

## These Dreams

From the beginning, there were a few things I knew for certain: Mum and Dad loved me; dragons were way cool; and Harry Potter was the bestest wizard in the whole world. More things became certain over time, and a lot of *those* things developed nuances over the years, but the core truths were unshakable.

When I was seven, I began to notice that most of the adults in my life came in pairs: Mum & Dad, Granny & Gramps, Nana & Pop-pop, Aunt Sumi & Uncle Ron, Aunt Hermione & Uncle Bill, *et cetera*. The anomaly in this pattern was my beloved Harry, who had no mate in his life, no one stuck to him with an ampersand. My solution was simple: I would be his mate, the name on the other side of the ampersand.

Mum pooh-poohed this solution, but it certainly made sense to me. I knew, of course, that there *were* women who spent the night with Harry other than me, how else could I explain the grown-up underwear that I found under the couch when I was looking for missing gobstones? It had to be *grownup* underwear because all of my knickers were blue, not black, and mine had cartoon characters on them of course – I mean, if you were old enough to choose your own knickers, how could you NOT choose Minnie Mouse? But I digress – Mum told me that it was okay to *pretend* that I'd marry Uncle Harry, but it was only for pretend. I never told Mum about the dreams I had – the dreams that grew in intensity as I grew older to the point that Aunt Hermione taught me a charm to tuck them away in a part of my brain that I couldn't touch most of the time, but that's another digression too.

I didn't worry about these essentially mythical women as they were neither serious nor persistent. Those who showed the least bit of persistence got to meet my pet fireball. The essential flaw in my plan was exposed when I figured out that there was a second anomaly in the pattern: my Aunt Ginny didn't have anyone on the other side of her ampersand either, and she was awfully keen on my Harry and awfully persistent too.

Aunt Ginny and my Harry eventually became Harry & Ginny, despite my best efforts to persuade Harry that he should wait for me. Ginny had my grudging respect because she wasn't put off by fireballs, or Harry's stubbornness, or the fact that there were a number of people who had made it into his heart before her. Harry & Ginny, to my surprise, was a good thing. Not only was my Harry no longer alone, which made him a lot happier, but I got a second best friend out of the deal.

After they got married, I still spent at least one night a month sleeping over at Harry & Ginny's house. For movie nights, sometimes I'd be sandwiched between the two of them, and other times I'd be on Harry's left and Ginny would be on Harry's right. Family was important to me, and I spent a lot of time with my aunts and uncles, my cousins and my brother and sisters, but anytime I wasn't at home, or out on a babysitting job, chances were that I was at Harry & Ginny's house. As I observed things, most grown-ups worked, while Mums would alternate between staying at home, raising little witches and wizards and regular jobs outside the house, Dads would most often have a steady job outside of the house. Harry seemed to be the exception to this rule. He had lots of jobs, but nothing like a regular office or shop, which meant that he had lots of time for me. I didn't mind that a bit.

Mum and Dad made sure that I learned all sorts of essential things before I was packed off to Beauxbatons for school, but it was Harry who taught me how to fight with knives (among other things), and Ginny who showed me where you could hide a knife when wearing a skin-tight dress. Mum taught me where babies came from along with the basic facts of how they were made, but it was Ginny who taught me the why of that mystery; that it wasn't enough to want to sleep with a boy, you had to want to wake up with him the next morning too.

In the end Harry was the yardstick by which I measured every man in my life. As far as I was concerned, it was simple. I wanted someone who would look at me the way Harry looked at Ginny. Who would treat me like Harry treated Ginny, and frankly who would look as good in swimming trunks as Harry did. Needless to say, not one of them measured up.

When I went off to school, it was Ginny who (illegally) taught me how to Apparate so I could nip away from school and talk to her when I just needed a shoulder to cry on or an ear to hold my secrets. Over the years she heard about my first date, my first kiss, the first time I bombed an exam and my first break-up.

It was Harry I turned to when I needed help passing my Defence class. He might not be as powerful as most people think (the Daily Prophet portrays him as some sort of Deity) but he is better trained than any Auror on the planet. He's the person that the Unspeakables go to when they have a problem. He's as close to fearless as any person can be, and, after Ginny came into his life, remarkably even tempered – until a member of his family is threatened.

Harry has a large extended family, but he cares about all of us. During my first year at Beauxbatons after a few minor and very stupid Death Eaters managed to kidnap me, the whole world got to see what happened when Harry Potter was pissed off. By the time he finished, there wasn't anything left for people to prosecute.

As soon as he had heard I'd been taken (and boy, was I embarrassed but in my defence, I wasn't expecting a *toilet seat* in my dormitory to be a Portkey) he took command of the Aurors, and no one in the Ministry, not even the Minister, had the guts to tell him that he had no authority to lead them – on paper he was just a civilian.

He ran the investigation like he had the war against Voldemort, even ordering Ginny around (for the first time in their marriage). I would have

thought beforehand that being bossed around would have caused problems, but Ginny laughed as she told me later that it made her hot, and as far as she was concerned, he didn't release the inner Harry Potter often enough.

My kidnappers had taken me from Beauxbatons to Germany. They thought I was unconscious, but they never took into account the fact that biologically I'm not quite human. I woke up and overpowered my guards, but without a wand I really couldn't do much to break out of the castle where I was being kept. Add to that the fact that I really didn't know where I was, but the one thing that I did know was that Harry would come for me; *that* I was sure about.

Normally, getting permission from the German authorities to either get them to investigate or allow an English force in takes days, if not weeks. Harry has always had a way of bypassing those rules. This particular time, I found out later, Harry walked into the German Ministry, strolled straight into the Minister's office, and informed the Minister straight out that he was attacking the Death Eaters base in ten minutes and he'd appreciate it if the German Ministry would be so kind as to stay out the way.

The Minister did exactly as he was told.

Harry lead the Aurors personally, and Ginny told me later that even she, who thought she knew him, hadn't quite realised how good he was.

I was rescued and didn't even see the blood.

But you know, it was reassuring. I already knew that Harry was the bestest wizard in the world but now I knew that if anyone touched me, Harry would get them, and nothing, and no one, would stop him.

To say I was close to Harry & Ginny during my Beauxbatons years was an understatement, but it didn't all flow one way though - during my first year I became Ginny's secret keeper too - I knew that she was carrying a baby inside her a few hours before Harry knew.

I got an express owl the day before exams that she lost the baby in her sixth month of pregnancy. My cousin Phillip Potter was buried in Godrics Hollow after I came home from school. I was the only member of the extended family who didn't have the good sense to stay away during the first few days of mourning. I spent that afternoon wrapped in a blanket with Ginny as we both bawled our eyes out. When Harry came back from his duties after the funeral he made us soup and joined us on the couch as we forced ourselves to eat. For a miserable time, it was pretty cosy.

Losing the baby was terrible, but life went on. For me, it was going back to school, for Ginny it was going back to work, for Harry, it was looking into new businesses to invest in, a hobby that had produced handsome returns over the years.

That was what he said officially anyway. Unofficially he was still keeping his hand in with the Unspeakables, becoming their chief trainer, even though he was never on the payroll.

Thanks in part to comprehensive revision notes from my Aunt Hermione and the fact that all of the adults in my life were locked in a competition to show me neat bits of magic before the others could do so, I skipped my fourth year, moving directly from the lower division of Beauxbatons into fifth year classes and all of the madness of O.W.L. classes and the year-long preparation for the O.W.L. tests. Halfway to Christmas that year I reached a Saturday morning where I'd had enough of France, enough of Beauxbatons and more than enough of a wizard named Phillippe who thought he was my boyfriend, so in the time-honoured tradition I'd established, I left a note for my Prefect and slipped off the grounds of the school, Apparating to England and to Ginny's kitchen.

