

Chapter 7

March was halfway through. Signs of spring were popping up everywhere. The snow was melting and streams were rising with the drips of the melting ice that came from the rocks and trees near them. All the signs suggested that Professor Albright's plan, to defeat Voldemort and his Death Eaters, would be a success, except for one thing. Ginny was still behaving unsociably, especially to Harry. It was the most important thing, besides destroying the Horcruxes, that Ginny and Harry be together. Ginny's love for Harry, in addition to the love from his mother that ran through Harry's body, would be key to overtaking Voldemort. Without Ginny's love, Harry would not have the ability to destroy the dangerously powerful wizard.

Professor Albright knew that she had to do something quickly. It would be April soon. The secret weapon was very close to being complete. Professor Albright decided it was time to do some brainstorming with the trio. She made arrangements to meet them in staff quarters that evening.

The day wore on quickly and it was time for the trio to meet with Professor Albright. Harry and Ron were in especially good moods. The Gryffindor Quidditch team had won the Quidditch Cup from Slytherin, ending the season on a prophetic note. Harry and Ron could not stop talking about it. It was driving Hermione crazy.

"Would the two of you stay focused? I hope you don't think this meeting is going to be about Quidditch!" Hermione barked.

"Oh, give it a rest, Hermione! We know what the meeting's about. Don't you think I'm concerned? She's my sister for God's sake!" Ron yelled back.

"Well, good! I'm glad to see you understand the gravity of the situation," Hermione answered, with a tone of self-righteousness in her voice.

Ron rolled his eyes at Harry. Harry grinned back. They made it to the entrance of the staff quarters. Harry knocked on the door.

"The door is unlocked," Professor Albright announced, sitting at the table in staff quarters.

Harry tried the knob, and it turned. He slowly opened the door and walked in, followed by Hermione and Ron.

"Glad to see you could join me," Professor Albright said. "Take a seat. I trust you all know why you're here."

“To talk about why my sister is behaving like a prat,” Ron replied, with a snide expression on his face.

Hermione was about to scold him for his rude comment, but Professor Albright spoke up too quickly.

“Right you are, Mr. Weasley,” Professor Albright confirmed.

Hermione gave Professor Albright a look of surprise. Harry sat quietly.

“Hermione, tell me what you have observed about Ginny,” Professor Albright prodded, looking directly into Hermione’s eyes.

Hermione began to feel nervous. “Well, the one thing that stands out is her obsession with her Potions class. I’ve never known anyone to study as much as she does. Slughorn was never that demanding,” Hermione divulged.

Harry and Ron remained uncharacteristically silent. They watched Hermione and Professor Albright exchange thoughts about Ginny, as if they were watching a tennis match.

“By any chance, do you know if there is anyone in the class that may be bothering Ginny? Has she mentioned anything to you?” Professor Albright asked, concern growing in her voice.

“No. Nothing. How could anyone bother her? She doesn’t allow anyone near her. She alienates herself,” Hermione replied.

“Sounds to me like some thing has a hold of her,” Professor Albright hinted, peering at Hermione over her bifocals. “Are you aware that the piece of soul in a Horcrux has the capability of acting independently from the rest of the soul? It will do the bidding of the main piece, but it will act, as needed, to get the job done,” Professor Albright informed, addressing the trio with this information.

“Wait a minute!” Harry jumped in. “Are you saying you think Ginny’s behavior is due to a piece of Voldemort’s soul?”

“Yes, Harry,” Professor Albright answered, with a matter-of-fact tone of voice.

Ron’s face screwed up with fear. There was a moment of silence, then Hermione spoke.

“Professor, are you saying you think that Ginny has the last Horcrux, and the piece of soul inside it might have control over Ginny?” Hermione asked in an effort to clarify the professor’s statement.

“Precisely,” Professor Albright confirmed. “But in order for it to have such control over her, she must carry it with her. Do you notice anything on Ginny? Does she wear a necklace or a ring?”

“No. There’s nothing that has any significant markings. I mean, I think she wears a ring and maybe stud earrings,” Hermione replied, looking at Harry and Ron for assistance in recalling the jewelry that Ginny might wear.

Professor Albright thought some more then, with a gleam in her eye, spoke. “Let’s recall what Professor Dumbledore said about the night the Dark Lord came to Harry’s house.”

“He said, after You-Know-Who tried to kill me, he became very weak,” Harry recalled.

“Good,” Professor Albright said, supportively. “What else do we know about the Dark Lord after that? Where did he go? What happened to him?” she probed, motivating the trio to recall as much as they could.

“Back in first year, Professor Quirrell kept the Dark Lord hidden under his turban,” Harry remembered.

“Yes, go on,” Professor Albright encouraged, smiling as she continued to motivate them.

“That’s right!” Hermione exclaimed. “He was too weak to have his own body. He was too weak to finish hiding his soul.”

