

The Price

There are moments in life that are so pure, that to attach mere words to them would be to diminish them in some way.

In his long life, he could still remember the first moment. It had been life changing, and at the same time, life defining. For the first time, he'd had a purpose he was excited about, a feeling that he was finally on the right track for his life.

Voldemort was still out there, but this had nothing to do with him and everything to do with an iconic image etched on his memory, like letters emblazoned in solid steel.

It had started like any other day. No hint of what was to come or how things were going to change for him and for the rest of the world.

He'd eaten lunch; he couldn't remember what it was. It was before.

He'd gone flying alone, trying to deal with the pressure he was under, the pressure he could never escape from.

After flying, he'd put his broom away, taken off his Quidditch gear and contemplated going in with the others. But he didn't want to. He didn't want his sour mood to poison the atmosphere again.

He'd decided to go for his weekly walk – the best decision of his life. He'd walked slowly, lost in thought, and then casually looked up.

She was there, standing on a rock.

She was watching the water.

Her bright hair shining in the sun, casting a shadow over her face, but he could still see her eyes. He paused, staring at her.

The light made the outline of her dress transparent, and he could see her legs, her body.

And everything changed.

He'd heard other boys talking about her attributes, her breasts, her legs, and her hair. And he'd never really paid attention. Why would he? She was his friend.

Friendship was no longer enough.

He remembered now. They wanted her. At least two of them were planning on asking her out, on trying to get into her life.

He couldn't allow that. Not now.

She was his, even if she didn't know it yet. She always had been, even if he didn't know it.

There was a moment of self-doubt, but it didn't last. He couldn't afford to doubt, not now. Not when everything he suddenly wanted was at risk.

He walked up to her, not looking away, wanting the ethereal image to be imprinted on his eyelids, so that when ever he closed his eyes, he'd see her.

This wasn't the time to think of someone else. This wasn't the time to be generous. This was his chance, his moment. This was his time to be selfish and to take the chance he had.

"Harry?" she asked as he moved closer to her.

He didn't talk, didn't take his eyes from her, not wanting to blink in case she vanished into the same ether she'd been created from.

He felt her eyes boring into his, as he didn't stop a polite distance away and moved straight into her personal space.

"What?" she asked.

He moved his finger, touching her lips, and shook his head. This wasn't the time for words.

As slowly as he could, he leaned in and kissed her unresisting lips.

Nothing. She was totally unresponsive to his kiss.

Panic gripped him for a second, and he took a deep breath. This needed to be right – everything rested on it.

He took this new feeling; he had this sense of destiny and purpose, this sense of life. He opened himself like he had never before, and he kissed her again, harder this time. He poured everything he felt, every emotion he had into the kiss, doing everything he could to make her feel the same way, to not reject him.

He could feel his heart beating, as if he had run a marathon. His stomach was in a knot. She didn't feel the same. He'd missed his chance. He'd lost her, before he even knew she wanted her.

Then she moved.

Her hand swept up into his hair, her body melted against his, and she kissed him back.

She understood. She accepted, and she wanted it as well.

He exhaled in relief against her lips and then pulled back slowly, so he could look into her eyes.

He smiled at her. It felt like he had never smiled before, like every other emotion he had felt was different, or was just practice, for this one smile.

Her brown eyes lit up with joy, and she smiled back.

He pulled her into a hug, and then he lightly turned her around, hugging her back to his chest, so that they could watch the sun slowly set over the lake at Hogwarts.

He inhaled slowly, drinking in the smell of her hair, and smiled over her head. He'd just entered the last relationship of his life, and he couldn't be happier.

When the sun had set, she'd taken his large hand in her small one, and they'd walked together into the future. He didn't care what anyone thought. She was his now, and no one and no thing would ever separate them.

He still hadn't said a word, it hadn't been needed.

He'd told her everything he needed too.

And she'd replied in the same way.

Talking could come later.

For now, the sound of silence was all they needed.

"What are you thinking about, love?" she asked softly.

"The first time I fell in love with you," he replied candidly.

"Ahhh," she laughed gently. "Did I ever tell you my side of that story?"

He shook his head and stroked back a strand of her grey hair.

"Did you ever wonder why I invited Lavender and Parvati to be bridesmaids?"

He shook his head again. He hadn't, he'd just presumed that it was something she decided on the spur of the moment.