Ginny, however, wasn't in the kitchen, she was in the loo, making pukey sounds.

When I heard her clean up in the loo, I announced my presence. "You're not alone, Ginny," I called.

"Yeah," she said, pushing hair back from her face with her forearm, "I was just figuring that out myself."

I looked at her with awe and amazement. I, unfortunately, said the first thing that came to mind, which wasn't at all poetic or ladylike.

"So, he knocked you up again."

Ginny arched an eyebrow at me. "Idiot schoolgirls who can't master basic charms get knocked up," she instructed. "Happily married women successfully conceive and glow with pregnancy."

"So that's what you were doing in the loo? Glowing?" I asked.

"Yeah, it's a messy thing, this glowing business," she said, putting a kettle on for tea.

I was a secret keeper again. No one who wasn't a Weasley found out about Ginny's condition until she passed the first trimester. This time she carried the baby for seven months, yielding another stillbirth. Phoebe Potter was buried with her brother at Godrics Hollow at the end of May. Ginny seemed to be unfazed by the loss when I came back from Beauxbatons in June, but early in July I popped by the Potter house before going off to a babysitting gig only to find her sitting by the kitchen table with a large bottle of Firewhisky and a small bottle of Muggle medical pills. She was pretty incoherent at the time; sobbing and heaving about how much she loved Harry and what a terrible witch she was, having failed him as a wife. I knew I didn't dare leave her, so I performed my first sidealong Apparation, taking her to Harry.

My admiration for Harry's love for Ginny grew as I watched them that summer. Harry engaged the situation and took charge, willing to put his own grief to one side to make sure that Ginny was alright, instinctively understanding that Ginny's grief was more raw - that she had actually carried their child, even if it was for such a cruelly short time.

He arranged her leave of absence - well, by arranged, he put the word out and the Weasley clan arranged everything else.

I has always loved me at one time the Weasleys were looked down on. Not any more. Every single one of the seven Weasley children was a success, and with *their* various children, they were infiltrating all parts of Wizarding society.

I once asked Harry about it and he just smiled at me and looked innocent. That was when I knew that it wouldn't be long before Uncle Percy was the Minister of Magic. Harry never did anything without a plan, and that plan always came from some of the smartest people I have ever, and will ever, meet: Ron, Sumi, Hermione, Bill, Mum and Dad. But I'm digressing here.

Harry took Ginny to the Cayman Islands. He had a place there – heck, he had a lot of places to go as collecting bolt holes had been a hobby of his for years, but that's where they ended up. A week before school I got an owl from Ginny, inviting me to come visit them. I didn't have to be asked twice. Although Harry had a house in the Cayman Islands, they weren't staying there. Instead, they had a cabin at the beach that was half-cottage, half-garage. For reasons that weren't entirely clear, they spent their days working together, building a sailboat. In the evening they'd go out to eat and walk the beaches. When I came to visit them, they continued in this pattern. It wasn't all shipbuilding though, as they took me out dancing one night, but aside from that one outing, they didn't go out in public much. I learned a fair amount about carpentry, splinters and blisters, and even more about how much you can say to someone without ever uttering a word.

Both of them wrote to me that year when I went back to school. They finished the boat by Christmas, and then began building a bigger boat after that. By the time I finished school that year, they announced that they were going sailing for a year in the second boat, the one they just finished. Harry's notes were short and pithy - I doubt I ever got a letter longer than two pages. Ginny's letters started out short, and by the time winter had set in France, she was writing me two ten-page letters every week. Despite the length of Ginny's letters, it was a short note from Harry that finally set my mind at ease.

Dear Sam,

Ginny is not yet well, but she is no longer broken. While I don't wish what's happened to us on any couple, this time together has been incredible. I'm falling in love with this woman all over again. Study hard, but take time to break a rule or two just to stay in practice.

Love,  
Harry

I spent Easter on the boat with them, we anchored in the Caribbean and Ginny taught me to fish, and Harry taught me how to cook the fish over an open fire.

It was almost strange, looking back, at how their roles were sometimes reversed. Ginny was the one who did a lot of the traditional male things, and Harry was the one who tended to cook and clean. He never cared, it wasn't that Ginny didn't know how, it was just that he was a better cook than she was and he never had that macho-bullshit attitude about cooking and cleaning that some men had.

There were no more pregnancies after that. I'd heard (alright, overheard) my Mum talking to Aunt Hermione about how Ginny's healer said that the next pregnancy could easily kill her, mentioning something about hypertension that I didn't understand at the time.

The next few years were a blur. I finished Beauxbatons, and had offers from the French Auror Academy and St. Mungo's Healer program. I remember sitting in the galley with Ginny aboard their sailboat with both acceptance letters in my hand, trying to get her to make the decision for me. Ginny told me to make no decision because the right decision would percolate to the top of my mind while I took a week of holiday with them.

I didn't bother asking Harry because I knew what his answer would be. He would sit down with me, discuss both options through and then get me to make the decision I wanted. Well, I didn't want that – damn it. I wanted someone to just tell me what to do.

It must have worked. At the end of the summer I began the Healer program in London. The normal apprenticeship is three years, but I took a special programme in trauma medicine that took four years, complete with a residency rotation at the Muggle medical school in Grenada. By the time I finished the Healer programme, Harry & Ginny had returned from their year of sailing and Ginny had been back at work for a few years, taking back her old job, supervising the training of new Aurors.

I had the pick of several jobs, but gravitated towards one that appeared to have my name on it. After dithering over the positions for nearly ten years, the English Auror program began to hire its own Healers, establishing a small medical unit at the training centre. I was the first Healer hired. I went through classes with the new Aurors, qualifying with honours for most of the field courses (anyone who had been taught to defend themselves by Harry Potter was not going to have a problem with field action) and not a few of the more academic classes as well. After a while, I began to go out with the strike teams, having convinced Tonks that it was a good idea to take a qualified Healer with them when they sent Aurors into harm's way. On more than one occasion I went out on strike teams with Ginny. I saw a whole new side to her out in the field.

The Ginny that teased Harry on the couch when we'd watch movies on the telly was nothing like the witch I saw out in the field. She was focused, silent, and very, very scary when she got angry. More than one new Auror trainee made the mistake of assuming that she got her job because she was married to a living legend. Those that worked with her out in the field never made that mistake more than once.

Seeing Ginny like this made me realise what Harry had seen in her back when I was seven years old. This focused and quiet witch had the strength to stand up to Harry Potter. She was my role model growing up, after all.

It was when I went to work for the Ministry that I found out that there were laws about International Apparation that I had been breaking since I'd started school. It never occurred to me to check. When I asked about it, I found out once more that being loved by the Potters conferred a blanket ability to ignore any number of laws. No one was going to dare say anything to me – they'd have to contend with Harry if they did. The flip side of that was that if I did screw up, people knew that all they had to do was see Harry to deal with it. And as anyone in our family will tell you, from Gramps right down to our newest addition, you do NOT want to have Harry tell you that he's disappointed with you.

Granny and Gramps may be the Matriarch and Patriarch of the family, but it's really Harry who holds us all together, who makes sure that there aren't any serious disagreements, and deals with the problems.