“Yes, good, Hermione!” Professor Albright exclaimed, her enthusiasm heightened. “And knowing he would have been too weak to look for anymore trophies, where do you think he decided to settle putting the sixth piece of his soul?” Professor Albright asked, hoping this last question would at least put Hermione on the right track.

“He would put it somewhere ... that held some significance, even if it wasn’t from the four houses. Although, if he had his choice, he would probably want to hide it in something that was related to Slytherin,” Hermione replied; her thoughts were racing.

Harry and Ron watched in awe, as Professor Albright carefully guided Hermione’s thought process. Professor Albright was encouraging Hermione to use her mental capacity to its fullest. Hermione looked exhausted. Then her face suddenly appeared revitalized.

“You know. I just remembered something about Professor Quirrell, back in first year,” Hermione announced wide-eyed.

“Yeah? And what was that?” Ron asked.

“One time, I went over to the Potions classroom to speak with Professor Snape, but when I arrived, I caught Professor Quirrell rummaging through Professor Snape’s cupboard. He had a Potions book in his hand. At the time I couldn’t figure out why. Now, that I think about it, maybe he was trying to find Snape’s mother’s Potions book,” Hermione deduced.

“No. Considering that You-Know-Who liked shiny things, he probably instructed Quirrell to find Ravenclaw’s bracelet.” Professor Albright was quick to correct.

“You’re probably right about that, but if that’s true, what was Quirrell doing with the Potions book?” Hermione inquired.

“Perhaps, You-Know-Who realized, when Professor Quirrell was not able to find the bracelet that Professor Snape’s mother had won, he was going to have to settle for something else. He instructed Professor Quirrell to take Eileen’s book. She was just as gifted a student, in Potions, as Lucinda was in Transfiguration. The Potions book, now belonging to another gifted student from the house of Slytherin, would make for a reasonably decent Horcrux,” Professor Albright summarized.

“Hey, that Potions book wouldn’t happen to be the one Slughorn found in the bottom of that old cupboard?” Ron asked.

“Yeah! The one marked, ‘Half Blood Prince’,” Hermione replied, glaring at Harry. “Harry, as I recall, *you* were quite smitten with that book last year.”

“Oh, Hermione, you still haven’t gotten over Harry getting better grades, than you, on his experiments,” Ron teased.

“Ron, are you forgetting that Harry made you lie for him? That book turned Harry into a desperate maniac, especially when Snape demanded that Harry give him the book. Remember that incident between Harry and Draco?” Hermione replied, in her defense.

“She does have a point, you know,” Ron asserted, looking at Harry, who was growing ever more nervous.

“Harry, are you okay?” Professor Albright asked, now noticing Harry’s recent condition.

“You know, Snape never did give that book to Dumbledore,” Hermione recalled.

“That’s true. If he had turned in the book that Harry gave to him, Snape would have been turning in *my* book!” Ron exclaimed.

“So, where *is* Elizabeth’s book, Harry?” Hermione asked, addressing Harry directly.

“You know, that’s a very good question,” Professor Albright interjected. “Where *is* Snape’s Potions book, Harry?”

Harry looked at both Hermione and Professor Albright nervously. Ron immediately came to Harry’s aid.

“Wait a minute. Why are you picking on Harry? I thought you said, whatever was making Ginny act so weird, would have to be something that Ginny was wearing, or at least, carrying around with her,” Ron protested, looking almost accusingly at Professor Albright.

“Harry, where is Snape’s Potions book?” Hermione growled, gritting her teeth.

“Well,” Harry began, feeling extremely nervous, “when I knew Snape was going to ask me to turn my books over to him, I hid it in the Room of Requirement. Some how I managed to get in.”

“So, it’s in there now?” Professor Albright asked.

“Well, not anymore,” Harry replied nervously. “After Dumbledore’s funeral, I sensed that the book would somehow come in handy, so I went back and got it.”

“So, it’s back at Grimmauld Place?” Professor Albright asked, feeling more frustrated that Harry was not giving her a simple answer.

“Well, not now. I figured since a new book was expensive to buy, I...I...lent it to Ginny,” Harry gulped, waiting for the inevitable repercussions.

“Harry!” Ron shouted, his eyes popping out of his head.

“I’m sorry! God knows, I’m so sorry,” Harry moaned, throwing his head down on the table and putting his arms over it in shame.

“Well, a lot of good that’s going to do her now!” Hermione yelled, in reference to Ginny. “I told you that book would lead to no good!”

“Harry, you do beat all! I love you dearly. You are many things besides my prize pupil, but, when it comes to trouble, you are exasperatingly repetitious!” Professor Albright exclaimed.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. How many times do I have to say it?” Harry cried, his voice muffled from the weight of his head squishing his mouth on the table. His arms still covered himself.

"Well, don't just sit there! Go get that book and do as you have been taught!" Professor Albright yelled.

"HARRY, RON, COME ON!" Hermione shouted, quickly jumping up from her seat.