"Ginny?"

"Yeah?"

"We've been thinking."

Ginny looked scared and backed away slowly.

Parvati laughed and grabbed her. "Don't be silly; it's not the end of the world."

"Are you sure?" Ginny asked, a grin on her face.

"Hey," Lavender complained. "Be nice. We're here to do you a favour."

"Oh?"

"We're fed up of Harry moping around. You're going to do something about it." Parvati explained.

"I am?" Ginny blinked. "Have I just stepped into a weird new dimension?"

"No," Lavender continued. "The only way Harry is going to change is if he has something more important to him than He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

"And where do I come into this?"

"You're going to be his girlfriend."

"I'm going to be *what!*?" Ginny demanded.

"You're going to date him," Parvati explained helpfully. "Kiss him, distract him, and let those gorgeous, elegant hands of his explore your body. All the good things."

Ginny squeaked, feeling herself blush harder than she could remember. "I... I... I don't feel that way about him," she said.

"Oh?" Lavender asked. "In that case, you won't mind helping us find a girl who could feel that way."

"Yeah," Parvati agreed. "We know exactly how to get through to Harry; we've been studying him enough for the past month. I think Susan Bones would be a good choice, don't you? She's got a bit of a crush on him."

"Oooo, yes! Good choice," Lavender agreed. "Harry and Susan. I wonder if they'll name their children after us."

"We can hope. Sorry to waste your time, Ginny," Parvati said with a smile. "I think Susan's in the greenhouse. Let's go find her."

"Wait!" Ginny blurted. "What do you mean, you've been *studying* Harry?"

"So you *are* interested?" Lavender asked.

Ginny nodded, looking down. "But he'll never feel that way about me, so I've locked it. I've got his friendship. It's enough."

"Coward."

"What?"

"You were both too young earlier," Parvati said quietly. "You had a crush – he wasn't ready. Times have changed, and you've both grown. And you're hiding behind what happened a few years ago as an excuse not to get what you want."

Ginny squared her shoulders. "I am *not* a coward."

"Good," Lavender smiled cheerfully. She looked at her watch. "We've not got much time. Take your jeans off."

"What?"

"If you're going to say that every time we tell you to do something, it's going to take forever. We've got a new dress for you to wear. Get moving."

Ginny nodded, her sense of unreality all encompassing.

Parvati looked at her underwear and shook her head. "Okay, strip completely. You can't wear them."

"Why not? They're comfy."

"I'm sure they are. They're also about as sexy as a pair of Wellington boots."

Lavender walked over and looked through Ginny's chest of drawers. "Here we go," she said happily, handing Ginny a pair of white silk knickers.

Ginny sighed and changed into them.

"Bra off," Parvati ordered next.

"I can't go bra-less," Ginny complained.

"Yes, you can. You're catching a boy; you have to bait the hook."

"But..."

"No," Lavender interrupted. "No buts. This isn't Dean or Seamus; you don't have to worry about your virtue. This is Harry. It's important that he gets the right image."

"What are you talking about?"

Parvati sighed and undid Ginny's bra herself.

Harry needs something different to fall in love," Lavender explained. "The standard things aren't going to work with him. It needs to be magical, it needs to be unreal – otherwise it won't get through to him."

"That doesn't make sense."

"Of course it does," Lavender disagreed. "Arms up."

Ginny obediently raised her arms, as Parvati moved a summer dress over her head and slid it down her body.

"Perfect," Lavender said with a smile, as the dress hugged Ginny's curves, before flaring out at her hips.

"Put these shoes on," Parvati ordered.

"But I never wear heels."

"Tough. We're emphasising your legs here, and the heels are going to do it perfectly."

"But..."

"We told you to stop interrupting," Parvati groaned. "Just do as you're told; we haven't got long."

Feeling a little cowed, Ginny did what she was told.

"Right. Come on," Lavender said, offering her a long coat.

"What do I need to do with this?"

"We don't want half the boys in the school drooling over you," Parvati explained. "Especially not the way your chest is going to bounce as you walk in those heels."

"But..."

"Ginny, no buts!" Lavender said. "Now come on; Harry's about to finish flying and go for his walk around the lake."

"He's doing what?"

"He does it every Sunday. He flies alone and then goes for a walk. It's his way of preparing for another week and the only time he gets to relax. You need to be in position."

