ancient leather hat, preserved through magics long past the time when any would expect such a leather hat to exist, could do nothing other than what was already being done by the complex charms that must have been triggered to alerted the Headmaster to a visitor requesting him in his office. The bird, a phoenix, knew that such charms would not tell the Headmaster of the urgency it could hear in the visiting woman's voice. It decided to help.

In the great hall, the students enjoyed their lunch while they studied for their next class, finished one parchment or another, or simply talked with their friends. The lunch time meal was the most relaxed of the three, allowing for the houses to mingle to some extent. Few students took advantage of it, but it was allowed. Percy Weasley took some advantage of the relaxed atmosphere to sit next to a friend from Ravenclaw that made him smile in a way that he didn't understand completely. He didn't know if the same was true for her, but he knew he liked it, and at the moment, that was enough.

As was normal, the professors also attended the great hall for lunch, save the Divination Professor, who rarely ventured down from the north tower where she both conducted her classes and made her home. At the slightly raised fifth table, the professors were in their normal seats, Professor Snape at one end and Professor Vector at the other. However, lunch for everyone was interrupted when a flash of phoenix fire flared in front of the head table. The Headmaster, Professor Dumbledore, rose from his seat at the center of the table and held his arm up for his phoenix, Fawkes, to perch. The muted din in the hall dimmed to the whisper of student speculation. The teachers looked to their Head, silently questioning what the disturbance could be about.

Professor Dumbledore looked at the firebird perched on his arm directly in the eye and got the impression of some urgency connected with the notice from the charms that had already notified him of a visitor. He had known of the visitor, but assumed they could wait for some minutes while he finished his lunch duties. The message, or feeling, from his familiar told a different story. He received the feeling that he should not dally, that maybe the visitor could not wait.

“If you will excuse me,” he said loud enough to be heard, but quiet enough to give the impression to the students that he was addressing the professors rather than students. “It seems that I have some business to attend to.”

After a nod from his deputy, he patted his lips and mustache clean a final time and left the top table. His phoenix quickly took flight and vanished in a ball of pure flame. The hall stayed quiet until such time as the Headmaster departed, releasing the torrent of speculation from the students who had never before seen the Headmaster's fiery familiar and teachers who were curious as to what Fawkes could have communicated to the aged wizard. Were it times not that many years ago, times of deep fear before the You-Know-Who's defeat, Professor McGonagall might have needed to calm the students and teachers, but the muttering was curious in nature rather than something of a panic.

Immediately after the altar was completed and had been colored to Ginny and Harry's satisfaction, they carried it between them into the woods once they thought the coast to be clear and Mrs. Weasley wouldn't be looking. They had their normal spot in the woods set aside to place their new creation, but the thing would be too large for either of them to handle alone. They wanted to get it there right away, because they had a use for it before the day was through.

Even though they thought she would be otherwise busy, they were not completely correct in thinking Ginny's mum would be safely cleaning the living room at this particular time in the morning. Their judgment of timing was hampered by their lack of wrist watches, a circumstance that was normal in the wizarding world, especially among the young children. As such, their judgement was slightly off allowing Molly to see her daughter manhandling the finished piece, seemingly on her own, into the woods the girl had taken to disappearing into. Molly, ever curious and protective of her brood, set her cleaning aside to check on Ginny in her own stomping grounds.

The Headmaster made it to his office in rather better time than most would have guessed a man of his apparent age could. Still, no matter how fast, the woman waiting for his company was not a spry maiden herself, and kneeling with her head in a fire did not sit to make her temperament calm and pleasant.

“Headmaster!” she said as he entered the office.

“Arabella!” he said in his unsurprised, welcoming manner. “What a pleasant surprise! Please, come through.”

“I think you should come here, Albus. Something has happened.”

With a wave of his wand, Professor Dumbledore lifted his floo restriction and beckoned her through.

“I have a school full of students. Come through to my office and we'll see if I need to inform Minerva of my leaving.”

Grudgingly, Arabella Figg pulled her head back and stood stiffly to her feet. *If wizards were as smart as they thought they were, they'd install fireplaces at chest height so you could talk through them without nearly crippling yourself*, she fumed to herself. She reached for the floo pot above the fireplace once again and tossed a large pinch into the yellow fire. She stepped into the newly green flames and called out, “Hogwarts Headmaster's Office.”

