

Nothing and Everything Good

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The residents of Little Whinging were in agreeance about two things. It had been abnormally depressing and misty for summer – a condition which had persisted since last year – and the sound coming from the open window of the smallest bedroom of the Dursleys was a clear indicator of someone or something very out of the ordinary.

Harry Potter was sitting on his bedroom's wooden floor, dragging a fork across the grain and leaving deep scratches in the once pristine surface. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he knew that his aunt would be livid with him when she saw him, but so far, she had not bothered to enter his bedroom that summer. Even if she had seen what he'd done, he simply couldn't bring himself to care.

A hollow space had been carved into Harry's chest since last month when he left Ginny at Dumbledore's funeral. The ride home from Hogwarts had done nothing to decrease the empty feeling that threatened to suffocate him at any moment as he stared languidly at Ginny's reflection in the window of the carriage they shared with Ron and Hermione. Ginny had been accepting of his decision to seek Voldemort alone – too accepting, he now thought – and the resulting wall that had sprung up between them seemed to act as a very personal, very stubborn Dementor. Nothing Harry had done since his arrival in Little Whinging had lessened the emotionally strangling sensation, and by the time July had arrived, he was certain that death would almost be preferable to it.

It took enormous willpower to stay with the Dursleys that summer. Whenever Dudley would sneak a punch in the stomach, or he'd been given a particularly small portion at mealtimes, the desire to leave the abusive situation was almost overwhelming. It was only the memory of his promise to Dumbledore that kept him there. For even in death, his mentor continued to hold sway on his heart.

His eyes wandered to the glowing red numbers on his clock. It was almost time to leave.

He wrenched himself from the floor and lazily began to pack his belongings. Trainers, trousers, socks, and books were piled into the battered trunk. His copy of Advanced Potion Making lay on top; the one that once belonged to Professor Snape – the Half-Blood Prince. He covered it with an old, smelly shirt and searched his room for more of his belongings before the anger surrounding that memory returned.

Prising loose one of the floorboards, Harry shone his lit wand into the hollow space to check for anything he may have missed. A few crumbs of long-eaten cake from Mrs. Weasley and a wrapper from a Pepper Imp reflected the light, but nothing more.

On the tiny nightstand next to his bed, Harry gently took a framed picture of his parents, dancing amidst falling leaves. They paused and smiled at him, waving as if they didn't know they were about to be murdered. Harry moved to the trunk and was about to place the picture inside when he stopped. Looking more closely at the photograph, something struck him. He had always known he'd looked very much like his father and confirmed that fact by checking his reflection in a mirror on the wall. When he looked back down again, his eyes lingered on his mother and his breath caught in his chest. She looked an awful lot like Ginny with her long red hair and freckles. The only difference was a slight variation in the cheeks and the eyes. The thought of him and Ginny dancing carefree together forced his heart to beat rapidly in this chest. What had he been thinking? How could he have left her? How could he tear himself away from the only person he'd ever really... loved?

That's what it was, Harry had decided during the last few weeks of solitude. It was why he'd left her in the first place and remembering why renewed his resolve. Voldemort would use his love for her against him and he honestly didn't know if he'd be able to choose between Ginny and the rest of the world.

Mooning over Ginny didn't help him prepare for his eventual departure, however and with a shuddering breath to clear his head, Harry set the picture inside his pillow to cover his parents mocking smiles. When Voldemort was gone, then he'd be able to have that happiness with Ginny. When he'd removed that monster from the world, he'd be able to live again. Until then, he'd just have to keep focused and not fall into the trap of wanting to live someone else's life.

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At long last, Arthur Weasley appeared at the front door of Number Four to collect Harry.

"Hello, Harry," the kindly man said as he entered the living room. He wore a warm smile that was mingled with worry and exhaustion. "All ready, then?"

Harry hefted his trunk, packed for the last time and turned to survey the place he had lived but never considered his own. The Dursleys appeared quite satisfied to let Harry leave their lives without comment. Dudley was ignoring them by sitting as close to the telly as possible, without touching his nose to the screen and had the volume turned up well beyond a normal level. Uncle Vernon seemed oblivious to both Harry's impending departure and his son's attempt to ignore them. It was only when his eyes swept across his aunt did something change; she was looking at him with a most peculiar expression, as if she knew that it was the last time she'd ever see him again, and one way or another, Harry reflected, she was probably right.