"Come on, Harry," Ron urged, pulling Harry's arms off of Harry's head.

"Be careful," Professor Albright warned, " I doubt Ginny will be in a cooperative mood. I'm sure that by now, <i>his</i> soul has quite a hold on her."

The trio was just on their way out the staff door when Professor Albright called Harry back.

"Harry, come here," Professor Albright called out.

Harry returned to Professor Albright's side.

"Listen, Harry, I must warn you. When you try to take the Potions book, Ginny, or the spirit inside of Ginny, will try to resist you. It will resort to saying some horrible things to you, but you must overlook this. Understand where it's really coming from. Keep talking to Ginny. Keep re-enforcing what you feel. No matter what 'it' says, keep talking to Ginny's heart. Keep saying that you love her. Do you understand what I'm telling you?" Professor Albright asked intensively.

Harry stared into the professor's eyes and nodded almost hypnotically.

"Good. Now go quickly!" she commanded.

Harry ran as fast as he could to catch up to the other two. The trio finally made it to the Gryffindor common room. They entered the common room to find Ginny at the table, standing in a combative stance and brandishing her wand.

"I know why you three are here," Ginny accused, in an uncharacteristically deep voice. Her eyes glowed a strange, red hue. She was holding the Potions book in her other hand.

Harry was the first to approach her. The other two watched nervously.

"Ginny, please, give me the book," Harry calmly demanded.

"No! I'll never give this book to you," protested the voice inside Ginny's body.

"Please, Ginny. I'll give the book back," Harry promised, continuing to walk closer to her.

"One more step, and I'll kill you," threatened the voice.

“No, you won’t, Ginny. Please, just give me the book,” Harry repeated.

Hermione slowly reached for her wand, as she continued to watch Harry masterfully control the situation. Ron glanced quickly over to Hermione. He could see what she was trying to do. In the meantime, Harry continued to talk to Ginny.

“Please, Ginny, I want to help you,” Harry continued.

“HELP ME? You can’t help me! You can’t even help yourself! Pity I was only able to kill your parents. I should have killed you straight up!”

Harry had to keep cool. He remembered what Professor Albright had warned him about. Even though hearing these words coming from Ginny’s mouth was almost more than he could take, he tried to remain strong. His voice began to quiver.

“Ginny, I know you’re in there. Please, I love you. Please, give me the book,” Harry pleaded. He began feeling a pang of fear in his stomach, as he watched Ginny raise her wand.

“Harry Potter, your existence has made it very difficult for me to achieve my ultimate goals. It’s time I put a rest to your intrusion,” declared the voice coming from Ginny.

Harry did not take his eyes off of her or the wand.

“You have taken your last breath,” the voice announced, as Ginny slowly aimed her wand at Harry.

“Uh, guys, a little help here,” Harry squeaked.

Ginny was about to fire the Avada Kedavra curse, when Hermione quickly responded.

“*Expelliarmus!*” Hermione yelled.

Ginny’s wand quickly flew out of her hands, almost hitting Ron. Ron’s much improved Keeper skills helped him duck out of the way.

“Hey, watch it!” Ron quipped.

“Sorry,” Hermione replied.

Harry, feeling relieved, regained his courage and walked a few steps toward Ginny. “Ginny,” Harry called, looking as if to say, ‘You’re surrounded, give yourself up’.

“NO!” the voice bellowed, as Ginny clutched the Potions book tightly against her chest and crouched down on the floor.

Harry had all that could take. "Dammit! Give me that book," he demanded, lunging at Ginny. Harry tried prying the book from her, but her strength was extraordinary. Harry looked up at Hermione and Ron who were watching fearfully.

"Ron, help me," Harry ordered with a voice of desperation.

A frightened Ron looked at Harry confused. He knew that Ginny was not herself. Something evil was controlling her. Ron quickly looked back at Hermione for her response. Ron had a 'what-should-I-do-look' on his face. Hermione responded non-verbally by shaking her head. She too was frightened. She had never read about anything like this before. All she could do was watch her friend, Ginny, struggling from something eating away at her. Hermione felt helpless. A wave of panic spread through her whole body.

"Ron, help him!" Hermione finally cried.

Ron, still confused, ran over to Harry and Ginny who were wrestling each other for the book. Ron surveyed the situation then saw where he could break in. Ginny was kicking Harry furiously.

"Arg! OUCH! Ron, help!" Harry yelled pleadingly.

Ron dropped down to the floor and grabbed Ginny's legs in a bear hug. Ginny was so strong that Ron could still feel her kicking him.

"Harry, hurry! I don't think I can hold on for much longer!" Ron yelled.

Harry found his break when Ginny tried to re-establish her grip on the book. Harry cleverly slipped his arm under hers. This was the leverage he needed. He was able to successfully grab the book out from Ginny's hands.

"Hermione, think fast!" Harry yelled, as he threw the book in Hermione's direction.