By rights, Ginny didn't have to be out in the field, although as the Auror in charge of training, only the head of the Auror office could forbid her from direct involvement in operations, and then only on an *ad hoc* basis. I went because it was my job – the Ministry finally having seen the light that time was precious when dealing with magical trauma – an Auror strike team without a Healer was like an Auror without a wand. Ginny went – actually, I wasn't sure at the time why Ginny went. I looked through the monthly logs, trying to spot a pattern, but if there was a pattern, I certainly couldn't discern it.

Of all the duties as Chief Medical Officer, (a rather bizarre title, given the fact that there were just two of us) the chore I dreaded the most was reviewing each Auror's medical file and issuing reports that either called them in for a new physical or pronounced them fit for duty. I usually palmed this year-end task off on the Healer with less seniority (I had all of ten months seniority), but when Rachel went out on maternity leave, I was stuck with this task. I banged out almost all of the files over two days, either issuing "fit for duty" reports, or filling out a punch-list that recommended either - a) losing weight, b) quitting smoking or c) further physical exams. I left the stack of medical files for headquarters personnel for the last day.

Ginny's file was remarkably full, containing reports from Hogwarts, St. Mungo's and a number of other hospitals scattered throughout the world, including my almost alma-mater, St. George's in Grenada. She was up-to-date on all of her required exams, and she was certainly fit for duty, so there wasn't much to review. I flipped open to the section from St. George's largely out of idle curiosity, hoping that I'd recognize a name or two. To say that I was shocked was an understatement. She'd been admitted for a case of routine food poisoning during the year that she and Harry spent sailing through the Caribbean – a dish prepared from Conch that had given her severe intestinal distress. While she was there, she had a full physical, including a fertility workup and a Muggle CAT scan. The fertility workup was inconclusive, which, frustratingly enough, was not all that uncommon. The CAT scan was anything but inconclusive. I waited until the end of the day, slipping into Ginny's office after the rest of the staff at the Training Centre had gone home for the night.

Ginny looked up from her desk, covering the trainee progress report she was writing with another folder. "Hello, Sam, what brings you by? Movie night's tomorrow."

"I'm not here in my capacity as your niece, Ginny, I'm here as the Chief Medical Officer," I said, hoping that I didn't look like I was all of twenty-five.

I plopped the medical file that I'd brought with me onto her desk, placing it in front of her. The file opened to the radiology report from St. George's hospital.

"Does Harry know?" I asked, my voice cracking a little.

Ginny pinched her lips together and shook her head.

"Is this why you're volunteering for every cocked-up strike force that goes out into the field?" I asked.

Ginny glared at me in response, nostrils flaring. Both of her hands were gripping the edge of her desk, her knuckles were white. "I go out because it needs to be done," she said slowly.

"Is that the only reason?"

"When I come back, Sam, I feel - I feel fully alive, and nothing else matters. After all these times going out, I've got Harry trained now – when I get back he locks the house down and then shags my brains out, we get something to eat, maybe a drink or two, and then repeat the process. I haven't heard any complaints from him about my going out with the strike teams."

"Does he know that you're trying to kill yourself?"

Ginny glared at me again and then looked down at the desk, shaking her head.

"When are you going to tell him?"

Ginny took a deep breath. "I'm *not* going to tell him. Right now, I'm fit for duty. As my healer you are bound to keep my confidences until I say otherwise, or until my condition has an impact on my ability to discharge my duties. I know that puts you in a shitty position, but it's the best I can do, Sam. After I'm gone, you can tell him everything. As long as we're playing truth or dare, I have a question for you. Do you still love him?"

"I love both of you – I have since I was a little girl," I said, conveniently forgetting that the Ginny love came seven years later later than the Harry love.

"But that's not what I asked," Ginny replied. "It's well known that the only time you deign to go out with anyone is when you need a date for the Ministry balls. Is Harry the reason why?"

"No, I blame you for that, really," I replied.

Ginny smiled weakly. "How's that? I didn't think you swung that way."

"You're the one who said that it wasn't enough to want to sleep with a man that you had to want to wake up in the morning with him too. I haven't found anyone I wanted to wake up with yet, so I skipped the other part."

"Probably a good decision," Ginny said.

"It's worked for me," I said with a small, wry smile.

"So, what are you going to do?" Ginny asked.

"Well - the Chief Medical Officer is going to put your file back into the filing cabinet and write up her report saying that you are fit for duty. Your niece is probably going to beg off from movie night for a while until I can figure out how to be around Harry without telling him that he's about to become a widower," I said, hoping that I could get out of her office without bawling my head off.

"Sammy," Ginny said softly, her eyes showing incredible pain and regret, "I - it's not going to be for much longer. Harry's getting suspicious, and I can only lie to him for so long. He's noticed what I'm doing, and while I've tried to pass this off as part of my nymphomaniac thrill seeker act, he isn't buying it. I love him, Sammy, he's been my rock, my heart and my life since I got his attention. In sixteen years of marriage, I can count the number of arguments we've had on one hand, and I think I forced one of them just for the make-up sex afterward. What I can't do, what I won't do, is break his heart by letting him see me deteriorate. He thinks he's strong, and in many ways he is, but living with an empty husk who doesn't remember who he is would kill him - and he'd do something stupid."

I didn't say anything in response.

"I'm going to miss you," Ginny said with a snuffle.

That snuffle broke the dam. Two boxes of tissue and four bottles of butterbeer later I finally made it back to my flat. I didn't write up the report until the next morning. I dropped by St. Mungo's and asked a few Healers if they could cover my shift for the next week. I needed to get out of the office - I needed to get away from London. Without really planning it, I ended up in the Cayman Islands, in their old bolt-hole.

The touching part about what Ginny had to say to me that night was what she called me. No one called me Sammy anymore, Harry had stopped as I got older, and at the time I had appreciated it, it meant he knew I was growing up. All of a sudden I missed being called that by him, and I wished I was nine again, in love with the bestest wizard in the world and in love with Ginny then. I felt immortal in those days, and figured everyone around me was immortal too. Now I knew better. I was happier then.

The time in the Cayman Islands was good - I went snorkelling and windsurfing. When I wanted to be alone, which was most of the time, I was. When I didn't want to be alone, a little burst of Veela power guaranteed that I didn't have to go to dinner by myself. I didn't make any promises that I couldn't keep and didn't have any regrets in the morning. For a solo vacation, it was pretty good.

I wasn't horribly surprised, however, when the very fit and very overdressed young man who was watching me while I was windsurfing turned out to be an Auror from the Cayman ministry with an express courier tube. The message was quite simple, hand-written on the stationary of the Head Auror: Ginevra Molly Potter, Order of Merlin, 2nd Class, died at her residence last night from injuries sustained in the line of duty. Acting in my stead, Kingsley had ordered that the autopsy be performed at St. Mungo's. On behalf of the family, my immediate presence was requested.

It took me two and a half minutes to meet up with the rest of my family.

At age forty-five, Harry Potter was no stranger to loss and grief. Having been orphaned essentially at birth and been shadowed through his youth by an intermittent vicious war, he'd seen death up close and in person time and time again. Death had come again last night, claiming his wife after sixteen years of marriage.

The day had started like most days - he'd wake up just before the alarm would sound, turning the alarm off so he could spoon with his wife for a few minutes before padding downstairs to make coffee and breakfast. Most days Ginny would wake and rise of her own accord somewhere between the time the coffee finished percolating and the time he put the bread in the toaster. On some days he would have to climb up the stairs to summon her. Depending upon her mood and their respective schedules, some mornings she'd be most uncooperative, refusing to get out of bed until he'd "performed his husbandly duties." On those mornings the eggs would be cold by the time he managed to bring her to the breakfast table, not that either of them seemed to mind. Some things are easily fixed by warming charms. It was lucky she was able to work flexible hours and didn't really answer to anyone at work, because a normal boss would have been driven to distraction by her apparently random late arrivals. Of course, this mythical normal boss, if he'd been smart, would have noticed that Ginny was always in a better mood on those days, and would have learned to live with it.