Ginny sighed and gave up. She put the coat on and walked with the two girls, as they marched her downstairs and outside, towards the lake.

"Where are we going?"

"To the rocks," Parvati said.

"But they're always busy at weekends."

"Not this weekend."

Up ahead, Ginny saw Blaise Zabini and Terry Boot clearing the popular swimming point. The two boys were also her companions' boyfriends.

A lot of the younger years looked very disgruntled at having to interrupt their Sunday afternoon games.

She could just hear Blaise shouting as they approached. "Anyone not out of eyesight by the time those three girls get here, will discover exactly what can happen when the D.A. decides to get some revenge."

The younger years fled as if Voldemort himself was after them.

"Okay," Parvati said, after she dropped a kiss on Blaise's cheek. "Harry's due in three minutes. He's going to come around that corner. The sun should be at just the right height by then. You need to be facing him, but looking out over the lake."

"Wait a minute," Ginny frowned. "That's going to make my dress transparent."

"Of course it is," Lavender sighed. "Why else would you be wearing it?"

"But..."

"No buts," Lavender and Parvati said together. "Why are Gryffindors so bloody stubborn?"

Blaise and Terry exchanged a smile.

"Get up there. You're showing off to Harry, not anyone else. We're going to make sure no one else sees you."

"How do you know it's going to work?" Ginny asked, suddenly feeling incredibly nervous.

Lavender smiled softly and reached out and hugged Ginny. "It's going to work because you're beautiful. It's going to work because it's going to be magical. It's going to work because he's not going to be able to think of anything but you. It's going to work because all he needs is a little push to move you from friendship into love."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because he's Harry. Because despite everything, he still believes in the fairytale. And you're going to be his fairytale."

"I think you're nuts," Ginny whispered.

"Probably," Parvati agreed. "But what have you got to lose?"

"His friendship."

"And what have you got to gain?"

Ginny remained silent.

"Everything," Lavender said gently as she smiled at the younger girl. "You're the only person who can get through to him, even if we did this with Susan it wouldn't work. It has to be you. It can only be you. Now get into place."

Ginny nodded and slowly climbed up the rocks. She turned as she had been instructed, still not sure why she was doing it, why everything had changed like it had. She looked out at the water and smiled slowly.

She could feel him. All of a sudden, she knew he was there looking at her. She turned to face him. He had a look on his face she'd never seen before. It was intense, like when he was playing Quidditch or fighting, but still different.

"Harry?" she asked, as he got closer; she was starting to feel nervous again. This wasn't the Harry she was used to. This was different.

"What?" she asked.

He placed his finger on his lips, voluntarily touching her, and she stopped breathing.

Suddenly he was kissing her.

Harry Potter was kissing her. She was so shocked she didn't even think to kiss him back. Lavender and Parvati had been right.

He broke away, and she gasped to herself. His expression. It was so open, so hot, and so intense. It burned its way through all the mental protections she had built to keep him as only a friend and laid her completely bare to him.

He kissed her again, hot, heavy, full of passion and hope, and with a raw need that she'd never even dreamed of, never even hoped that she'd ever feel from anyone, never mind from him.

His hands were around her back, crushing her to him, and she revelled in the feeling of being possessed.

He started to stop, and she realised she'd just been standing there like a ninny, not giving him any clue that this was what she wanted with every breath in her body.

She slid her hand up, into his hair, kissing him back, and tried to be as open as he had been to her. She let the years of pent up frustration melt away in one mind-blowing kiss.

He broke the kiss and smiled at her.

It was the singular most beautiful thing she had ever seen. She had nothing to compare it to. She didn't think that anyone had ever seen him look like that – and she never wanted to share it.

He hugged her, before turning her, so that they could watch the setting sun together. His arms were around her waist; she could feel his breath in her hair.

For the first time, she wished he was a little more normal; parts of her body that she'd never seriously considered letting a boy touch were now calling out for his beautiful hands to slide up and hold her more intimately.

As the sun slid down they turned, his arm around her, and they walked off together. She slipped her hand into his, feeling the calluses from Quidditch. She caught a glimpse of Lavender and Parvati high-fiving out of the corner of her eyes, and she smiled softly. She'd have to do something really nice for them, for changing her life in less than an hour. But for now, it didn't matter. She had Harry, and it was the only relationship she had ever wanted.

The last of her life.

