

## Chapter 5

Harry paced back and forth in the drawing room. He carefully lit a fire in the fireplace, straightened the room, and closed the curtains. He wanted the light from the fireplace to set the mood. Harry turned around, and found his blanket lying opened and over what appeared to be something moving underneath it. Whatever it was, it had obviously dragged it from Harry's room to the drawing room.

"What the..." Harry blurted.

"Dobby brought down Harry Potter's blanket," a muffled Dobby replied, from underneath.

Harry laughed, walked over to the blanket, and lifted it off of Dobby to help the little elf escape. Harry neatly folded the blanket and placed it on the sofa. He looked around then something caught his eye, as he glanced toward the window. Ginny was hastily walking up the walkway. She had gone from the Ministry to Grimmauld Place, using the Portkey her family used two years ago. Harry felt his stomach jump. He rushed downstairs and over to the front door to greet her. Harry held the door open before Ginny made it the porch. She looked up at him and smiled. Harry looked into her eyes and felt as if something inside him was melting. He became nervous, but in a way that felt wonderful. Even though the day was cold and dreary, Harry felt warm and happy inside.

"Hey." Ginny smiled. As she turned sideways to get through the entranceway, she leaned over and kissed Harry on his cheek.

Harry's body tingled all over at the feeling of Ginny's cold lips on his cheek, and her body brushing up against his.

Once inside, Ginny looked around quickly and noticed the improvement of the house's appearance since her last visit. She turned around to gaze at Harry. She felt a fluttering feeling in her stomach, as she began taking off her coat. Harry walked over to help her.

"Here, let me take that for you," Harry offered. Harry helped Ginny remove her coat and hung it in the closet then he turned back to join her side. "Are you hungry? Can I get you anything?"

"No, you'll do just fine for now." Ginny grinned then, taking Harry's two hands in hers, she leaned in to give him a quick kiss.

A wonderful buzz of electricity ran through Harry's body the moment Ginny's lips touched his. Harry led Ginny upstairs to the drawing room.

“Wow, look how cozy this is,” Ginny teased, stepping away and walking over to the center of the drawing room.

She turned to look at Harry. Harry stood motionless. Ginny’s red hair glowed beautifully from the light coming from the fireplace. Her deep brown eyes pierced Harry’s heart as she gazed back at him. Harry regained the feeling in his legs and walked over to her. Ginny put her arms around his neck and looked up into his eyes. She flashed her famous smirk. Harry followed and nervously put his hands around her waist. *Why am I so nervous?* he asked himself. *It’s not as if we’ve never been alone before.* Ginny did not seem the least bit nervous. She dropped her hands to her side and then sat down on the floor in front of the fire. She looked up at Harry, who was completely in her control. She reached up for Harry’s hand and pulled him down next to her.

Ginny laid down on the floor and stared up at the ceiling, waiting for Harry to realize this was his cue to start doing what they were both there to do. Harry laid down next to her on his side. He leaned up on his elbow, propping himself up off the floor. With his other hand, he nervously played with Ginny’s long red hair.

Ginny ran her finger along the side of Harry’s face and down his neck, just below his ear. It tickled him, but he did not want to let on -- not that he had anything to worry about. When it came to tickle fights, the points added up like a bad Quidditch game, with the score in Harry’s favor.

Harry could not hold back any longer. He reached over and tucked his hand under Ginny’s body. With the hand his face had been resting on, he held Ginny’s head. He gently lowered his head down and touched his lips to hers. The quivering feeling in his stomach became more intense. His heart felt like it could not keep a rhythm. With each gentle kiss, Ginny felt the flutter in her stomach as well. She put her arms around Harry’s neck. Together they surrendered to the old magic. They innocently kissed until both could not handle the feelings inside any longer. Harry rolled over on his back. He was breathless. *How could it be,* he thought. He had more of a workout during Quidditch practice. Then again, he wasn’t in love with Quidditch practice.

“So, what was this important meeting your dad had to go to on Christmas Eve?” Harry asked, trying to take his mind off the thoughts running through his head.

“He had to meet with Scrimgeour,” Ginny answered.

She was lying on Harry’s arm and running her hand through his tousled hair. Her other hand tenderly rubbed his chest. Harry laid on his back. His other arm was up over his head. His eyes were closed. He felt completely happy and relaxed.