She approached Harry, who was now a full two inches taller than her and with wringing hands and a watery smile; she did something she'd never done in his entire life. She hugged him.

"Take care of yourself," she said hastily before pulling away as quickly as she'd come. Then, she turned her back on him and began to reflexively wipe the kitchen counter. She didn't look back.

Harry scarcely realised what had happened before he was being led away towards a Ministry car and on to the Burrow. The only thing that interrupted his pondering his aunt's strange behaviour was the fact that he knew in only a couple short hours, he'd be back at the Burrow. He'd have to deal with seeing Ginny again.

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Dust trailed the black sedan in great billowing clouds as its tyres hit the dirt road leading to the Burrow. With a small squeak, the brakes brought the car to a stop and the cloud of dust continued forward, enshrouding Harry's view out the vehicle's window.

"Welcome home," Mr. Weasley said softly.

Harry saw his half-lit face smiling at him as the dust swirled on the other side of the glass. Something warm swelled in Harry's chest and he smiled in return. "Thanks. It's good to be back."

They collected Harry's things and entered the Burrow. "Arthur!" Mrs. Weasley exclaimed. "I'm so glad you made it safely." She landed a kiss on his cheek and turned to look at Harry.

"And Harry, dear; you look like you've not eaten for a month. Didn't those Muggles feed you at all?" She wrapped him in a motherly hug and gave a disparaging sniff. "I'm so glad you're here. Let me get you something to eat."

Mrs. Weasley began to throw pots on the stove and gather ingredients from the pantry while Mr. Weasley banished his trunk to the Twins' room. Harry heard a noise at the garden door and turned to see the one person he'd most hoped he would and would not see – Ginny.

"Hello, Harry," she said as he sucked in a breath. Her hair was pulled back with a red ribbon, exposing her neck. She wore a simple powder blue t-shirt underneath a pair of cut-off overalls. Her face was streaked with mud and a fine sheen of sweat graced her brow. She was more beautiful than he remembered and seeing her again confirmed what he already knew – his resolve wouldn't last long in her presence.

He took a step backwards. "I – I better go unpack my things," he said awkwardly, gesturing vaguely towards the stairs. He turned and took another step when his foot caught on the table leg, sending him sprawling across the floor. Mrs. Weasley started at the stove and bent to help him up.

"There you are, Harry. Mind the table next time, will you?" She returned to the now boiling pot and began to pour in sliced vegetables, but looked suspiciously between him and Ginny, who he had not once stopped staring at. "Is there something the matter, Harry?"

"N – No," he stammered. "Just going to see about my things." He turned, careful to avoid the table and two chair, and then took two loping strides before he was on the stairs and climbing upward. Before he was at the top, however, he caught Ginny's eye once more and saw that same blazing look on her face that had been there before he very first kissed her. The distraction caused him to miss the last step, grazing his shin on the missed step and fell face first onto the landing.

"Blimey, Harry," said a familiar voice. "No need to fall at my feet. I'm not that important."

A pair of strong hands helped him back onto his feet and Harry rubbed at his injured leg. "Hey, Ron."

"You see Ginny, yet?" he asked as they walked to Harry's room. He pulled two thin straps of liquorice out from his pocket and handed one to Harry, who was re-arranging his glasses.

"Yeah," Harry confirmed, noticing the puking pastille he found last year at this time was still on his bed, now perched on the pillow, as if someone was telling him that he'd better take it this time. "I did, actually."

Ron stopped and gave him a searching look. "Better do something about that, mate," he said, taking a great bite of liquorice.

Harry sighed. "I can't. She's better off here with your family, than traipsing around the country looking for Horcruxes."

Ron didn't say anything, but his brows rose unbelievably. They sat on his bed and the smell of flowers met his nose, unencumbered by the lingering scent of gunpowder. "Hey. Where'd all the boxes go?" For the carpet was clear, and a vase of familiar, large flowers sat on a table where there had once been stacks of the twins' things.

"Fred and George took them to their flat," Ron answered. Then crossing his arms, he said, "But you're not going to get out of answering me about Ginny."