In the woods behind the Burrow, Harry and Ginny Potter once again prepared to bond themselves in marriage, this time with the addition of an altar. They had no idea that, back at the house, someone was removing her apron, intending to follow her daughter into the same woods.

Family Inseparable

Chapter 9

Family Inseparable: Chapter 9

By: Musings of Apathy

Molly Weasley walked calmly through the wood behind her house, a very small basket hanging from her hand. She knew her daughter was within, somewhere along the trail she traveled; she had, after all, seen Ginny enter this particular path. A simple spell, common for mothers, kept her following the right path, even as it forked. She wasn't worried about reaching her destination with any speed or stealth. Her children knew she checked up on them on occasion, and she trusted and respected them enough to not pounce on them from the bushes. She would, after all, know if they had done anything wrong. A traditional mother's little helper spell let her know each time her little darlings hurt themselves. Really, she didn't worry, but it was still her duty to check on her children. At least she could keep up appearances, with a few small snacks and a letter from Charlie in the basket for her daughter.

"Now, what is it that has you so concerned, Arabella?" Albus said calmly, despite what had brought him to his office. He stood behind his desk, ready to sit in his chair, and motioned an offer for the elderly woman to sit in one of the guest chairs facing. "I would offer you tea, but what you have to say seems urgent."

"It is, Headmaster," Mrs. Figg said in a panicked, rushed tone. She ignored his offer of a chair, pacing back and forth, worrying the handle of her purse. "Harry's gone."

"Harry Potter isn't at the Dursley residence?" the Headmaster asked. He came from behind his desk to lean on the far side. If his guest would not be sitting, he shouldn't either. He looked to the silver spinning and puffing gadgets that dotted his shelves and saw nothing different than he had seen before. "I was sure he was alright. My instruments you see... Perhaps you should tell me everything."

"Well, I returned from Cynthia's yesterday afternoon," she told him. "I'm so sorry, Professor. I thought it would be alright to wait until today to go check on him. I brought my shopping list. Thought I'd ask Petunia to have young Harry assist me at the market. I played up the dottering old woman a bit to make sure, but when I got there she said Harry wasn't available to help. I asked if I could come back later when he wasn't busy, but she said he wasn't gardening in the back, but that he had done a runner. He left in the middle of the night near two months ago. What are we to do? He could be in danger."

"Are you completely certain?" Dumbledore asked. "My instruments don't indicate the approach of any wizards and that he feels safer and happier now than in the past."

"Well, there you go, Professor," Mrs. Figg said conclusively. "That proves he isn't at the Dursleys. He's never been exactly happy with his relatives. If he's happy and he feels safe, he can't be within reach of any of those people; his Uncle, his Aunt or his cousin. None of the three would stand for his happiness."

"That is indeed unfortunate, if what you say is true. But, perhaps the instruments are mistaken in his level of happiness," he reasoned. "Perhaps he was simply unavailable due to a punishment for some boyish misbehaving. After all, he is just nine. Who knows what all he could have done that would warrant him being restricted to his room."

"But why would Petunia tell me he had left?" Mrs. Figg asked.

"Merlin only knows," the Headmaster sighed. "Perhaps she thought he would have had too much of a good time during his punishment if she had allowed him to go along with. Who knows how the woman thinks. Your role may have been discovered."

"I doubt that, Professor," she replied. "I haven't ever seen Harry any more than slightly relieved to be at my house in all of the times I have sat for him. He doesn't seem to have a love for cats, at least not mine. I believe he has really done a runner. I think he's gone."

"That is most distressing," Dumbledore fretted. "Most distressing, indeed."

Disturbed by the news that the young boy was missing, as he was becoming convinced as well, a confused Headmaster allowed the elderly Mrs. Figg to go back through the floo. She asked that he come along as soon as he could. She would be checking with the neighbors, finding out what she could about the boy wizard's disappearance.

Before the green flame died down in the quieted office, Professor Dumbledore was out through the door proper, negotiating the spiraling stairs as quick as his long robes would allow. With the vast responsibility he carried, he couldn't just up and leave, at least not without notifying his deputy.