"Wait a second," Harry laughed softly. "You're telling me I'd just walked up to you, kissed you, and you already wanted me to touch you?"

Ginny smiled softly; with a slow movement, she reached her hand out and grabbed his. "I always loved your hands," she whispered. "The thought of

you touching me was right. It always was.”

“I can’t believe that they set us up like that.”

Ginny nodded softly. “They made me promise never to tell you. They said it was their contribution to the war against Voldemort.”

Harry nodded softly. “It was the biggest,” he whispered.

“I know, love,” she smiled and coughed dryly.

She felt him move a handkerchief in front of her lips, and she smiled softly at him, resting her head back down. She was so very tired and so very cold.

She let her eyes drift over his face again, as she had done every chance she had for the past ninety years together. He didn’t look that different; his hair now had a few specks of grey, as if age didn’t dare touch him. He still looked like he was in his forties. The more magic someone had, the slower they aged. And Harry had more than anyone.

“Tell me again,” she whispered tenderly. “Tell me how Tom died.”

He smiled at her, the same half smile that had been on his face throughout their marriage.

“Are you absolutely insane?” Ron demanded.

“If I was, would I know?” Harry retorted.

“Hermione,” Ron said, turning to the side. “Tell Harry he’s insane.”

“I can’t,” she whispered softly. “It’s the only thing that we’ve found that might work.”

“But it’s a gamble!”

“It’s not a gamble,” Hermione corrected gently. “We just don’t know what the criterion is.”

“But…”

“They’re right, Ron,” Ginny whispered. “I hate it, more than you can know. But it’s the only thing that’s got even a hint of a chance.”

Ron ran his fingers through his hair and looked directly at Harry. “If you die, I will never forgive you,” he whispered, then launched forwards and hugged him. “I still think you’re insane.” He reached out and pulled Hermione into the hug as Harry pulled in Ginny.

The four of them stood that way for a minute, each knowing it was possibly the last time they would ever be together as a quartet.

“It’s time,” McGonagall interrupted them shortly.

As they broke apart, Ron looked at Hermione and Ginny and then turned to the D.A. “You all understand the plan?”

As one, they nodded and picked up the tall mirrors. They had a charm on them, so that they could be seen through from the back. Hermione’s brilliance, combined with his magic had allowed them to create the ultimate shield. It would reflect anything, even the Unforgivables.

“Then let’s go!”

With a yell, the students, accompanied by some of the teachers, formed a circle around Harry, and started to run towards the Death Eaters.

They yelled their fears, their hopes, and their emotions in to the sky.

Unforgivable curses flew past them, missing them, or bouncing off, as they crashed into the line of Death Eaters and didn’t stop, crashing into them like an unstoppable wave.

They parted, letting Harry through. He went and didn’t look back, running until he was opposite Voldemort.

Voldemort smiled in that eerie way of his and opened his mouth.

“*I call for Life Judgement*,” Harry yelled and released all his magic in one painful burst.

The field went silent; everyone stopped. He saw horror appear on Dumbledore’s face and Harry hid a smile. No one knew what Life Judgement did; all they knew was that it took two people, and killed one of them. No one had ever found out what made the spell chose one over the other. The survivors had never talked about it. It was a spell that wasn’t forbidden, because to cast it was close to suicide. The last twenty times it had been called on record, the caster had been killed.

He found himself floating and he saw Voldemort doing the same. Before them, a giant shape with bat-like wings appeared. It seemed to be made out of screams and mist, of suffering and insubstantial smoke, as it billowed in the soft summer breeze.

“Who calls for Life Judgement,” it said, or perhaps it didn’t. It seemed like it couldn’t talk, like its words would not be for human ears to be able to

understand.

Harry raised his right arm.

It looked at them both. "One shall live. One shall die. Decide."

Harry frowned, feeling confused. The decision was obvious. Voldemort should die, and he should live. But why should he live over Voldemort. He got the feeling that the creature didn't care about good or evil, or petty subjects like that. He couldn't hate Tom, not like this. He couldn't let hate rule his life, not even if it would save it.

He closed his eyes for a second and then smiled sadly. He knew that Voldemort was wishing for his death. He could feel the malevolence. He was a little sad, as he thought of Ginny, of the way she had supported him, the way she had been there for him, the way she had kissed him and allowed him to kiss her. He felt like he was letting her down, letting everyone down. But he couldn't do it. Not ever to Voldemort. He couldn't hate.