Harry grabbed the sweet from his pillow and contemplated biting into it so he wouldn't have to talk to Ron about his sister – the sister that he was completely in love with, but couldn't be with until he killed the most evil wizard in fifty years. Instead, he took a bite of the liquorice and chewed while Ron began to pace in front of him.

"Look," Ron said as he sat on the bed. "When you and Ginny first got together, I was a little worried that you'd... well, that you'd act like I'd been with Lavender."

Harry snorted. Ginny would tie his tongue in knots before she'd let him use her as a snogging machine.

"But then I realised," Ron continued, "that you'd never do that to Ginny. I watched how you treated her, how she made you... calmer and more... *alive*." Ron bit another piece of liquorice off and stood, chewing as he walked towards the open window.

"I know," Harry relented. "I know I need her in my life. I just can't..."

"Rubbish." Ron turned around and faced Harry.

Harry looked his friend in the eye, his jaw set. "I can't sit through another funeral, Ron. Not yours, not Hermione's, and *especially* not Ginny's."

Ron turned to face the window again and pocketed his sweet. "Yeah," he said after a long moment. "I know what you mean. If anything happened to you or Ginny or Hermione... I'd..."

"Die."

"Yeah."

They fell into a companionable silence, each lost in their own thoughts about the prospect of losing loved ones, when Ron turned around and walked over to Harry and grabbed his shoulders, forcing Harry to look him in the eye. "I've learned one thing this year, Harry. When you were with Dumbledore, and those Death Eaters were shooting curses at us, and that Greyback..." here, Ron shuddered at the memory. "Well, I realised something that you need to understand before you do something stupid. I learned that we need to keep the ones we love close to us, or we might lose them. You're worried about losing Ginny if you let her come... She wants to, you know?"

Harry's eyes bugged at this.

"Yeah," Ron said with a nod. "She told me she was going to come with us, that she didn't give a damn about school, or Death Eaters, and that she..."

Ron faltered and let go of Harry's shoulders. "What? What else did she say?" Harry asked, as if he were a hungry dog begging for scraps from the table.

Ron smiled. "You'll have to ask her. Just... think about it." His smile grew wicked and he whipped out his wand. "I'm of age now - I can hex you if you don't do something, you know?"

Harry smiled at the threat and held up his hands. "Only until my birthday."

They heard Mrs. Weasley calling for Ron in the distance. "Damn," he said and re-pocketed his wand. "I forgot I need to be helping dad with the security spells."

"You're setting the wards with your dad?"

Another smile, more satisfied this time, and Ron straightened up a little. "Bill's too busy getting fitted for robes and stuff like that, Charlie's not going to be in until tonight, and the twins are working double shifts at their shop. I'm the only one left."

"Brilliant," agreed Harry.

There was another call from downstairs. Ron cupped his hands to his mouth and pointed his head out the door.

"COMING!" he yelled and tapped on the pocket holding his wand. "Remember, I'll be watching you."

Harry sat back against the wall and watched Ron leave the room. If seeing Ginny again wasn't bad enough, smelling her perfume, hearing how much she wanted to go with him, and knowing she was close enough to touch if he really wanted to, was enough to make the strongest man's knees shake with indecision. It was going to be a long month before school started and Harry was beginning to wonder if he'd be better off back with the Dursleys.

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With the wedding taking place at the Burrow the next day, everyone was assigned chores. Ron, having finished with the wards was degnoming the garden, was to set up the tables and chairs, and then visit the twins in Diagon Alley for some last minute purchases. Charlie had sent an owl explaining that he'd be arriving even later than expected and Percy was far from being welcomed by anyone but his mother. It'd be a miracle if he even showed up for the wedding itself.

"Harry?" asked Mrs. Weasley, who was balancing several pieces of meat with her wand as they danced towards an open oven. "Be a dear and peel some potatoes? I'm making a salad and just don't have time to magic them before dinner."

Harry nodded, grateful for something to do and walked into the small room off the kitchen. There were at least a hundred of the large brown tubers piled on a table and behind them a small, red-haired figure was already hard at work stripping them of their skins. A large bowl sat between her and another chair, where a vegetable peeler sat opposite on the table.