Molly's walk through the wood was beginning to make her worry. She hadn't come across her daughter yet, even with the use of her mum's tracking spell. The spell still insisted she go further into the woods along the same path she was traveling. With seven children, she learned long ago which spells she could trust to not lead her astray, and this was one of the better. Finally with her wand pointing her to a small clearing, Molly found her daughter.

"Ginny, what are you up to?" Molly called into the clearing.

Professor Dumbledore was through Mrs. Figg's floo in Little Whinging before the end of ten minutes. He had to be proud of his decision those years ago to appoint Minerva McGonagall his deputy. The witch was the best he had ever met, able to understand and adapt to whichever new situation she was faced with in moments. She hardly even had to be told he was going to Little Whinging to check on the Dursleys before she assured him she would keep the school well in control while he investigated Mr. Potter's disappearance. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he waited with dread for the stern woman to remind him of her opinion those nearly eight years ago. He couldn't dwell on that thought, however. She would remind him, he was sure, if for no other reason than to keep him humble. In their friendship, it seemed his deputy had taken on the role of keeping him from completely believing his own press.

His only pause before finally stepping through the floo was to transfigure his clothing to that of a well dressed muggle and do a switching spell to move his beard to a bust amongst the rest of his baubles. He rarely visited muggles, some trips to muggle shops on occasion, but it was enough to understand what would be acceptable attire. No fool, he knew his robes were garish even for the eccentric wizarding society.

Albus Dumbledore stepped from the floo at Mrs. Figg's house, on Magnolia Crescent, with nary a spot of smoot on his dark suit, a skill he had not mastered until his age reached the triple digits. Working with Nicholas Flamel had left him much to aspire to, still. The oldest man on Earth, by all reliable accounts, performed such control of magic as to make it seem natural.

Ginny and Harry had just finished their ceremony and had separated when Ginny's mum calmly walked into the clearing. They both immediately froze in shock. There was no way around it, they were discovered. The only saving grace that prevented her mum from entering the clearing full of rage, was that the ceremony they had just completed, the first with the new altar, had no words or other sounds. This ceremony was all intent as they looked deeply in each other's eyes and connected with their left hands and wand tips. That Ginny was still grasping a smooth, red wand, and Harry still had a natural, crooked wand, just made the entire scene all that more incriminating, they knew.

Petunia Dursley had had a bad feeling about this day from when she woke up. She refused to think that she would have anything so strange as intuition, much less anything like her sister had talked about; seeing the future indeed. No, she had none of that freakishness in her, nor would she ever.

Her feelings had not settled in the least when the old woman from around the corner who was normally willing to watch over the brat, good riddance, showed up at her door, asking about the whelp. Carry her groceries, she wanted. And then, when she was told Harry wasn't there anymore, she had the gall to suggest her precious Duddikins help her out, like the freak had done before. Well, Petunia would have none of that. Her precious had better things to do than help some pensioner to the store. This was his time to rest from school, the weekends. She wouldn't have her son taxed by such menial tasks. Her solid boy was destined for greater things, just like his father.

A knock at the door startled her, just as it had earlier when the old crone had come around. She looked through the peep to see an old man, well dressed, but with indecently long hair. Why a man who would attire himself in a well crafted suit would show such a deficit in character with such obscene hair was beyond her. Reluctantly, she opened the door half way.

"Hello, Petunia," the old man greeted her as soon as her face appeared. "How are you today?"

"Do I know you?" the housewife asked.

"Can't say we have met in a rather long time, but I believe we do know each other."

"Who...?"

"Perhaps if you would permit me to come in, we could conduct our business in the privacy of your home?" he asked, looking directly in her eyes.

The woman looked left and right cautiously, as if to see twenty neighbors peeping from every fence and hedge. With a slightly frightened nod, she gestured him into her home.

"Now, who are you and what do you want?" she asked him after the necessities had been completed.

"I am Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. I was a friend of your sister and her husband. I believe you know of me, if not know me altogether."

"You're one of them. You're one of those freaks. You're the one who put that abomination with us, forced us to take him."

"This is most distressing. Where is Harry Potter?" the Headmaster asked, getting angry and upset.

"I don't have to tell you anything. Get out of my house!" she screamed shrilly at the wizard.