That particular morning she'd made it to the breakfast table without intervention. They compared notes on their respective schedules before Ginny Flooed to the Training Centre for the day. Harry's morning was full of errands and his afternoon was full of meetings, the last meeting of the day was scheduled for a joint meeting with the Minister for Education (Hermione) and the Minister of Magic (Percy) at the latter Minister's office. Harry had suggested that instead of the meeting they just have dinner at his house, including their spouses and children, but Hermione begged off, citing a major problem with the Exam Board.

During the meeting a young Auror trainee carried a red bordered note to the Minister of Magic, informing him that an Auror strike team with hit-wizards had been sent to the outskirts of London to deal with a hostage crisis. A moment later another note arrived, providing a roster for the strike team. Before that trainee was dismissed, another note arrived indicating that the hostages in question were the daughter and niece of the Ambassador from the Magical Government of Mexico.

Percy asked Harry if he wanted to stop the meeting, but Harry demurred. He knew that Ginny was the most experienced of all the Hostage Negotiators available, having never failed to retrieve a hostage yet. At the end of the meeting, yet another Auror trainee came in, bringing in a black bordered note. Hermione glanced at the note, her face suddenly pale. "Harry, you need to go home immediately," she said urgently.

"Not to the Training Centre or to St. Mungo's?" Harry asked.

Hermione shook her head. "No, go home Harry."

Godspeed," Percy added quietly.

Harry took the Floo to Hermione's London flat and then used her private Floo connection to go home. A young woman wearing Auror's robes over the lime green robes of a St. Mungo's Healer was crouching next to the couch, trying to start a fire in the hearth with one hand while keeping the other hand on a prone, pale Ginny Potter.

"He's here now, Mrs Potter," the Healer said, stepping away with a hesitant look on her face.

"Harry?" Ginny mewed, pushing herself up from the couch. She held an arm out to her husband, who noted that the other arm lying limp on her side was wrapped in gauze that was colouring with blood. "Hold me? I'm so cold. I'm so glad you're here."

Harry sat down on the couch, pulling his almost limp wife onto his lap. With an absent wave of his hand the fire roared higher, flooding the room with warmth. Harry turned to the Healer who was leaning against the doorway leading to the kitchen.

"She got the hostages out, but before we could subdue the last criminal, she got stabbed with a Kraken blade," the Healer said in a low, dull tone.

"You're sure?" Harry asked.

"I'm sure, Harry," Ginny said with a wry smile. "It's one of the trademarks of the Young Dragon gang – they all get a Kraken blade when they're initiated. It's poisonous, 100% lethal and there's no known antidote."

"Mrs Potter refused to be evacuated to St Mungo's," the Healer interjected.

"They just would have tried cutting off my arm to delay the action of the poison, but I'd rather be buried whole than in pieces. I was born at home, and swore that I was going to die at home, sitting by my own hearth. I'm so glad you're here," she said, placing a tender kiss on his neck. Her lips were icy cold.

He took a deep breath; he knew all about Kraken blade – he'd spent enough years of his life working to eradicate every last one of them. The people who had developed and made them were rotting in Azkaban.

"Can you leave us alone?" Harry asked the healer. She nodded and disappeared through the opposite doorway leading to the stairwell.

Ginny straightened up, trying hard to focus her eyes as she placed a cold finger on Harry's lips. "Harry, love, I don't have a lot of time, so don't interrupt and don't try to distract me," she said, a tear running down one cheek. Harry nodded in reply.

"It has been a great honour to be your wife, and I only have two regrets – first that I couldn't give you any children and second that I couldn't grow old with you. I don't know which one hurts me more, Harry," she said, sniffing while she closed her eyes. "I love you so much."

"What can I do for you?" he asked quietly. It took every ounce of his will power not to break down, but he couldn't, not now while she needed him, never while she needed him.

Ginny didn't answer and didn't stir for a moment. He took a deep shuddering breath, as the first wave of realisation hit him. His wife was nearly gone.

"You've already done so much for me, Harry. You've loved me for seventeen years, and I wasn't very lovable for a lot of that time. This is exactly what I wanted. I needed to die at home, sitting by my hearth, being held in your arms," she whispered.

"You're not going to die," he whispered back, holding her tightly, wishing he could swap his life for hers. He would happily trade the rest of his life for five more minutes with her.

Ginny's hand reached up and touched his face softly. "You shouldn't live alone after I'm gone. The depression will eat you alive," she said tenderly, "So I've sorted that bit out for you, don't screw it up this time. You need to talk to Sammy."

"What?"

She laughed, but the laugh turned into a coughing fit. "You'll know when the time is right, my love. It is your curse that you can only love strong women, and I've been mentoring this one for years, but enough about you. I'm dying, Harry, and I'm so sorry. And I'm so cold."

Harry had tears running down his face, as he looked down at his wife for so many years. "You're not cold, my love," he started, before taking a deep breath and struggling to continue. "It's bright sunshine outside, the ocean is turquoise, and later we're going to take our boat out for a cruise around the island, we'll swim naked in our bay, and then we'll make love on the beach.

"We'll come back for the afternoon, and Sam will drop by; we'll drink wine and talk, we'll joke and laugh like we always do, and we'll go to bed, and I'll tell you I love you again and again.

"A perfect day," she whispered, her voice almost gone. "I love you, Harry."

Harry held her tighter and said that he loved her too, but Ginny never heard him. Her shallow, ragged breathing had stopped.

Ginny Potter was dead.

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There were no surprises at the funeral. It was raining – a bitter, merciless rain that suited everyone's mood. The service at the chapel in Godrics

Hollow was plain and unadorned, like the fair linen that covered the slim, short casket. Ginny had left rather thorough instructions as to her preferences for “disposing of my remains,” which, more or less, were followed by Harry with the concurrence of the Weasley family. Only a few knew that the casket contained thoroughly burned ashes rather than a body. Ginny’s body, or what was left of it, was not going to provide fodder for any Dark Wizard foolish enough to disturb the wards protecting the Potter family plot. The casket was carried in solemn procession from the chapel to the burial ground by her brothers, each of whom, earlier in the day, had attempted to surrender his position to Harry, who politely declined, choosing instead to walk behind the casket in a thin cloak, hunched over, hands in his pockets, the turned up collar standing as the only acknowledgement of the driving rain.

Because of his position in the Wizarding world, the funeral was overly attended by important people from all over the world. But they were not there to be seen as anything other than mourners – there were no eulogies, no public statements and no pictures. Percy Weasley made very sure of that, and any one who disagreed was forcibly removed, without regard to title or station.

The wake was held at the ballroom at Grimmauld Place. Harry stood by the fireplace with a drink in his hand, nodding and talking briefly to the friends, relatives and co-workers who came by to pay their respects. More than a few journalists were turned away at the doors by Bill, or worse yet, by Fred and George Weasley, who were in a particularly bad humour to entertain members of that profession. The immediate family left him alone, knowing that it was only out of respect for Arthur and Molly that he was here at all.

At the funeral I’d deliberately come to the chapel late enough to be seated in the back. After the interment, I’d gone back to the chapel, ostensibly to pray, but in reality to try to sort out what I was going to do next. When nothing brilliant came to me at the chapel, I decided to move on. I Apparated to the park not too distant from Grimmauld Place and walked into the sombre house, pausing at the doorway to give my Dad a hug. Dad murmured something to the effect that Harry wanted to talk. I nodded, not really processing what he’d said until after I’d stepped foot inside the manse when I did a doubletake and turned to Dad. “Here? Now?” I asked.