"Oh, good," Ginny said brightly. "I need the help." She blew a stray strand of hair out of her eyes and began to peel another potato.

He watched helpless as the bit of hair worked its way loose once more and fell inevitably back into her eyes. She tossed the bare potato into the bowl and reached for another, again blowing the hair out of her face.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" she asked imperiously. "If we don't get this lot finished in an hour, Mum'll be skinning *us* next."

"Oh," Harry said, red-faced and sat down hastily in the empty seat. "Sorry," he muttered, grabbed the peeler, and reached for a potato. Instead of a rough, dirty spud, his hand closed around something warm and soft. The heat on his face spread to his ears and neck and he quickly moved to grab another one from the pile.

As he began to run the peeler along the length of the potato, he heard Ginny release a long, weary sigh next to him. Luckily, she did not try to engage him in conversation and Harry soon found himself deeply engrossed in peeling potatoes.

The pile diminished considerably and Harry almost forgot that he wasn't alone when Ginny began to softly hum. It was a tune they'd heard together on the wireless one night while she studied for O.W.L.'s. They had just come back from a walk around the lake flushed and happy. Ginny had zapped the wireless with her wand and they danced around the common room until Hermione scolded them for not studying. Ginny had been instantly repentant, but when their friend looked away, poked her tongue out and giggled until they'd reached their book bags. It had been the best bout of studying Harry had ever experienced.

"Harry?"

He shook his head clear and turned automatically to see Ginny's face a few inches from him. "Huh?"

"You'd better stop peeling that one or you'll be scraping skin."

"Wha – oh!"

In his hand was half a potato, the entire top had been peeled down to the centre. Harry laughed half-heartedly and put the partial spud into the bowl.

"What were you thinking about? Just then," asked Ginny. Her hair was still up, he noticed, but the streaks of mud were gone, revealing an adorable spray of freckles across her nose and cheeks.

"What was I thinking about? You," he blurted and instantly regretted it.

She didn't speak, but finished peeling her potato and placed it in the now full bowl. "I'm going to go empty this," she said haltingly. She bent over to grab the bowl with both hands and lifted. Struggling with her load, she left the room, leaving a fresh scent of flowers lingering around him.

Harry groaned into his starch covered hands.

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The wedding itself was magnificent. Harry had never been to a Wizarding wedding before and found himself taken in by the magical decorations, enchanted, musical faeries, and gobs and gobs of delicious food.

He passed a knot of guests surrounding the large wedding cake, pointing and commenting on the blue and white dragons on the bottom of each tier. Every so often, they would spout a miniature flame and the white dragon would graze its head under the chin of the blue dragon.

Bill had almost fully recovered from his encounter with Fenrir Greyback. He still had some very deep, pink scars, but had yet to show any werewolf tendencies. A quick scan of the entrees didn't show any raw meat and Harry was grateful.

Fleur was radiant in her white wedding dress, and had almost every boy lolling their tongues out after her, including an easily smitten Ron. Harry had overheard Ginny talking about Fleur to Hermione when he caught them walking out of the house. Hermione had been looking daggers at Ron as he followed after Fleur with a small group of boys. It was Ginny's comments that had intrigued him, however, as it seemed that the Fleur's display of loyalty to Bill convinced Ginny to stop calling her Phlegm.

When it was time for everyone to follow Bill and Fleur onto the conjured dance floor in the garden, Harry knew he wouldn't be able to avoid Ginny any longer. Everyone else was paired off – Ron with an agitated, but somewhat mollified Hermione, Bill with Fleur, Molly and Arthur.... Ginny's eyes were locked onto his and he gulped. He moved into position opposite her and resigned himself to making the best of it.

They didn't speak at first; seeming to know exactly what the other was thinking. Harry took her carefully around the waist with his right hand and led with his other. He was equally careful not to notice the way her sleeveless gold chiffon dress conformed to her figure, or the way her eyelashes sparkled in the sunlight.

Halfway through the second song, Harry caught a glimpse of Ron dancing with Hermione. A surge of hope that perhaps Ron would save him from the blissful agony of dancing with the most beautiful girl on the dance floor was instantly quashed when Ron caught his eye and patted the end of his wand protruding from his trouser pocket.