"Now, Petunia," the aged man said as he slowly pulled his wand from seemingly nowhere. "I am sure we can be reasonable about this."

The woman visibly shrank back from the angered wizard upon seeing his instrument, his weapon. "He's gone. He just up and disappeared one night a couple of months ago. That's all I can tell you."

"But where did he go? How did he leave? Why did he leave? Did someone take him? There are still so many questions that need answering."

"But I don't know anything else," Petunia assured him. "He just vanished one night without so much as a 'by your leave'. His door was locked and the house was locked. I don't know where he went. Must have been one of those damned freak things. I don't know anything else."

"This is most unfortunate," Dumbledore said with regret. His wand came up to point the woman in between the eyes. "I am very sorry, Petunia. *Legilimens*."

"Ginny, there you are, darling. What have you been doing?"

Ginny was near panicking inside her mind. She had been caught with her husband performing yet another wedding ceremony. She was still riding the high the bonding produced, the very same reason Ginny and Harry kept exploring new ways to expand their bond, was making it hard to be too sad or frightened about anything at the moment. Her years as the youngest of seven kicked in, allowing her to tell the greatest, and most repeated lie to her mum's question.

"Nothing, mum." A lie, just like every time a child says they are doing nothing.

"Well, you sure went to a lot of effort for nothing. When I was a little girl, I remember playing at marriage several times, although I usually married one of my little dollies."

Confused, Ginny said, "I'm sorry, mummy. I'm sorry I didn't marry one of my dollies."

Molly chuckled at her daughter's misunderstanding. "No, that's not what I meant. I just meant that I usually did it in my own house with a dolly, rather than a tree stump, an attractive one to be sure, but certainly different than a dolly."

"A tree stump?" Ginny asked, looking between Harry, who was frozen, petrified in fright, and her mum.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I've forgotten what it was like to pretend. A mighty fine husband you've found there, dear. I hope he'll take proper care of you."

Ginny was getting more and more confused. She could see Harry standing still on the far side of the altar, just as he had when her mum entered the clearing. Why, her mum's teasing made no sense. "Um, sure he does."

"Okay, dear. I can see you're well taken care of. I'm off to see to the roast. I brought you a little snack basket to tide you over until dinner and a letter from your brother Charlie. If you can pry yourself from your honeymoon, please join us. Don't forget you should answer your brother's letter."

"O-kay," Ginny answered now supremely confused, the basket of goodies hanging from her hand. She knew her mum was teasing her, but she didn't know exactly what just happened. Before she could contemplate it further, her mum was off back to the trail leading to the family home.

The series of events Dumbledore saw through his mind magic just confirmed what the Headmaster had been told from both Mrs. Figg, and strangely the woman before him, Mrs. Dursley. Harry had disappeared over the course of one night more than two months previous. No trace had been shown since the woman's blood nephew disappeared, not that the woman had looked in the slightest. Apparently the only changes in her routine the boy's disappearance necessitated was falsifying evidence of the boy's housing arrangements before calling the authorities, and shifting her schedule to make sure all of the chores were completed.

The Headmaster, of course, found the treatment the Dursleys poured on their nephew to be appalling. There was no doubt the couple found no love for their charge, but not even a man so experienced around children could have expected them to treat family so shoddily. He was equally sure their treatment of their own son was doing the boy no favors. Already Dudley Dursley was showing signs he would not be prepared for life as an adult, even ten years hence. He had enough experience as an educator to see the truth behind Petunia's overwhelming sense of pride in her son, that the boy would not make it through school with any sort of honors, at least as far as educational goals could be counted.

"I see," Dumbledore said after reviewing the woman's memories, which left her a bit cloudy in mind. "Petunia... Mrs. Dursley!"

With his shout, she came out of her mind magic induced stupor. "What is it you want? You can see he isn't here any longer. Your business here is done. You may leave post haste."

"Mrs. Dursley, you were given the simple task of taking in your sister's only son, an orphan, into your home and seeing to his care and growth. You seem to have failed in that. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"We, neither my husband nor myself, was asked if we even wanted the brat in our home. What right do you have to put him here without asking?"

"Madame, in my day, when a family was in need, help was provided no matter the rivalry between sisters, brothers or cousins. Can you not see your responsibility in this?"