Hermione screamed, as she saw the book being hurled toward her way. She was careful to avoid making any contact with it. She let it fall to the floor. It made a muffled thud sound when it hit the carpeting. Hermione prepared herself for the next step. She raised her wand again and pointed it directly at the book.

"Everyone, take cover," she announced, as she proceeded to perform the Expono Animum incantation.

Harry immediately threw his upper body over Ginny's to protect her from the impending blast. Ron, while still grasping tightly to Ginny's legs, turned his head so that the side of his face was now pressed up against Ginny's backside. His face winced involuntarily, a natural response to bracing himself for what was to come.

“Expono Animum!” Hermione yelled out.

Both Ron and Harry gripped tightly to Ginny, who was now struggling to free herself from their grasp.

“Expono Animum,” Hermione called out for a second time. Ginny was biting Harry’s arm.

“Ouch, dammit!” Harry yelled in response to feeling Ginny’s teeth sink into his arm.

“Hurry up, Hermione!”

“Expono Animum,” Hermione called out for a third time. She immediately dropped to the floor, covering her face. The all-too-infamous glare of purple light burst from the book, followed by the loud explosion. The explosion had a back draft effect on the flames in the fireplace. It caused them to shoot out from the mantle. Hermione screamed as she felt the intense wave of heat tumble over her.

“HERMIONE!” Harry yelled.

Hermione did not respond. Ron panicked not hearing Hermione’s voice.

“HERMIONE!” Ron cried.

Still, there was no answer. Ron sat up, looking over at Harry. Harry lifted his head up to look back at Ron. They both feared the worst. Ron’s expression had a look of terror and grief. They both looked down at Ginny, whose body was limp. Ginny was unconscious.

“Ron, check on Hermione. I’ll take care of Ginny,” Harry directed.

Ron quickly jumped up and ran over to the other side of the sofa where Hermione and the book were lying on the floor.

“Hermione,” Ron screeched. Ron knelt down next to her. He lightly stroked her hair. A look of worry swept across his face. It was this moment that he acknowledged the strong feelings of love he had for her. He turned her gently on her back. He lifted her head slightly with one hand, while gently caressing her cheek with the other.

“Hermione, please, wake up,” Ron whimpered. For the first time in his life, he felt as if he might lose someone very dear to him. It was a new emotion for him and he felt helpless. “Open your eyes, Hermione, please,” Ron pleaded, his voice trailed off, as a lump formed in his throat.

“Ron, is Hermione okay?” Harry yelled, as he cradled Ginny in his arms.

Ron tried to answer, but he choked on the words.

“RON!” Harry shouted. Harry’s voice jolted both Hermione and Ginny back to a conscious state.

“Ron,” Hermione whispered, looking up into Ron’s eyes.

Ron looked down into Hermione’s eyes. A quick wave of relief overcame him. He buried his face into her hair in an effort to hide the fact that he was close to tears.

Meanwhile, Ginny looked up at Harry. She smiled as a warm tear ran down the side of her face. Harry caught it with his thumb.

“Harry,” Ginny whispered weakly. “I love you. Forgive me.” Ginny fell back into a state of unconsciousness.

Harry hugged her tightly, cradling her body and supporting her head in the palm of his hand. He felt a twinge in his heart from hearing Ginny speak these words to him. He melted as he felt the warm tear on his thumb.

Harry turned away from her, thinking only one thing. *Thank God.* He turned back to Ginny, lying helplessly in his arms, leaned over and gently kissed her forehead. He lifted her head a little higher and pressed his cheek against hers. He could feel his heart beating very hard and very fast. It would be a night the boys would never forget.

Ron desperately needed to break the tension he was feeling. He picked his head up from Hermione’s hair. In an act of bravery, he tried to overcome his embarrassment, caused by the fear that he almost lost the one girl he ever truly loved. He looked back into Hermione’s eyes, knowing that he could no longer hide what he was feeling. His face unabashedly displayed his emotions. Hermione smiled at him and touched his cheek. Ron felt a strong tug at his heartstrings. He looked over at the book. All the pages, though in tact and held together, had been cleanly separated from the hard cover binding. Ron did not miss the opportunity to comically express his relief.

“Wow, Hermione! I thought you’d be the last person to vandalize school property,” Ron joked. Hermione looked up into his eyes and smiled.

“WHAT THE BLOODY HELL IS GOING ON IN HERE?” Seamus shouted, as a crowd of Gryffindors began to congregate into the common room.

Obviously Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny were not the only ones that heard the blast. Harry had one thing run through his mind now. *<i>How do I explain this</i>?*

“What happened?” Lavender Brown inquired, anxiously.

“Uh,” Ron began, looking at Hermione. Then he looked back up at the rest of his fellow Gryffindors. “It’s a long story.”

Some of the Gryffindors began to walk back to their dorm rooms, but Lavender, Seamus, Dean and Neville stayed behind.

“What’s with that book on the floor?” Neville asked.