They danced for three songs before Harry broke off. Her eyes pleaded with him, as if to say that she needed to spend more time with him before he left, but he knew his limits. Her perfume was too pleasant and her face too lovely to linger. Bowing slightly, Harry turned to walk in whatever direction would take him away from his greatest source of comfort.

"Harry? Please wait," she implored from behind him and he felt her hand on his shoulder, causing it to burn where she was touching him.

He swallowed and lowered his head, but did not turn around. He felt the uncomfortable stares of the other guests – most of whom were related to Ginny – on his back. Ginny must have noticed as well, because she hooked her arm through his and gave it a gentle tug.

"Let's get out of here," she whispered in his ear, sending shivers of pleasure racing down his spine.

He did not protest, but some small part of him knew that being alone with Ginny would lead to nothing – and everything – good.

She led them to one of the places they'd spent countless hours together over the last three weeks of the previous summer. Underneath a large weeping willow sat a piece of granite that had been carved into the equivalent of a sofa by one of her brothers several years ago. It featured large sweeping sides and a smooth place to sit that easily fit four adults.

"Sit," she commanded and Harry obeyed, tucking his feet underneath his knees. She remained standing, however, and set her jaw in a way he'd seen her mother do on countless occasions when the twins or Ron had pushed their limits a little too far. She drew her arms across her chest and glowered down at him.

"I need to know how you feel about me," she demanded determinedly, but Harry could detect a slight streak of fear in her eyes. "How you *really* feel about me."

Swallowing in an attempt to wet his parched mouth, he felt a tingle in his chest. "You know how I feel," he said with a barely audible murmur, staring fixedly at her slim ankles.

"Do I? You never told me. I need to hear it."

Harry hesitated. If he said it out loud, he'd be admitting too much. The tingle in his chest began to vibrate. Before he could say anything, however, Ginny spoke.

"Because I can't help but wonder if you've been feeling just as empty and alone as I've been feeling." He could hear the uncertainty in her voice and it ate at him that he was the cause of her pain. "Tell me that you don't hurt when we're apart. Tell me it doesn't kill you to pretend we're not together..." She trailed off and sniffed, causing the vibration in his chest to burn.

"Ginny, I..."

"No, Harry," she interrupted and sat cross-legged in front of him, exposing more of her long, pale legs. "You need to look me in the eye before you say anything. I need to *know*."

Unwillingly, he brought his head up and the sight of her moist brown eyes penetrated him like nothing else. He knew then what he had to do, but it was still extremely difficult. "I – I have very strong feelings for you, Ginny." There was what seemed to be a snapping sound in his chest and the burning instantly melted into a pleasant pool of warmth that spread throughout his body. "You said you never gave up on me and ever since then, I've not been able to figure out why someone like me would deserve..." He trailed off because he could sense a subtle change in the air between them. His plan wasn't working at all.

Ginny seemed poised on edge, trying to decide whether she was going to attack or run away. After wavering for a moment she leaned forward. "You idiot!" she screamed as she balled her hands into fists and began to pummel his chest. "I want to be in your life forever, but your *stupid* noble intentions won't give me a place until you've killed Voldemort, but that's just *silly*, Harry!" She stopped hitting him, though he would have let her continue, feeling like he deserved every bit of punishment. "It's just... it's just stupid." She seemed to run out of anger just then. Her fists relaxed and wrapped around his chest, pulling him close instead. Harry's own hands found her exposed back and returned the embrace. He never wanted to leave her again and knew that he wouldn't be able to push her away any longer.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." He repeated that over and over in his mind, letting a stray tear drop into her hair.

Then, seeming to sense what Harry needed just then, Ginny raised her head and closed the distance between their faces. If kissing Ginny before had been like living through several sunlit days, then kissing her after a prolonged absence was like swimming in an ocean of her love.

They came up for air, Harry opening his eyes to see the tracks made on her face by the tears she'd just shed. "I have strong feelings for you too," she said, smiling a crooked smile. "It's called being in love."

Harry nodded and then pulled her head to his shoulder again. He didn't know what the future would hold, or how long he'd be able to spend his life with Ginny, but he knew that she belonged at his side through whatever Voldemort was determined to throw at him. Together, they would conquer or be conquered. Together, they would meet their future.