"We provided the boy with clothes on his back, food in his belly and a good sense of his place in the world. We were responsible for nothing more."

"The only thing that should limit young Harry's place in the world is his own desire and hard work. With his family's standing, he could be anything from a humble cobbler to the leader of this land, whatever he chose."

"I shudder to picture a freak in such an important position. Leader indeed. I suppose he might lead your group of freaks, but who would care. Long as him and those like him stay away from the good, upstanding people that lead this great nation, the normal ones of us in this nation, I could care less who your kind picks to tell them what to do."

"What in the world just happened?" Ginny asked her husband after her mum was out of earshot. She was very confused about what could have caused her mum to act so strange.

“You don't suppose she really did just see me as a tree stump, do you?” Harry asked.

“I don't see how,” Ginny said. “You were right there.”

“Maybe, with the necklace messing with how she noticed me,” Harry reasoned, “and with this wand looking like a little branch, maybe the magic or something made her think I was a stump.”

“That's just...” she said, screwing her face up to wrap her mind around the strange happenings and theories. “I don't think I'll ever understand magic. It doesn't seem it'll ever be simple.”

“I don't think it's supposed to be simple or understood. If it was, it wouldn't be magic.”

“I'll have you know that there have been several ministers and dignitaries throughout the history of Britain who possessed a great amount of skill in the magical arts,” Dumbledore educated her. “As history has it, they were quite accomplished in their roles in government, as well. It has only been in the last couple of centuries that the separation between our worlds has become more pronounced.”

“I don't know what you're on about, but if we're separate from you freaks,” Petunia spat, “I'll be that much happier. I think it time you left. There is nothing more for you here.”

“There is still the question of the disposition of young Harry if he is found,” Dumbledore soldiered on.

“Do with him what you will,” she instructed him, “he left this house of his own choosing and as far as I am concerned, he can stay gone.”

“You are his only living relative,” he reminded her. “Neither his father's family, nor you own, was ever a large one, and the recent times have hit both hard, although a long life was never a Potter trait. They have greatly tended to make their impression on the world grand and early in life. Thus, you are the only one left to care for him.”

“I told you before,” she argued, “he is not wanted here.”

“Perhaps if I were to address some of your concerns,” the Headmaster bargained, “we could come to an arrangement that would provide for his satisfactory care. Maybe a discussion over a cup of tea?”

“Do you suppose the necklace would work that well on the others?” Harry asked, chomping into a carrot.

Ginny contemplated the thought. “I don't know, but we can't risk it.” She liked the cheese and crackers her mother included. The cheese was a good sort, with a bit of a tooth to its flavor.

“I know, you're right,” Harry agreed. They lapsed into a comfortable silence. “Did you like that ceremony?”

Ginny smiled at him beautifully. “Very much. It was weird with my mum there while I could still feel the magic, but it was very nice.”

“I'm glad. I enjoyed it too. I was just too frozen when your mum came to hug or kiss you like normal. I hope you weren't too disappointed by that.”

“It would have been great, but I know neither of us could help it,” Ginny said. “Besides, you'll hold me tonight, and that's good too.”

Harry let that go without response.

“Shall we read the letter from Charlie?” Ginny asked.

“It's your letter, Ginny. I'd love to hear what he had to say, though.”

Ginny unfolded the parchment after breaking the wax seal. Like most children, she didn't know to appreciate her mum for all that she was and all the trust she gave. The fact that the wax was still sealed didn't register as having an alternative, one where her parents might have not trusted her and would open and read her mail before she could. One day, she might learn that not all parents were as good as hers, but hopefully it would be many years before that life's little reality reared its ugly head.

“*Dear Ginny,*” she read.

“We are bound for our first trip to a preserve this coming weekend. Our professor tells us the first will be a trip to Egypt's Nile river delta where there is a colony of Sphinxes. This is a real treat. Sphinxes are very intelligent, more intelligent than I will ever be I am afraid, and were gracious enough to allow our class to visit. For the last two weeks we have been studying their practices and cultures. It appears they work with the wizarding world to protect their colonies, as their magical abilities are not the sort that would protect and hide them from muggles, which has led to the cooperative nature of their agreement. Wizards called Rangers are employed to work with the sphinxes and to maintain wards around their colony that have managed to keep the local muggles in the dark as to the continued existence of the noble magical creatures. Did you know that the sphinx was so revered by the ancient Egyptians that they built a tomb for a respected sphinx advisor to Pharaoh Khafra around 4500 years ago? The monument still is around to this day. According to wizarding history, the muggles have never unearthed the burial chamber, even though the magics protecting it have never been renewed. Can you imagine if the muggles came across that mummy?