Ron was surprisingly quick with an answer, “It had a boggart.” His voice carried an intonation that resembled a question more than an answer.

Seamus shot Ron a suspicious look. Neville just looked confused. Dean Thomas walked over behind the sofa and glared at Harry, who was still cradling an unconscious Ginny. Harry looked up at Dean.

“Some boggart, huh?” Harry uttered, with a guilty expression on his face.

Dean shook his head, as he shot a look of disdain back at Harry. Harry looked back down at Ginny, hoping that Dean would turn around and leave with the others. Eventually they did leave.

As Ron continued to hold Hermione, a thought came to his mind. “Hey, Harry,” he called out.

“Yeah?” Harry replied.

“What was all that stuff about? You know, telling Ginny you love her?”

“Huh? Oh, that. Uh...well...Ron... there’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you,” Harry stuttered.

Both Ron and Hermione laughed. “Forget it, Harry. I already know.” Ron chuckled.

In the days that followed, Harry sensed that something still wasn’t right with Ginny. She kept trying to avoid him. Harry knew he had to talk to her. He decided to wait for her one day outside of her Transfiguration class. As Ginny stepped out of the classroom, Harry grabbed her arm. Ginny was startled, not expecting to be grabbed.

“Ginny, do you have a minute?” Harry whispered.

“Well, I really have to go. Luna and Hannah are waiting for me,” Ginny replied, nervously avoiding eye contact.

“Well, I’ll make it fast then,” Harry assured, feeling a bit put out. “Are we alright now? You know, now that we took care of the book?”

“Alright? Yeah, I guess. Wait. What do you mean?” Ginny asked nervously.

“I mean, we’re still together, right?” Harry asked, fearing Ginny’s reply.

“Harry,” Ginny began, tears filling her eyes, “I’m still afraid. You don’t understand.”

“Well, I’ll try if you give me a chance. Won’t you at least give me that?” Harry pleaded, growing impatient.

“Harry, you don’t understand. I’m scared.”

“Ginny, you said you loved me, remember? Remember that night, after Hermione did...what she did to the Potions book? You told me you loved me. You looked into my eyes and said you loved me. So, I just want to know. Do you still feel that way? Because I still feel that way about you,” confessed a dejected Harry, his heart sinking into his stomach from the pain of looking into Ginny’s confused eyes.

Ginny began to cry, and she covered her mouth. She closed her eyes, as she tried to turn away from Harry. She looked down at the floor, and two large teardrops fell from each eye.

“Ginny, I can’t take this.” Harry’s voice cracked. Frustrated, he stormed away, leaving Ginny crying.

Professor Albright was on her way to staff quarters, when she saw Ginny crying outside the classroom door. “Ginny, dear, what happened?” she inquired sympathetically.

Ginny could not speak. She started to sob openly. Her books dropped to the floor and she put her arms around Professor Albright’s neck. She wept heavily on Professor Albright’s shoulder.

“Ginny, it’s okay. Whatever it is, it’ll be okay. Come. Let’s go back into the classroom,” Professor Albright suggested, leading Ginny into the room.

Ginny picked up her books and followed Professor Albright back.

“Now, Ginny,” Professor Albright began, sitting down at one of the student’s desks, “sit down and tell me what’s troubling you.”

Ginny took a seat at one of the desks across from Professor Albright and attempted to reply to Professor Albright’s question. “It’s ...I ...Harry...” But that was all Ginny could get out before crying again.

"Oh, I see," Professor Albright replied, taking some tissues out of the pocket of her robe and handing them to Ginny.

Ginny took the tissues, blew her nose, and then clutched them in her fist.

"Did Harry say something to hurt you? Because if he did, you just tell me." Professor Albright insisted.

"No, no, nothing like that. It was me. I just can't be with him anymore. I can't be with anyone," Ginny wailed.

"Why is that?" Professor Albright asked, now growing suspicious that Ginny was still under some sort of spell. "Did someone say anything to you?"

"No."

"Then what makes you think you can't be with *anyone*?"

"It was this dream--more like a nightmare," Ginny replied.

"Go on," Professor Albright encouraged, certain of her suspicions.

"In the nightmare, Harry, I and one of my brothers -- I couldn't see his face -- were being chased by You-Know-Who. He trapped us at the edge of a cliff. He made the ground give way, and I was holding onto Harry's hand in my left and my brother's hand in my right. I could feel my strength giving out. I knew I had to make a choice. The most horrible question ran through my mind." Ginny could not finish. Professor Albright filled in the rest.

"Whom do you hold onto? Whom do you let go?" Professor Albright completed, smiling at Ginny.

Ginny could not speak. She was overcome by grief again. Professor Albright got up and walked over to her desk to get the box of tissues. She walked back to where Ginny was sitting and placed the box down on the desk. Ginny reached for a tissue.

"Thank you," Ginny whimpered.