Dad smiled a bit, shaking his head. “Not here, not now, but soon,” he answered.

I hugged and cried my way through the crowd, starting on the end of the room furthest from Harry. Feeling like a coward, I finally steeled my resolve and turned, only to find that he’d disappeared. On a hunch, I followed Molly into the kitchen, where I found him hacking at a large block of ice with a wicked looking pick.

Molly looked at the two of us and then nodded at me, backing out of the kitchen with a fully laden tray.

“I’m sorry,” I squeaked, hoping that he’d heard me so I wouldn’t have to repeat myself. He nodded and then held his arms out to me, a gesture I’d been responding to since I was a wee slip of a girl. To this day I don’t know why I responded – whether it was to comfort him or to grab some comfort myself, but I was in his arms nonetheless, crying and talking over his attempts to talk to me. That part went well, at least. I’d pulled the plug on the bottled-up thoughts and emotions that had been fermenting inside me for a fortnight and to my dismay, I couldn’t shut up. Harry finally silenced me with a method he’d used on Ginny on many an occasion. He kissed me – square on the lips.

It wasn’t a passionate kiss, it didn’t even rate as a lover’s kiss; I think it was just a reflex action for him, because I know without a doubt he was not thinking of me like *that* at the time.

“Sam, hush up, you’re babbling faster than I can listen right now,” Harry said quietly after releasing my lips.

If he said anything after that, I didn’t hear it – I was too busy fighting off the waves that were crashing over me, threatening to swamp me like a twelve metre wave. Although I didn’t notice it at the time, I was glowing as only a Veela can glow, which proved helpful in making my way through the crowd, but it brought me more attention than I desired from the women in the ballroom, a couple of whom were Veela themselves or had lived with us long enough to be attuned to our ways. Once I was outside the house, I Disapparated, hoping that I was beyond the wards, but not particularly caring whether I got splinched or not. I’m not sure where I arrived, but several Apparations later I was standing outside my flat, fumbling with my keys. A half hour after that I was sitting in my bathrobe, dripping wet from a hasty shower, trying to get warm by my Floo-blocked fire, thinking back to the last time I’d felt this overwhelmed by my own physiology.

I was raised with a hugging, kissing family, but long before I reached puberty, Mum insisted that kisses be reserved to the cheek or the forehead, which required a teensy bit of adjustment, as I’d been kissing all of my extended family, male and female, square on the lips ever since I’d learned to pucker. After adjusting to this minor change in the demonstrative rules of engagement, I didn’t give it a whole lot of thought until I started dating at Beauxbatons, where I ended up kissing my fair share of boys and I thus came to appreciate the wisdom behind my Mum’s boundaries.

As puberty approached, I came fully into my Veela powers. The safest way to practice, of course, was with family. Weasley men were particularly susceptible to Veela allure, excepting Dad, who was blood-blocked. Although Mum could still stun him with a blast of Veela allure, but I couldn’t, no matter how hard I tried – my magic recognized him as my father, and he was thus off-limits. Uncle Ron was another story entirely. I could drop him from across the room without even making eye contact. I never saw the harm in this until Nana and Great-Nana cornered me one day during the Christmas holidays. I was probably all of fifteen at the time. They hit me with a specialized, custom hex that they had fine-tuned for the Veela endocrine and neural system. I was in an instant mental fog – my temperature shot up a degree or two and I felt certain tissues begin to swell up as the pangs of a cramp in my uterus began. Nana impaled me with a glare.

“Please make it stop,” I hissed. Nana said nothing. I repeated my request in my very best schoolgirl French.

“The Creator did not give Veela these powers for your private amusement, my little bunny,” she said, cancelling the hex. Great-Nana nodded sagely.

“Is that what it feels like when I do that to Uncle Ron?” I asked, suddenly ashamed of how many times I’d accidentally and intentionally tweaked him with my allure.

“Not exactly like that – you could never feel what he feels and vice versa, but we decided to give you a small taste of your own medicine by slapping you with a wave of desire as Veela experience it,” Great-Nana said in a reserved Parisian accent. “You must cease your shameless *practicing* with members of the family, especially your Uncle Harry.”

“But Uncle Harry’s immune,” I protested.

Great-Nana shook her platinum white tresses as she gave me a haughty look. “No man is *completely* immune,” she said, closing off discussion.

Sitting in front of my fire ten years later, I heard Great-Nana’s voice ringing in my ears, even though she’s been gone for quite a few years. In general, I tend to learn best from watching the mistakes of others, which meant that I was rarely disciplined as a child. This incident was no exception to that rule, and I didn’t think about it for another ten years, not until today.

When Harry kissed me in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place I felt a wave of desire wash over me, complete with cramping uterus. I wanted to kiss him back, not a continental buss on the cheek, or an avuncular peck on the lips, but a swab-out-your-mouth-with-my-tongue-goodness-we’re-wearing-too-many-clothes type kiss. While I was no stranger to kisses or desire, becoming lost in my desire like this had never happened before – not with any man, especially not without a bit of preparation on my part. I didn’t see him for almost a month after the wake, but the few times I did see him thereafter, I felt the same surge every time I got within six feet of him.

Something had changed, and I needed to figure out what it was.

Under normal circumstances I’d discuss something like this with Ginny, but that was obviously out. Even if she had been alive, I don’t think I could have gracefully raised in polite conversation the problem I now had when I was in close proximity to her newly bereaved husband. For similar reasons, having a conversation like this with Mum was out too.

There was only one person I could turn to, and while we’d never been as close as I had been with Ginny, she was still family, and she was the only person who knew him well enough to help me.

Which was why I ended up gathering my courage in front of my fire, prepared to Floo to my Aunt’s house.

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Ginny was dead.

His wife of sixteen years was dead.

Killed by a thug during a botched hostage negotiation.

There would be time for detailed deconstruction later, time to find out who had ordered the kidnapping, who had planned it, who had helped kill his Ginny. Time for all the legal niceties that the Wizengamot would concern themselves with if they were going to prosecute those involved.

But now was not that time. It hadn’t taken him long to dig out his equipment, to get dressed in the Muggle gear he had used in the past. He’d squeezed a few Auror friends for information, and when some of that information proved inadequate, he’d burgled a few desks for the information he desired.

Tonight he Apparated to the headquarters of Weasley’s Wizarding Weases.

The shop was closed, but he didn’t let that stop him. While he could use magic, a knife to the lock opened it much faster and didn’t set off any of the magical alarms.

He headed downstairs to the experimental laboratories, where Fred and George still worked together, coming up with the latest and greatest inventions.

He wasn’t surprised to see them both there. They appeared to be waiting for him.

“We knew you would come,” Fred said. He looked like he hadn’t slept in the days since the funeral, his eyes were red-rimmed and there were visible tear tracks down his face.

“We’ve got what you need,” George continued. He didn’t look much better. He held out a small bag. “Everything, all of our best stuff.”

Harry nodded and took the bag, looking through it.

There was the sound of footsteps, causing the three of them to look up. Bill, Charlie, and Percy joined them. They looked at Harry.

“Thought we’d find you here,” Bill said in a low voice. “Here.” He handed over a couple of marbles. “Roll, and stand back - way back.”

Harry nodded, putting them carefully in his pocket.

Charlie moved forward next, silently he handed Harry an antique sword. “Don’t cut yourself,” he advised. “The blade will chop anything.”