“But, the reason I am writing to you is somewhat confusing. I checked my supplies for the upcoming trip, and found the money sack you gave

me. I admit, when you said I had been saving your allowance, I pictured a nice collection of knuts and sickles. What I found, though, was a bag full of gold, as I'm sure you know. You didn't do anything silly like dip into some sort of dowry savings mum and dad set aside, did you? I don't want to take any money that will affect your future, Firefly. If the gold was from a dowry sum, you will need that money when you've attracted a great wizard. You know tradition as well as I. If the money wasn't from that, where did you get it? I can't imagine any of our brothers having such an amount, either in Gringotts or in a stash around the house, not that I would dream in a thousand years you would take from one of our brothers. I would never think you had stolen for this money.

"Please, I haven't said anything to mum and dad, but you have to tell me where you got the money. We are Weasleys and we are proud and upstanding. I await your owl. I leave by portkey before sunrise Saturday, so make your answer fast.

"Love,

"Charlie"

Ginny set the letter down on the grass they were both kneeling in. Both her and Harry were shocked and a little scared. They had been concealing him for so long, they were a bit panicked at being found out. They felt a tightness in their chests and their hearts clenched.

"This is not good," Harry said. "What are we going to do? I don't know what we can do."

"I don't know either, Harry," Ginny said. "We have to come up with a way to make Charlie happy. We can't tell him that the money was yours, though. That would just bring too much up."

"It's your money too, Ginny," Harry insisted. "We'll have to think of something."

"I know," Ginny said. She lapsed into silent thought for a moment. Harry could tell that, whatever she was thinking, it wasn't easy for her. "I can't lie to him. I can't lie to my brother."

"I'm sure we won't have to," Harry assured her. "We'll tell him the whole truth if we have to."

Harry pulled Ginny in and held her tight. Neither had the age or wisdom to realize that the deception they were perpetrating, even if not an outright lie, was what was causing their grief. If they were lucky, they would learn their lesson while they were still children, and not perpetrate lies in the future. But, for them, at that moment, they didn't yet know how much simpler and happier life could be without having to hold a deception.

Professor Dumbledore arrived at Gringotts after coming to a satisfactory understanding with Petunia Dursley. The woman wouldn't be convinced to act in the best interest of her nephew for altruistic motivations, but there were other incentives for her to act as a good aunt should. And, perhaps, if her son was provided with a good education at university once he was grown, the world would be a better place. He could think of no greater good.

"May I speak with the head of accounts, please," Professor Dumbledore asked of the teller once he was able to reach the front of the queue. The goblins unsettled the old professor quite too easily. His experiences with them proved they were none to be tangled with. They held little respect for wizards or their accomplishments. The magic wielded by a goblin accomplished all of the things important to a goblin, and little else would registered to them as of consideration.

"If he will see you, you may. Wait over there," the teller said with a sharp pointed finger. The teller made another entry into his leather bound ledger, ignoring any other actions from the Headmaster. He, regally, went to where the teller indicated. Before long, not even a quarter hour, he was ushered through the lobby to more administrative parts of the bank. He had too many interactions with the bank to be surprised, but in all of his years he had never been able to detect a goblin's magic. He hadn't seen the teller indicate to anyone what he needed, but here he was, being ushered into an office labeled 'Head of Accounts'.

"What is it?" he was gruffly asked immediately upon entering the office. The goblin never looked up from his ledger which he was constantly making entries in, the purpose of which, Dumbledore had no idea.

"A young orphan has gone missing from his guardian's care," Dumbledore answered. "I was hoping Gringotts could assist in locating the boy."

"Most unusual," the goblin growled. "This isn't something that would normally involve Gringotts. After all, we are a bank, not a locator service."