"Now, listen, Ginny," Professor Albright ordered. "What you experienced wasn't a dream. It was a vision implanted into your mind by You-Know-Who, designed to confuse you. Its main objective was to force you to feel uncomfortable about your feelings for Harry, thereby causing you to feel the need to end your relationship. Don't you see the beauty in the simplicity of such an evil plot? As long as you and Harry are split up, Harry no longer benefits from the additional protection your love offers. Don't let it work, Ginny."

“Well, even though that may be true, it still doesn’t answer my question,” Ginny sniffed, collecting herself.

“And what question is that?” Professor Albright inquired, knowing very well what the question was.

“Which would have been the right choice? Whom should I have saved?”

“Well, let me ask you this,” Professor Albright replied. “Do you know why people and animals make babies?”

Ginny gave Professor Albright an odd look, but she went ahead and entertained her question. “Yeah. To keep the people and animals going.”

“And what would happen if they did not make babies?”

“They would die out.”

“Precisely. Do you think it is important that your family keeps going?”

“Yes, of course,” Ginny replied.

“Do you wish to help your family by having a family of your own?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Then who do you think would be better to help you make your new family, Harry or one of your brothers?” Professor Albright smiled, as she observed Ginny’s face.

Ginny’s face lit up. She even started to giggle. Then another thought started to nudge her conscience. “Wouldn’t I be acting disloyal to my family? After all, my brothers are my blood,” she was quick to point out.

“Ginny, don’t you realize you would be doing a greater disservice to your family if you remained loyal to your brothers and failed to move on with a family of your own?” Professor Albright questioned.

“But that would still be wrong. Maybe my brother had someone that he wanted to marry and have a family,” Ginny argued.

“Ginny, when making a decision, sometimes it isn’t always whether or not the final decision is right or wrong. Ginny, as a scientist, I have learned that Mother Nature makes decisions about who lives and who dies every day. Sometimes Her decisions seem wrong, even cruel, but the species must go on. If one member of the herd needs to be sacrificed, then it is sacrificed. Do you know why?”

Ginny shook her head.

“Because the survival of the herd is more important than the survival of the individual. I know it sounds pragmatic, even selfish. Believe me, if the Sorting Hat was placed on Mother Nature’s head, she would be placed in Slytherin.”

“I know what you’re trying to say, but I still don’t know if I could live with myself, knowing that I let go of my brother, who is definitely a part of my life. To do that, with the hope that Harry and I would be together forever, seems like a terrible gamble,” Ginny debated.

“Ginny, no one is saying it would be an easy decision to make, but sometimes in order to do what is right, you have to do what is hard-- what is logical. Never make decisions based solely on your emotional needs. That’s why Mother Nature has managed to maintain a balance in the world,” Professor Albright explained.

Ginny was still not completely convinced. It was time for the professor to ask the most poignant of questions.

“Ginny, I sense you are still struggling with this dilemma,” the professor observed.

“Well, yeah. Like I said, maybe my brother has someone he loves. Maybe Harry and I wouldn’t wind up together in the end after all,” Ginny speculated.

“Ginny, you can’t go wasting away in might be’s and uncertainty. Let me ask you one question.” Professor Albright gazed into Ginny’s eyes. “Are you in love with Harry?”

“Yes. Of course I am, but I love my brothers too,” Ginny replied nervously.

“I didn’t ask you if you loved Harry. I asked you if you are *in* love with him. Could you see yourself spending the rest of your life with him? Would you risk everything you had just for the chance to spend every moment of your life with him?”

Ginny’s mouth dropped open as she returned the professor’s gaze. She furled her brow then looked away. There was a moment of silence then Ginny gave her answer. “Yes. I would die for him.”

“Then what you’re telling me is all the fear and all the trials would be worth it to be with him. You are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in the name of love, even if it means always being uncertain and afraid.”

Ginny began to cry again. “Yes, I would sacrifice everything for the chance to spend the rest of my life with him.”

“Well, then, Ginny, the answer, however hard, should be clear, yes?”

Ginny nodded. Then Professor Albright delivered the question that helped Ginny make her final decision. "You haven't forgotten that Harry's and your love is the secret weapon against *him*, have you?"

Ginny's eyes opened wide. She shook her head vigorously.

"Well, then, I guess, you could say your decision to protect the herd outweighs the decision to protect the individual. While your brother would die, Harry's and your love would save the wizarding world."

"So, I guess, I should go find Harry," Ginny concluded.

"Yes, that would be a logical step in the right direction," Professor Albright encouraged.

"What am I going to say to him? He must be furious at me. I've hurt him so. I know I have," Ginny wept.

"Ginny, you need to find him. Talk to him. He'll be hurt at first. After all, you did break his heart terribly, but he loves you," Professor Albright assured.

Ginny smiled in spite of her nervousness about having to face Harry. She got up from her chair, leaned over to Professor Albright and hugged her. Ginny left the classroom.