“Oh, no, not him,” Harry joked. “Figures some bloody vampire would make your dad work on Christmas Eve.”

“Oh, really,” Ginny teased back. “You have something against vampires?”

“Well, you know, they can be a real pain in the neck,” Harry joked.

“Yeah,” Ginny replied, with a playful look in her eye. “You mean like this?”

Ginny quickly plunged her face into the nape of Harry’s neck.

Harry could feel her warm mouth on his neck, just under his jaw. A cold chill ran up his back and straight through his stomach. This time Ginny’s mouth and hair caused a tickle sensation that was unbearable. Harry involuntarily kicked his legs up to his stomach. His one arm was still trapped under the weight of Ginny’s body. Ginny was clever enough to grab onto Harry’s thumb while his arm was still up over his head. Harry struggled to get free, but Ginny’s grip on his thumb was surprisingly strong. She applied leverage to keep Harry from moving his hand to defend himself. Ginny lifted her head to look at Harry. She wiggled the fingers on her free hand in front of Harry’s face, menacingly teasing him.

Harry became very nervous. He recalled the object of the game of tickle fighting. It was to see who would surrender first by shouting out ‘I give’. He also remembered that the person who usually did the surrendering was Ginny. He held an undefeated title. Unfortunately for Harry, Ginny had turned the tables around. Harry realized at that very moment, Ginny rendered him defenseless and his rib cage vulnerable. Ginny continued to menacingly tease Harry, watching him grow ever more nervous. Harry started to giggle. His breathing became rapid. Ginny could feel his chest rise up and down quickly.

“So, Harry, you wouldn’t be ticklish now, would you?” Ginny asked in a diabolical manner.

Harry closed his eyes. He held his lips tightly together and tried to bear down. He tried to tighten his stomach and chest muscles the way he did during previous tickle fights. During previous fights, this technique left Ginny thinking that Harry was not quite so ticklish. Today, however, much to Harry’s dismay, she would find out otherwise. The problem was the fact that Ginny was holding one of Harry’s arms over his head, making it difficult to tighten his muscles. Harry kept his eyes shut tightly. He could not bear to watch Ginny’s menacing fingers wiggle over his ribs.

Ginny finally placed her free hand on Harry’s chest and began to vigorously tickle his ribs. Harry squirmed involuntarily. He tried to keep from laughing in order to give the appearance that her efforts were futile. Eventually, his strength ran out. He lost control of his stomach and chest muscles and this caused him to feel the full effects of Ginny’s merciless, tickling fingers. Harry surrendered to the feeling by laughing uncontrollably. He quickly felt himself running out of breath. He knew he had to do something. The tickling sensation on his rib cage made it difficult to think.

“No! G--Ginny...stop,” Harry sputtered.

“Say the two magic words and I’ll stop,” Ginny negotiated in a teasing manner.

“No!” cried Harry, not wanting to give up his undefeated title, but it was no use. Ginny was quite a skilled tickler, when given the chance. Harry could feel the rest of his strength give way. The more his strength left him, the more ticklish he became.

“St-stop...G-Ginny...alright...” Harry gulped, gasping for breath, “I...I give...I give!”

Ginny immediately stopped. She laid over Harry’s chest, feeling it hit hers as it rose and fell quickly underneath her. She looked into Harry’s face. His cheeks were flushed. Harry continued to breath erratically. All his strength was drained. His legs were stretched out on the floor. Both his arms felt like wet noodles. He slowly opened his eyes, which were filled with tears from the strain of laughing so much.

Ginny gazed into them. A look of triumph was on her face. She gave him a kiss on his nose. She continued to smile at him. She had never seen such a vulnerable side to him. It caused her stomach to flutter again. Just when she thought she could not love him any more than she did, she realized her love had risen to a higher plane.

“I win,” she whispered, leaning into Harry’s ear and placing her lips up against it.

Harry could feel her warm breath and soft lips caress his earlobe as she spoke. The monster inside his chest struggled to maintain self-control.

Feeling thoroughly defeated Harry replied, “You win.” His breathing slowly returned to normal.

In a gesture of good sportsmanship, Ginny rolled over on her back. Harry followed, lying on top of her. He grabbed both her hands and pulled them slightly over her head. Ginny became nervous, suspicious of Harry’s motives. She looked up into Harry’s emerald green eyes pleadingly.

“Couldn’t I enjoy just one little victory?”