Harry pulled the blade out of its scabbard an inch; the bright silver blade seemed to glow in the dark light.

He slammed it back, and absently hooked it to his belt.

“Sorry I’m late,” Ron called as he entered the room. He spread out a map on a table. “The Young Dragons are a front for a Basque cartel. The

leaders of the cartel are meeting in a mansion in the Lake District. You'll enter here. There are two guards here, and here. The rest are inside. The mansion is warded against most things, but if you keep things simple, use Muggle fighting techniques, and follow this path, you'll get through. These are the four you want. They are having a meeting that will last for another few hours."

Harry nodded and spent a minute staring at the map until he had it memorised.

"Here," Percy said quietly. "The Portkey will take you straight there. Ron and Charlie will be distracting Mum and Dad. I'll be dealing with their politicians; the others will be with our wives."

Harry nodded for a final time. He didn't speak, he couldn't. Too much would come out.

"Harry," Percy finished quietly. "I'm not expecting any arrests."

"No arrests," he agreed, and activated the Portkey. It didn't surprise him that all of the Weasley Boys had been there. They were all good friends, and they all loved their sister. They understood that there were some things in life that you didn't just take, that you didn't just accept. And murdering Ginny was one of those things.

The perpetrators would pay, every last one of them.

He arrived exactly where Ron said he would, and walked up to the path. He wasn't concerned about stealth.

"Stop," a voice called, as two guards stepped out of the shadows in front of him. His right hand shot out, a knife flying through the air, embedding in the first guard's throat. Without pause he took a step forward and kicked the other guard in the stomach. As the guard clutched his stomach and leaned forward, Harry grabbed his head and twisted violently, his anger giving him the strength needed.

He retrieved his knife, absently wiping it on the dirty t-shirt of the first guard and continued down the path. He started to jog now, trying as hard as he could to avoid thinking, to avoid remembering. He concentrated on his job and nothing else.

Nothing else mattered. Not now. Not without her.

He stopped outside a door and reached for an Extendable Ear, still one of the most popular products the twins had ever made. He slid it under the door and listened. After thirty seconds he retracted it. There were at least eight different voices inside the room.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out the marbles, a whispered word activated them, and he opened the door slightly and rolled them in. He cast a locking charm on the door and sprinted away.

A loud explosion announced to the rest of the compound that someone was attacking.

He walked back to the door and opened, part of him recoiled at the carnage inside, but that part was told firmly to shut up. They had bought this upon themselves, first by kidnapping the daughters of prominent Mexican politicians, and second by what they did to the girls when they were waiting to exchange them for some of the Young Dragons held at Azkaban. The notion that they'd get anywhere with the kidnapping was ludicrous. It was a certainty that Ginny would get called in on the hostage negotiation, she was the best there was. Killing Ginny was stupid. It brought down the wrath of the most dangerous man in the Wizarding World.

And as far as he was concerned, it would re-send a message across the world as to what happens when you touch someone he cared about.

A small group of guards appeared, looked in horror at the blood splattered room, and then at him. To a man, they paled, as they recognised him. To a man, they raised their wands and fired curses at him, *Avada Kedavra*, *Crucio*, *Diffindo*, *Imperio*, curses designed to kill him, to maim him, to stop him.

They were all futile, he was already moving, Charlie's sword in his hand. He dived over the curses and rolled, regaining his feet. The sword danced a figure eight, cleaving limbs, before he stepped to the right with a side cut. A reverse sweep kick, followed by a two-handed thrust into the fallen chest.

It was quiet again.

He spun the sword, and re-holstered it.

He walked down the corridor, heading toward the centre. He didn't hide, daring them to come out and face him, daring them to approach their death. But they didn't, they didn't come.

The doors ahead, huge gates that put Hogwarts to shame were locked. He reached into the bag again, and attached some blue coloured putty. He ran down the hall, and cast both a shield spell and a deafening charm on himself. He activated the spells.

The plastic exploded. The gates disintegrated. Fred and George had been trying to create a new form of firework, based on a new explosive base, and had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. It was just too powerful; the formula had been locked away instantly, never to be touched again, anything that powerful could not be allowed on the open market, or even be used by the Ministry. The explosion nullified magical wards as well as destroying anything in its path.

Removing the spells that had protected him was almost routine as he moved through the gates. Some guards attacked him from a distance, some up close. It didn't matter. The result was the same as he left a trail of devastation in his wake.

They had had no idea that when they killed Ginny that they would awaken the person he thought he had put to rest so long ago. The coldness was

back, the hate, the fear, the anger.

Once more, he was Death's Avatar.

The cartel leaders were waiting for him. All four of them. All of them with their wands drawn and Muggle handguns pointed at him.

"Mr Potter," the leader behind the desk said. "Welcome to my humble abode."

This was the time when the good guys and the bad guys would banter, would exchange witticisms before getting down to the fight.

Unfortunately, he wasn't playing by that script. He dived to the left, his hand shooting out, his knife flying through the air and catching one of them straight. He caught himself on his hand, and turned into a roll. Muscles that hadn't been trained hard recently screamed their objection, but he ignored them, as he ignored the pain spreading through his shoulder as a curse gave him a glancing blow.

He pulled out the second to last item from the bag and chewed it quickly, the man who greeted him was still behind his desk, and the other two were approaching him.

He opened his mouth and blew, hard.

White fire exploded from his mouth, incinerating the two in seconds – seconds of agonising pain. Dragon's Breath chewing gum. The public version allowed for a very limited amount of fire. The house brand version did not compare.

The man behind the desk was unscathed and hadn't moved.

"Pity," he said dispassionately. "They were good employees."

Harry raised his wand and shot off a curse at him. It rebounded straight back at him, causing him to sway to the side.

"A lot of people get caught by that," the man said smugly. "It is impenetrable; the most expensive shield money can buy."

Harry took a step forward, swinging his sword out. He twirled it once to gain momentum, whispered a spell under his breath, and thrust it forward as hard as he could.

There was a clanging noise, followed by a tinkling as the shield spell collapsed, and his sword eviscerated the leader of the gang. He twisted it slowly, and then with two sharp movements, ensured that no magic would be able to heal the wound.

He pulled out the last of Fred and George's explosion plastic and set it to go. He attached a five minute charm on it.

"Please," the man croaked, his hands desperately trying to hold his guts in their rightful place.

Harry looked at him. The man had no mercy on the families that he had destroyed, had no mercy on the girls that were raped by his thugs, and he hadn't spared any for his Ginny.

He started to run; back the way he had come, sprinting as hard as he could. He was close to a mile away when a ping sounding in his ear warned him that the five minutes were up.

The whole compounded exploded in a bright white fire, sending a pyre of smoke to the heavens, eradicating everything that had once been there. He watched the fire for a timeless moment, before he turned and Apparated away.

He appeared in their cabin in the Caymans, where they had spent so much time together building the boat, where they had been happy, where they had fallen in love again.

He barely made it to the bathroom as his stomach rebelled in horror from what he had just done – the carnage he had just caused. When he couldn't heave up anymore, he curled up on the bathroom floor and started to cry.

He cried for Ginny, for the loss he felt, for what he had done, and once he started, once the guilt and the pain took over his conscious mind, banishing the mental shields he had used to lock up his guilt, he found he couldn't stop. When he looked into the dark abyss, he saw his own face reflected back.

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As was her practice of many years, Samantha announced herself as she came through the private Floo. "Auntie H?"

"We're in the parlour Samantha," Hermione called out.