It was late afternoon. Classes adjourned for the day. The sun was still high in the sky, as spring moved into April. Harry had gone to the Owlery to visit Hedwig. Ginny spotted him. Feeling very nervous, she quietly walked inside. She watched him for several minutes before making a sound. She cleared her throat to announce her presence.

Harry quickly turned around and glared at her for a moment. He greeted her quickly then turned his attention back to Hedwig. Ginny felt her stomach caving in. Her heart sank, but she knew she could not back down now.

"Harry," Ginny gulped, his name almost got lodged in her throat. "Can we talk?"

Harry did not turn around. He shrugged his shoulders as he continued to tend to Hedwig.

"Harry, I just wanted to say I'm sorry for everything I put you through. I know I hurt you and I'm so sorry. There was a reason for what I did, but I talked to Professor Albright and she helped me straighten things out," Ginny stammered. She could see that Harry was trying to resist her. This behavior did not help relieve her nervousness. She felt like she wanted to cry.

"Harry, won't you even turn around and look at me?" Ginny pleaded.

Harry stopped petting Hedwig. He stared ahead, took a deep breath, and turned to face Ginny. Ginny's heart began to skip beats, as she looked into Harry's glaring eyes. His expression was undeniably angry.

"Harry, say something," Ginny begged.

"What would you like me to say? You said you're sorry. Fine! You want me to say I accept your apology? Fine! I accept your apology," Harry snarled, gritting his teeth. He turned back to Hedwig and continued to stroke her feathers.

"Harry, is that it?" Ginny whimpered feeling like someone dug her heart out of her chest.

Harry turned around swiftly. His anger began to increase.

"What else would you like me to say? Ginny, you broke my heart! You dumped me! You didn't give me a chance. You never even gave me the courtesy of telling me what I did wrong," Harry shouted, his voice growing louder with rage. By this time, Ginny's eyes were pooling with tears.

"Harry, I had something bad happen, and it frightened me," Ginny sobbed.

"What? What, besides that thing with the Potions book? What else could have possibly happened, for you to treat me like that?" Harry's face grew red with more rage.

"Well, I had this dream, and it made me think I had to choose you over my brother." Ginny started to panic, stumbling on her explanation. None of the words were coming out right.

"What?" Harry blurted, cutting her off. On top of his rage, he was now growing extremely frustrated with her.

"I'm trying to explain it to you, but I can't with you looking at me like that. Please give me this chance. I'll tell you everything."

"Fine. You were saying something about a dream?" Harry scoffed, walking over to sit on a bench next to where Ginny was standing. "I'm listening." Harry's arms were folded; his demeanor was defiant.

"I had this dream over Christmas break. We were being chased by You-Know --Who -- you and I, and one of my brothers. Anyway, he trapped us. He chased us to the edge of a very high cliff, then shot a spell to cause the ground to break away from under our feet. I grabbed you and my brother just before the two of you fell. I was holding each of you by your hands. I felt my strength giving out, and I knew I was going to have to make a decision. I woke up before I knew what that decision was. It left me feeling very guilty,"

Ginny revealed. She was relieved that she was able to finish her story, but was still feeling nervous.

“Why did you feel guilty?” Harry asked, now calming down and beginning to understand.

“Because I was hoping that I had saved you,” Ginny confessed.

“You felt guilty, because you hoped that you chose me over your brother?” Harry asked, feeling as if the whole thing was absurd.

“Yeah,” Ginny replied.

“Well, Ginny, it’s good that you wanted to save me,” Harry assured.

“It is?”

“Well, you can’t spend the rest of your life with your brother. That would be weird.” Harry chuckled.

“That’s what Professor Albright said. She even said it wasn’t a dream. It was probably a thought, planted in my head by You-Know-Who to get me to break up with you. You know, make you less powerful, because you wouldn’t have my love,” Ginny stuttered.

“She’s probably right. Professor Albright is pretty smart,” Harry agreed, smiling up at Ginny.

“Yeah, well, I realize that now, but I’m afraid it’s too late. I’m afraid the damage is already done. Even though I know it’s all that I deserve, I’m afraid you’re going to force me to live the rest of my life regretting what I’ve done to you,” Ginny sobbed. “Please don’t. Please give me another chance.”

Harry became nervous. Ginny was having a nervous breakdown in front of him and he didn’t know what to do. He knew, deep down inside, he was extremely grateful that Ginny wanted him back. He reached up, took her hand and guided her down next to him. He put his arm around her. Ginny wrapped her arms around him and buried her face in the nape of his neck.

“Hey, Ginny, you know that’s not gonna happen. I’m not going to force you to regret what happened. I know, now, that it wasn’t your fault,” Harry replied, trying to console her. “Hey, do you love me?”

Ginny lifted her head, looked into his eyes, and nodded. She put her head back down on Harry’s shoulder, nuzzling her face under his chin. Her hair tickled his neck and caused him to jerk away then chuckle a little.