Harry looked down at her and let out a chuckle, “Yeah, just this one little one.” Harry smiled then gently lowered himself to her lips.

The afternoon wore on. Harry and Ginny’s snogging session left them completely withered. Harry pulled away from Ginny’s face to look into her eyes. She was looking back at him with the same blazing look she had the first time they kissed. Harry’s heart started beating abnormally again. Ginny’s heart began to do the same. A new kind of monster was shuddering inside Harry’s chest. Thankful no one was around to perform Legilimency, thoughts of Ginny raced through his mind.

Suddenly, they both jumped from a startlingly loud “POP!” Harry leaped off of Ginny and propped himself up on his knees to see where the noise had come from. There were Dobby and Kreacher standing in the room. Kreacher had an evil grin on his face, and was holding what was left of a large paper bag. It had been ripped from the bottom, where the air rushed out of it, after Kreacher popped it.

“Dobby wants Harry Potter to look at the clock.”

Harry looked up at the grandfather clock in the corner. It said five minutes to three. Ginny looked up too then jumped to her feet.

“Oh, shoot!” Ginny exclaimed.

They both ran downstairs to the closet in the foyer. Harry quickly pulled out Ginny's coat and helped her put it on. For a brief moment, they held a sorrowful stare at one another.

“Bye, Harry. I love you,” said Ginny, throwing her arms around Harry's neck and hugging him. She quickly pulled away and walked out the door.

Harry watched her regretfully, as she disappeared into the growing darkness with the help of the Portkey. Harry closed the door and leaned his back up against it. He was grinning in spite of the fact that she was gone, because he quickly remembered that Christmas was tomorrow, and he would see her again.

Mr. Weasley was putting the last minute touches on the Christmas tree. He stood back for a moment to admire his work. Mrs. Weasley was in the kitchen with Hermione and Fleur, baking cookies and fighting off Fred and George from eating them before the rest of the guests arrived.

Bill, Charley and Percy were in the sitting room, giving Mr. Weasley directions on how to decorate the tree, and basically making Mr. Weasley crazy. Ron was upstairs, looking for Ginny. He found her in her bedroom. She had her Potions book open on the bed and was deep in concentration. Ron could not believe Ginny was studying on Christmas Eve night.

“Ginny, what are you doing?” Ron asked, with a look of disgust on his face.

“Ron, get out of here! I'm trying to study!” Ginny barked.

“It's Christmas Eve! Nobody studies on Christmas Eve,” Ron retorted. “What is it you're studying anyway,” he added, twisting his neck to see the title of the book.

“What's it your business,” Ginny growled.

Ron was taken back by Ginny's response. He realized something was bothering her and it was not her studies. He became concerned.

"Ginny, are you okay?" he asked sincerely.

"I'm fine," Ginny growled again, gritting her teeth, not looking up from the Potions book.

"Well, it's just that everyone's downstairs..." Ron replied. He tried in vain to finish his explanation, but was rudely interrupted.

"I don't care who's here. Can't you see I'm busy? Go away and shut the door!"

Ron knew something was bothering Ginny. She was acting more strangely than her usual self. Ron said nothing else. He just turned around and walked out of her room, closing the door behind him. He ran downstairs and quickly called Hermione over, away from Mrs. Weasley and Fleur. Hermione brushed the flour off from her hands, and joined Ron in an isolated corner of the sitting room.

"What's the matter?" Hermione whispered.

"I'm really worried about Ginny. You know what she's doing right now?"

Hermione shook her head no.

"She's studying! And even worse, she won't even tell me what it is she's studying," Ron reported, his face contorted with worry.

"That *is* weird. Even I won't study on Christmas Eve," Hermione admitted.

"Exactly!"

"Well, maybe I should go upstairs and try to talk to her. What was she studying?"

"I couldn't tell. I told you; she wouldn't say. I tried to see, but she had the book well covered," Ron answered.

"I'll go up and talk to her," Hermione decided, then kissed Ron quickly on the lips.

"Thanks," replied a relieved Ron. He turned to watch Hermione go up the stairs.

Hermione approached Ginny's bedroom door quietly. She knocked twice and called to Ginny.

"Ginny, it's me. May I come in?"

“Yeah, but be quick about it, I’m studying,” Ginny replied curtly.

Hermione slowly opened the door and looked at Ginny sitting on her bed. Ginny was propped up on her pillows. Her knees were pulled up, acting as a leaning post for her notebook.