"I am merely looking for information," Dumbledore said. "It could all total up to finding the boy safely."

"Ah, but information is a very prized and cherished commodity," the goblin reasoned. "Gringotts has not risen to the trust it has with customers by sharing its clients' information with other members of the public."

"But I am the Supreme Mugwump," Dumbledore argued. "Surely I have the ability and duty to investigate a matter which involves the safety of one of the wizarding world's underage citizenry?"

"Very well," the goblin grumbled unwillingly. "Who is the child who has gone missing?"

"Harry James Potter," the Headmaster answered, "son of Lily and James Potter."

"Let me see," the goblin said as he turned to the latter part of his ledger. A few more thumbed pages and he was apparently where he wanted to be, as he started reading, guiding his way down the page with the feather tips of his quill. "So, that would mean you are inquiring about activity on..."

"Harry Potter's trust vault, number 687," the Headmaster answered the obvious prompt.

With another flip of the page, the goblin reviewed one more thing before snapping the large book shut. “It seems there has been no activity from that vault since its original deposit. It would seem he has not accessed his trust account. Is there something else I can help you with?”

Professor Dumbledore hadn't expected to find the boy had run from his muggle relatives and happened to find his parents' legacy in the wizarding world's bank, but he had hoped. It was just the first of many leads he had to investigate. A quick look at his watch, with the planets circling the center, showed him he was truly out of time this day for business away from school grounds. Perhaps he could find some quiet assistance in the future.

“No,” he said as he rose from the chair. “I believe that is all you can help me with. Thank you for your time.”

The Headmaster walked down the hall, back to the lobby without a backwards glance. Had he looked to where he had come, rather than doggedly to where he was headed, he might have seen the goblin he was just dealing with moving in the opposite direction with a smile on his face and a bounce to his step that would have been rather startling from a goblin, who are not known to be the most jovial of races.

Harry and Ginny managed to not let the gravity of Charlie's letter weigh them down for the rest of the afternoon. They still managed to have some fun, playing in the forest. They didn't perform any other marriage ceremonies, but there was plenty of running and laughing. A child's mind is wonderfully able to get on with what is important to them, namely play, but Harry and Ginny were not to be completely distracted. They both knew they still needed a solution, something to tell Charlie that would keep their secret but not be a lie.

“Maybe we could just tell him,” Harry said. “Do you think he would keep our secret?”

Ginny worried her lower lip. She loved her brother, but she had learned that brothers that much older had different ideas of what needed to be told to their parents. Charlie was no tattle-tale, running off on every little thing, but she knew he would tell her parents about anything he thought they needed to know. She was afraid her being married and her husband living in the house would be one thing he would think they should know.

“No, I think he'd tell,” Ginny answered. “He'd want them to know. He wouldn't be like Grandmum. Least she was willing to keep our secret.”

Harry's face lit up with an idea. “You don't suppose we could write to your grandmum and ask her for help?”

Ginny thought about it for a moment. “I think you might be right. Maybe she could help.”

“Did you bring any parchment and ink?” Harry asked.

“No,” Ginny answered. “We'll have to write her tonight after dinner.”

“Okay,” Harry said. He enveloped her in a hug and told her everything would be alright.

Headmaster Dumbledore arrived back at Hogwarts just before the dinner service was to start. He considered the timing to be quite fortuitous. He could sit and pass word through the other teachers at the table to gather after the students were dismissed for a staff meeting. Harry being missing isn't something he wanted to go shouting to the Prophet at this moment, but he would need more help than just Arabella Figg, and he wasn't prepared to gather the old crowd just yet.

Harry and Ginny left the clearing for home well before the risk of sunset. They knew her mum was joking when she all but gave permission for her to stay out. Ginny knew everyone had to be at the dinner table when the sun set, no later. Harry put his arm around her shoulder as they walked back to the Burrow, his cloak and galaxy firmly in place for protection. They still had thought of no real solution to Charlie's curiosity, but they knew they needed to owl him within a few days or trouble would just be starting.

They lapsed into silence for the remainder of the walk back. Behind the broom shed, they shared a child-like kiss, their lips puckered in a parody of an adult kiss. Perhaps in time they would learn how kisses are meant to be shared between husband and wife. Perhaps when they grew older.