"I love you too. Hey, can I ask you a question?" Harry asked. His one arm was wrapped around Ginny's waist, while her left hand rested in his other hand. He was gently caressing the soft skin of her hand with his thumb.

Ginny acknowledged Harry's question with a smile and a nod.

"What exactly do you love about me?"

Ginny quickly lifted her head and looked into Harry's emerald eyes. "Huh?"

"What do you love about me?"

"You want me to list all the things I love about you?" Ginny asked, astonished.

"You mean there's more than one?" Harry teased.

"Well, yeah. You really want me to tell you? Take you on an ego trip?" Ginny knew she was beaten.

Harry was good at putting people in their place without really trying. "Well, yeah. It's the least you could do, after breaking my heart," Harry joked.

Ginny put her head back down on his shoulder. "Harry, I said I was sorry," she whimpered.

"Ha, gotcha!" Harry blurted, poking Ginny playfully in her side and making Ginny recoil. "So, are you going to give me that list?" Harry teased. His pirate smile was irresistible.

Ginny looked up at him helplessly. She took a deep breath, then she studied him for a moment to help her get started. She finally thought of something.

"Well, I love... your hair."

"You love my hair!" Harry responded, in a tone of disbelief. "Good. You can have it. I was planning on shaving it off!"

Both Ginny and Harry laughed at Harry's joke. There was silence for moment, then Harry coaxed her to continue.

"Okay, go ahead. Besides my hair, what else do you love?" he chuckled.

Ginny thought some more. Then she blushed. She was looking into his eyes. "I love your eyes. I look into them, and I get lost in them. And, yet, at the same time I feel so found."

Harry was listening intently. Ginny continued to think. She knew he wanted to hear more.

“Go on,” he gently encouraged, still smiling his irresistible pirate’s grin.

Ginny continued with her list. “I love how you look when you’ve got the Snitch in your grasp. You have this triumphant look on your face.”

Ginny turned away for a moment to think of something else. It did not take her long to add something else to the list. “I love how loyal you are to your friends. I think if everyone was as loyal to their friends as you, this world would be a lot better.”

She paused for a moment then carried on. “I love how I feel when I’m in your arms. I feel so safe. The whole world could be falling around me, and I’d know that, as long as I was in your arms, I would be in the safest place I could be.”

Harry continued to listen. He instinctively put his other arm around Ginny and hugged her gently.

“I love the way you kiss,” she continued. “You have the softest lips and you’re a good kisser.” Ginny blushed.

Harry blushed too. He said nothing for a moment. He just smiled at her with the same lady-killer’s grin. “So, are we okay?” he asked.

Ginny looked into his eyes and smiled.

“So, if I were to kiss you right now, you wouldn’t yell at me or --?” Harry wasn’t able to finish his question. Ginny had pulled him into a kiss. When they broke away, Harry looked lovingly into Ginny eyes and, in jest, asked, “So, I guess it’s okay to kiss you?”

Ginny laughed and looked down blushing. Harry touched her cheek. He lifted her chin and gently placed his lips on hers.

Only seconds later, Ron, Hermione, and Neville burst into the Owlery. Hermione and Ron were calling out to Harry.

“Harry, look! Our acceptance letters have arrived!” Hermione announced excitedly.

Both Harry and Ginny looked up at Hermione, Ron and Neville. Hermione handed Harry his letter. Harry accepted it nervously from Hermione’s hand and looked at it. He looked up at Ginny, whose eyes were filled with anticipation.

“Well, open it, Harry!” Ron demanded anxiously.

Harry knew there was no getting around the truth. Either the Department of Magical Law Enforcement considered him to be of Auror material or they did not.

“Well, this is it,” Harry gulped nervously, looking into Ginny’s excited eyes. He quickly peeled away at the envelope, pulled out the letter, and began reading it to himself.

“Well, come on, Harry! What does it say?” Ron asked anxiously.

Harry beamed a smile then proceeded to read the letter aloud.

“Dear Mr. Potter, congratulations...” Harry began, but the moment he read the word, ‘congratulations’ Hermione, Ron and Neville screamed and cheered. Ginny threw her arms around Harry’s neck and kissed him enthusiastically on the cheek.

Harry looked back at Ginny. His heart was pounding with overwhelming joy. “This is it, Ginny. I’m going to be an Auror!”

“It couldn’t have happened to a better person. Your parents would be so proud of you, Harry!” Hermione praised.

“So what’s with the rest of you lot?” Harry joked.

“I’ve been accepted to St. Mungo’s Medical Apprenticeship,” Hermione announced proudly.

“I’ll be joining my dad at the Ministry. We’ll be a father and son team,” Ron answered proudly.

“I’ll be doing my apprenticeship at Herbaceuticals Incorporated,” Neville replied.

“Well, it looks like we all have something to celebrate. We have to tell Professor Albright. I’m sure she’ll want to hear all about this!” Hermione beamed a broad smile.