Samantha paused, wondering who was with her Aunt. She smiled as she passed through the doorway into the parlour. Hermione was having tea with another favourite aunt, Gabrielle, or "Auntie-G" as Samantha insisted on calling her. With a quick calculation, she figured she could speak her mind with either or both of them. Hermione tapped the tea tray, summoning another tea cup and saucer which she prepared to Samantha's specification from memory.

"I'm glad I found the two of you together," Samantha said, taking a deep draw from her teacup. "I need help figuring some things out."

"Does this have anything to do with why you've been avoiding everyone since Ginny's wake?" Hermione asked, raising an eyebrow as she assessed her niece.

"Right in one," Samantha replied. "I'm very uncomfortable around Harry these days."

"Define *uncomfortable*," Gabrielle asked, holding her in her placid gaze.

"Something in Harry is screwing up my magic. When I get physically close to him my Veela power turns on and I start having -- a lot of -- feelings," Samantha explained, fighting the urge to run off at the mouth.

"So is *that* why you were kissing him in the kitchen at Grimmauld Place?" Hermione asked cattily.

"I didn't kiss him -- he kissed me!" Samantha protested.

"Before or after you started blasting him with your Veela power?" Hermione asked.

"Back down, Hermione," Gabrielle said quietly. "This isn't her fault."

"Oh, so it's just that Harry's been leading her on, is that it?" Hermione retorted.

"Your loyalty to Harry is legendary, Hermione, but in this instance, it's actually Fleur's fault," Gabrielle explained.

"Mum's fault?" Samantha squawked.

Gabrielle smiled. "When you're in close physical proximity with Harry, what exactly are you feeling?" she asked.

Samantha looked down at the floor, colour flooding her face. "Uh, it's kind of personal," she said.

"Raging physical desire, tunnel vision, damp knickers and the feeling that you're about to enter your most fertile period?" Gabrielle inquired, sipping daintily from her teacup.

"Um, yeah," Samantha admitted.

"Tell me, Samantha, in all of your courses at St. Mungo's, did you ever take the Xenobiology course?" Gabrielle asked diplomatically.

"No, I never thought I needed it," Samantha answered.

"Same opinion as your Mum, I see the apple truly does not fall very far from the tree," Gabrielle said, pursing her lips in a tiny moue of disdain. "Your mother, my sister, has never paid much attention to her heritage, acting as if she were just an attractive blonde human female rather than a non-human species that passes effectively as human."

"But she's not much of a Veela, Nana and Great-Nana always said so," Samantha protested.

"Exactly so -- but you, on the other hand, are *very much* a Veela, something that Fleur never comprehended until it was too late," Gabrielle said.

"Gabrielle, would you mind explaining to *this* poor non-Veela just what in the blazes you are talking about?" Hermione growled.

"I'm sorry, where are my manners?" Gabrielle replied. She took a deep breath and then turned so she could easily see both Hermione and Samantha. "What do you know about Veela?"

Hermione pressed her lips together as if she were preparing to recite in class. "They are related distantly to the Nymphs, they are avian in form and behaviour, they have limited shape-shifting ability and rudimentary control of some elemental magic -- the females can adopt a very attractive humanoid form and they have the ability to project a mild form of mind control based upon sex-specific allure." she asked.

"Fair and accurate, as always" Gabrielle replied. "What do you know about imprinting?"

Hermione fidgeted in her chair a bit. "Some animals when they are born will bond to other animals or objects -- this usually serves to support the parent-child relationship but can generate odd results if the blood parent is not available."

"Again, a perfect recitation, but then we all expect that from you," Gabrielle said quietly. "My sister was raised in a very permissive environment for a second generation Veela-Human cross. The fact that she was allowed to board at a human secondary school and then go off to live on her own and select her own mate was considered shocking and liberal among my Veela relatives. Nana and Great-Nana were abused time and again by those relatives, but for reasons we did not come to appreciate until we were adults, Mum and Nana decided to raise all of us as humans, not as Veela-Human hybrids. For the most part, I believe it was the right decision, but it meant that certain customs that Veela would consider second nature were lost to us. When Fleur gave birth to her firstborn, she was *supposed* to be attended by her husband and a medi-witch midwife. She was working on a mission for the Order of the Phoenix, as was her husband. She went into labour three weeks early, Charlie was on a mission in Bulgaria and the midwife in question was delivering twins in the Midlands."

"Harry attended to my delivery," Samantha volunteered. "Although, for some reason Mum never told me that fact until last year."

Gabrielle nodded.

Hermione cleared her throat. "So are you suggesting that Samantha *imprinted* on Harry when she was born?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"That's absurd," Hermione said.

"Absurd for a human maybe, but not for Veela. Harry was not a blood relative, so Samantha's magic did not recognize him as her father. Under those circumstances, a female Veela child will imprint on an unrelated male as a future consort," Gabrielle explained. "Although uncommon now, in the not too distant past arranged marriages were secured this way. You would have the spectacle of a child witnessing the birth of his future wife, or an older man witnessing the birth of a future consort."

"Consort?" Hermione asked, seemingly hesitant to have the difference explained.

"Polygamy is not unknown among the pureblooded Veela," Samantha explained, making an unpleasant face. "Veela-human hybrids were particularly favoured as a means of cementing ties between rival factions, usually as second wives."

Gabrielle nodded. "I see that you are not totally ignorant of your heritage."

"If I was imprinted on Harry, why did this just now kick in? I should have been having these feelings since puberty," Samantha protested and then paled dramatically. "The dreams," she whispered. "But they were just dreams..."

"Dreams?" Hermione asked

She felt herself blush bright red. "The ones you helped me with when I was starting school," she explained, hoping that Auntie H. wouldn't ask for clarification.

"You have Ginny to thank for that," Gabrielle said, taking the attention away from her smoothly. "Your closeness to Ginny meant that your magic acknowledged her as first wife, taking a Beta role to her status as the Alpha."

"Which means what, exactly?" Hermione asked sharply.

Samantha chewed on her lip as she blushed. "Polygamy among the Veela has its rules – the husband has relations with the second wife only at the will and pleasure of the first wife."

"Why would any woman want to do that?" Hermione asked.

Gabrielle clucked. "Come now, you are a happily married woman, haven't there been scads of times when your husband has had amorous notions and you were tired, or ill, or fretting more on how you're going to take care of your children the next day rather than on how you were going to be entertaining him in bed?"

"Of course," Hermione replied.

"If you had a second wife that would be an excellent opportunity to keep your husband happy while still getting a full night's sleep," Gabrielle said with a crooked smile.

"It still sounds like slavery to me," Hermione growled.

"But of course," Gabrielle replied. "A system that allows a man to marry a woman, let her raise his children and then divorce her at mid-life or later for any reason or no reason at all is so much more civilized, isn't it?"

"It's not the same thing!" Hermione sputtered.

"Of course not," Gabrielle replied. "Among the Veela second wives are socially protected and have very clear property rights that offset the fact that they *cannot* be divorced. Clemtada, the Queen of the Mongols was a second wife. She ruled her Sept for fifty-six years after the demise of her consort."

"I think all of this is fascinating, but it doesn't solve Samantha's difficulty," Hermione said, trying to change the subject.

"*Life* is difficult," Gabrielle replied with a shrug. "Either she works things out with Harry, or she spends the rest of her life fighting with the notion that she should be his consort."

"So, it's not going to drive her mad or anything?" Hermione asked.

"Mad?" Samantha asked.

"As in deranged, insane," Hermione sputtered.