“So what are you studying?” Hermione asked, trying to see the title of the textbook Ginny had opened on the bed.

“Why does everyone want to know what I’m studying? I would think you’d understand, Hermione.”

“I do. It’s just that it’s Christmas Eve. Everyone is downstairs. Your mum and Fleur are baking cookies. I just thought I was going to spend Christmas with my best friend,” Hermione explained, now sitting on the edge of Ginny’s bed. She tried to strategically place herself close enough to the book to see if she could read its contents. Hermione was successful at figuring out which book it was. It was the Potions book. Hermione grew concerned.

“Ginny, why don’t you take a study break and come downstairs with me?” Hermione suggested.

“Fine,” Ginny grunted. She slammed the Potions book and notebook closed, got up from the bed, and quickly stashed the books in her trunk.

Hermione stood up from the bed and observed Ginny’s strange behavior. She tried to keep a smile on her face to keep Ginny’s suspicions at bay. Ginny walked past Hermione without making any eye contact and left the room. Hermione quickly followed behind.

While downstairs, Ginny made a point of isolating herself from the others. She refused to join in on the cookie baking, and she barked at her brothers whenever they tried to involve her in the tree decorating.

Eventually the evening came to a close and everyone retired to bed. Hermione shared the bedroom with Ginny. Charlie stayed with Ron up in the attic. While Ginny fell into a deep sleep, her dreams began to take on a hideous shape....

*The Dark Lord chased Ginny, Harry and Ginny’s bother as far as they could go. They stopped when they realized they could go no further. They were standing at the edge of a tall cliff. The rocks below were jagged and sharp. They were trapped. Ginny, Harry and Ginny’s brother drew their wands. The dark, misshapen wizard did the same. The Dark Lord was quicker, however, and shot a curse at their feet, causing the ground to give way. Both Harry and Ginny’s brother began falling down with the crumbling dirt. Ginny quickly turned around and grabbed both of them. Harry’s hand was in her left and her*

*brother's was in her right. As she felt her strength give out, she realized the terrible truth. She would only be able to save one of them...*

Ginny woke up quickly. Sweat was running off her brow, as she stared into the darkness. As her eyes were adjusting to the lack of light, she could feel her heart beating ferociously. She looked over at Hermione. She wanted to wake Hermione, but was too afraid to move from her bed. She decided to lie back down and try to sleep.

It was Christmas day. The Weasley family was awake and excited. Everyone had gathered around the tree, except for Ginny. At first, no one had noticed, because it was quite chaotic; there were so many people in the house. Then suddenly, Hermione looked around and noticed Ginny's absence. She thought Ginny would have been awake by now and downstairs. She caught Ron's eye and her concerned look triggered Ron's curiosity.

"What's up?" Ron asked.

"Ginny's not here," Hermione replied, scanning the room again.

Ron looked around and noticed Hermione's observation was correct. "Well, where do you think she is? Not studying again, I hope," Ron snarled.

"I'll go check in her room," Hermione decided, making her way across the floor; torn wrapping paper was scattered everywhere. Hermione quickly ran upstairs to Ginny's bedroom, where she found Ginny huddled under the covers.

"Ginny, are you ok?"

"Yeah...I ...have a little upset stomach," Ginny answered.

"Oh. Can I get you anything -- maybe some tea?" Hermione offered, sitting down at the edge of Ginny's bed.

Ginny pulled the covers back and propped herself up against her pillow. Hermione could see that Ginny had been crying. The streaks from fresh tears were still on her face.

"Ginny!" Hermione's concern grew more with this new piece of evidence. Ginny was ill, but in what way? Hermione felt helpless.

The day wore on. It was late afternoon and the other guests had arrived, including Neville Longbottom, Angelina Johnson, some of Mr. Weasley's colleagues from the Ministry, Fleur's parents, her sister, Harry and Professor Albright. The Burrow seemed like it was ready to burst.

The whole time Harry was there, he tried to find a private moment where he and Ginny could be alone. Ginny kept trying to ignore Harry, painstakingly dodging eye contact with him. Harry grew more and more confused with Ginny's need to avoid him. Maybe she did not like the present that he gave her. It was a bubble bath set from the 'Lilies of the Morning' collection.