Not now.

Not now that he had learned what happiness was.

He remembered how she looked, her bright hair shining in the sun. And he smiled at the thing in front of him.

"The decision has been made," it intoned.

"You," he pointed at Voldemort. "Chose him. He," he pointed at Harry. "Chose no one."

Voldemort smiled evilly and started to laugh loudly.

"You will be an excellent addition," it said, reaching out a hand. "So much hatred, so much fear and so much rage."

"But," Voldemort screamed, backing away. "I chose him!"

"You chose hatred," it said. "He chose life."

The creature reached out, and grabbed Voldemort. Voldemort's spirit left his body, and Harry and Voldemort both crumbled to the ground.

He felt Ginny grab him and lift him, her tears falling onto his face.

He looked up at her. Her bright hair shining in the sun. "I love you," he whispered. Around him, he could hear the screams of the Death Eaters as their connection to their master was violently cut. "Did we lose any?" he croaked.

Ginny shook her head, the biggest smile he had ever seen formed on her face. "It's over," she whispered. "You won."

"No," Harry said softly, reaching up and touching her face. "We won."

Ginny leant down and kissed him lingeringly.

He looked down at her again, her eyes had closed, and she was sleeping. The slow rise and fall of her chest was the only sign that she was still alive. He ran his eyes over her slowly – the wrinkles of her face, the grey hair that had replaced the once vibrant red.

"Why didn't you leave me?" she whispered, opening her eyes to gaze at him.

"Why would I do that?" he asked, smiling softly. The first time she had asked that, he had been shocked.

"Because I'm old, and you deserve someone young who can keep up with you."

"You kept up with me for ninety years," he reminded her.

"But not for any longer," she whispered softly. "You should have left me a long time ago."

"I will never leave you," he whispered back.

"How can you look at me?"

"Because every time I do, I see the same girl I fell in love with, the same girl I married. The same girl I had three beautiful children with. The same girl who saved my life and my future."

"I'm not that girl anymore; I'm old and wrinkled."

"You'll always be that girl to me."

He watched as she coughed again, his handkerchief catching the flecks of blood. All his power, all his magic, all his determination couldn't beat time.

"I love you," she whispered softly. "I've loved you all my life."

"I know, love," he replied gently. "I've loved you since that moment."

"You've made me so happy," Ginny continued. "You've been my lover, my confidant, my best friend. I never thought that marriage would be like spending every day hanging out with my best friend, then getting to go to bed with him as well. You made me happier than any woman has a right to be. You supported me through everything I did, and you made sure I had a safety net so that if I fell, I knew you were there to catch me."

"Shhh," Harry whispered, feeling tears start to fall down his cheeks.

"I wish," she whispered softly. "I wish I could be here forever for you."

"I know," he whispered, unable to stop crying. The idea of his light being taken away from him had hurt him every waking second since she had taken to her bed, unable to move anymore.

"Harry?" she whispered, her hand grabbing his with surprising strength.

"Yes, my love?"

"Thank you."

"Thank you." He said back gently. "Wait for me?"

"I'll wait for you till the end of time," she said softly.

He leant forwards, the tears now streaming down his face and kissed her softly. She kissed him back gently, and then he felt her go limp.

And his heart died.

He stood as the emptiness filled him. The colours turned grey. He walked to the window and looked across the quiet lake. Out there was the Wizarding world. His legacy was that it was safe. The fight was over. His friends were dead, Ron and Hermione, within six months of each other.

Their children were adults now. With children of their own, even grandchildren.

He'd realised years ago that the price of the long life his magic gave him was watching his friends and love die.

He'd done so much.

He'd given so much.

The decision wasn't really a decision. Not now. He hadn't thought about it, but now he realised that he'd always known.

He was no longer willing to pay the price.

He waved his hand, a letter appearing next to Ginny.

He walked over to the mirror. The mirror that they'd had most of their lives. The only physical representation they had of the final duel.

He stared into it, and slowly a shape appeared over his shoulder.

She stood there. Still. She smiled at him.

He held out his hand, smiling softly, and pointed at himself in the mirror.

She was so beautiful.

He grasped his magic, like he hadn't since he had cast the judgement spell.

Her bright hair shining in the sun.

"Avada Kedavra."