Harry finally saw his chance, when Mr. Weasley sent Ginny out to the shed, to retrieve a Muggle artifact. As Ginny headed out to the shed, Harry carefully snuck out and followed behind her. Once just outside the shed, Harry made his move.

"Hey," Harry said, sweetly.

Ginny quickly turned around and gave Harry a sharp look. "What are you doing here?" Ginny hissed.

Harry grimaced at Ginny's response. His heart fell in his stomach. He could not understand Ginny's reaction. "Ginny, are you mad at me?" he asked nervously.

"No. Yes. I mean, I can't talk about it right now," Ginny replied, growing ever more aggravated that Harry had trapped her.

"Well, just tell me what I did and I'll apologize," Harry shuttered, feeling Ginny's cold glare.

"Look...Harry...this isn't going to be easy for me to say this," Ginny began, stumbling on her words, "but..." And with this 'but' Harry felt an awful stab in his chest. "I don't think we should see each other anymore." They both entered the shed.

"What? Why? What did I do? Please just tell me, and I'll fix it," Harry pleaded.

"It's not anything you can fix. It's just that, I can't be with you anymore." Ginny turned around and started looking for the Muggle item. She found it on the shelf. It was a cigarette lighter.

Harry could not speak. His legs were numb and the pain in his chest was nothing like he had ever felt. It was as if something inside him died. He felt a terrible lump swell in his throat. He wanted to cry, but his pride held him back, causing his jaws to ache. All he could do was watch her. She took the lighter off the shelf and quickly walked out, leaving a devastated Harry in the dimly lit shed.

Back inside the house, Mrs. Weasley was playing the old Christmas records. Ginny did everything she could to avoid the others. She quietly eased her way back upstairs to her room. Ron and Hermione gave up on trying to figure out what was bothering Ginny. They decided to focus their attention on Harry. Harry was trying hard to mingle with the other guests, but Hermione and Ron could tell that something was wrong.

The evening had grown late and everyone decided to go home. Harry and Professor Albright returned to Grimmauld Place by wizard taxi. As they walked up the snow-dusted stairs to the front door, Professor Albright looked at Harry. She felt a terrible wave of negativity emitting from him. Once inside, Professor Albright made her way to the kitchen to fix Harry and herself some tea.

Harry ran upstairs to his room. He fell back across his bed. Staring up at the ceiling, he replayed the events that happened in the shed. *Things were so wonderful the night before*, he thought. *What had changed? What did I do wrong?*

Harry was pulled away from his racing thoughts by the sound of Professor Albright, calling him from the base of the stairs.

“Dobby, go see what Harry’s doing,” Professor Albright commanded.

Dobby quickly ran up the stairs and into Harry’s bedroom. “Harry Potter, Professor Albright is calling,” Dobby announced. A look of concern was on the little elf’s face. He too sensed that something was bothering Harry.

“Dobby, tell Professor Albright I don’t *want* any tea,” Harry grunted.

“Dobby would sir, but he’s afraid of her,” Dobby whimpered, his voice quivering.

Harry found this to be amusing, which was the comedy relief he needed. He sat up and looked at the quivering, little elf.

“Professor Albright is not the kind to take no for an answer,” Dobby squeaked.

Harry chuckled at Dobby, then got up off the bed. “Alright, I’ll come down,” Harry surrendered. Dobby smiled with relief.

Harry entered the kitchen. At the table Professor Albright was already sitting and having her tea. Across from where she was sitting, another cup of tea had already been poured and waiting for Harry. Harry quietly sat down. He picked up a small spoon and began stirring the tea, staring out into space. His face clearly expressed despair.

“So,” Professor Albright began, “what happened between you and Ginny tonight?”

Once again, Harry had been caught off guard. He did not have to look up at the old professor to know how she was looking at him. Harry responded by shrugging his shoulders. He continued to stare at his tea. He was afraid if he tried to talk, he would choke up and cry.

“Harry, remember what we talked about? How important it is for you and Ginny to be together. The love you share is your secret weapon.”

Harry managed to force himself to speak. The anger he felt, from hearing the Professor tell him this again, was the motivation he needed to get out his question.

“Why?” he asked defiantly. “ How could any love that Ginny and I share defeat Him?”

“Because, it’s simple, Harry. Love is magic -- all you have to do is believe.”

Harry looked up at the old professor and rolled his eyes at her. How could she be so smart and yet think so naively? He shook his head as if waving a white flag.