"Whatever led you to that, Hermione?" Gabrielle asked. "Her situation is annoying, but not a situation in which she is likely to suffer physical or mental harm. Oh, wait, you mean going crazy like that Veela character in the old romance story *Faith and Charity*!"

"Uh, yeah," Hermione said sheepishly.

"The squib who wrote that potboiling tale knew as much about Veela as I know about Astrophysics," Gabrielle said haughtily.

"It was a good read though," Samantha protested. "'Henry, if I can't have your love freely, I'll break the bond myself,'" she quoted dramatically. "Henry was really hot, and who would have thought that..."

"We don't need to go into that now," Gabrielle said primly. "We're getting off track."

"So Samantha needs to work it out with Harry?" Hermione said.

"Sorry to contradict you, but I can't work it out with Harry," Samantha said wearily.

"Why not?" Gabrielle asked.

"I've seen him all of two times since the Funeral, and now I can't seem to find him anywhere," Samantha complained.

"Since when?" Hermione asked.

"Since the day it rained little bits of Cartel Members," Samantha said dryly.

Hermione pointedly said nothing.

"Aren't you worried?" Samantha asked her.

"Of course I'm worried – it's just like during the war – after a particularly nasty engagement, Harry would get marvelously depressed and go missing for weeks, sometimes months at a time. He got tired of me tracking him down during the war, so he let me put a status charm on him that lets me know that he's alive. I never got around to cancelling it after the war, so I do know he's alive and in reasonably good shape, *I just don't know where he is*," Hermione finished before sighing.

"I don't like it," Samantha growled.

"Then do something about it," Gabrielle snapped. "Use your head; according to your marks at school you *are* one of the brightest witches of your year; if that doesn't work, use your heart – you are Veela after all." Gabrielle looked down at her watch. "Fiddlesticks – I have to be going – I promised the twins that I'd drop in on their rehearsal before the recital. Good day, ladies," she said, bending down to clutch her purse before moving to the Floo.

Samantha rose to kiss her lightly on the cheek. "Thank you, Auntie-G," she said brightly.

"Brat," she replied after planting a kiss of her own. "I've told you not to call me that dozens of times – I want people to think that we are *sisters*." She threw a pinch of powder into the fire and then looked back at Samantha and sighed. "Go find your love; I'll deal with Fleur and Charlie." Her attention back on the floor, she called, "Happy Hooper's Studio," and vanished.

Samantha paused to compose herself before turning to face Hermione. "So, where is he?"

"I told you, I - don't - know," Hermione replied slowly.

"Don't-know is not the same thing as haven't-a-clue," Samantha remarked.

Hermione was silent for a moment before uttering a sigh that turned into a groan. "If I *were* to look for him, I'd try the Caymans first; if he's not there, then maybe his ranch in the Australian outback."

"Thank you, Auntie-H," Samantha said sweetly. "I'll let him know you're thinking of him."

"If you know what's good for you, you'll do nothing of the kind," Hermione growled. "If Harry thinks that I'm spying on him he'll go underground and never return."

Hermione rose when Samantha did to give her a firm hug. "Harry needs a friend right now, Samantha, not a lover," she cautioned.

"What a coincidence, Auntie-H, right now I need my oldest friend back more than anything else in the world. Wish me luck," Samantha said.

"You'll need more than that, child," Hermione said after she was gone.

---

It took me a while to clear my schedule for an impromptu vacation, especially since I'd just *returned* from vacation. Kingsley was out, so I was gnawing on this with Tonks, who finally cut to the bedrock.

"Where are you going, Sam?" she asked.

"I'm not entirely sure – I need to go find Harry," I replied.

Tonks took a long look at the leave slip before tearing it in half and sending the pieces into her rubbish bin. She summoned an ivory coloured sheet of paper which she scratched with her quill before she pushed it back at me. "You're not on leave; you're on a mission, nominally reporting to me. Just be reasonable about the expenses you turn in at the end of the trip and I'll make sure that you have a job waiting for you at the other end," she said.

"Why are you doing this?" I asked, clutching the slip before she pulled it away.

"Consider it a bit of karmic debt – I owe Harry more than a dozen times over, and between you and Ginny, it's probably an even gross. If you can help Harry out of his funk, I'll consider it Ministry money well spent," Tonks said. "Just remember your potions and charms."

I glared at her as I felt my face colour.

"I know that you have unresolved issues with Harry – I may be a klutz, but I'm not blind, girl. Now go, get out of here, you've got a broken-hearted hero to find," she said, swivelling in her chair to catch the next batch of airplane memos that banked around the corner to enter her office.

"Thanks, Tonks," I said.

"It's a debt, remember? So I should be thanking you. Find him and make it better – his world just fell apart."

By nightfall I was back in the Caymans. Because I'd just been there as a tourist, I thought this time I should be a brunette. Being a witch is so handy at times. The Concierge at my favourite hostel didn't recognize me. I was knackered – I'd find Harry in the morning.

I was less than a mile from Harry.

I knew it, I could feel him. But I was terrified. I didn't know what I was going to say to him, or how I was going to deal with him.

I felt like I was going to see Madame Olympe back at school when she summoned me. Of course, back then she wanted to know just what had caused one of my boyfriends to leave the school. All I knew was that he had been a little over-friendly and had problems comprehending my use of the word 'no'.

I found out later that Harry had also found out about it, I still don't know how, and had expressed his displeasure to the boy in firm and frank terms.

I knew that standing there reminiscing was nothing more than procrastination, so I took a deep breath and walked up the beach to his cabin. I couldn't help but smile at the description. As with everything Harry and Ginny Potter were involved in, they didn't scrimp when they bought things -- I've seen five star hotels that seemed shabby in comparison.

I didn't knock, I never did, I just walked in.

He was on the couch, his eyes closed, and a bottle of rum by his side.

"Go away, Sammy," he said quietly, but it was an eerie form of quiet, a strange tone of voice that I'd never heard from him before.

Actually, I had, but never, ever, aimed at me.

I took a step forward and before I could blink, his wand was in his hand and I was dunked unceremoniously about five hundred yards from the beach.

I was actually grateful. When you approach a wounded tiger and all he does is lightly pat you away, you should be damn thankful he didn't use his claws. Harry has a lot of claws.

The time it took me to swim to shore I spent thinking things through a little more clearly, and the one thing I knew without doubt was that Harry would never hurt me. No matter how much he wanted to lash out in anger, he would never hurt me.

I walked back in to his cabin, still dripping wet, and looked at him.

"I'd hoped you'd get the hint," he whispered.

"I'm not leaving," I said firmly, hiding my nervousness.

He looked at me, and I could see him struggle to hold back the words he wanted to pour out to me, at me. For a second, I thought about leaving, so that he could get through it.

But I didn't. Harry had been my first friend since before I knew what friends were for. He had been there for every important thing in my life, more than my brother, my sisters, more than my parents, more than Granny and Gramps. Harry Potter has been the one overwhelming constant in my life.

And I was about to put all that at risk.

"Harry," I said.

"Please," he whispered, still not looking at me, his voice tearing apart. "Not now Sammy, please leave – please leave me alone."

I took a silent couple of steps forward and touched his knee. He wasn't expecting that, his senses must have been dulled by the alcohol in his blood stream.

It didn't stop his reflexes. I have never, ever, seen anyone who could move as fast as Harry. And I was thankful that despite those reflexes he managed to stop himself before his knife entered my throat.

"Why are you here?" he asked, his eyes filled with pain that ripped my heart to shreds. For a second my knees went weak. I was close enough that my Veela powers could absorb a little of what he was feeling, and that killed my own mental barriers. Hermione's admonition that he needed a friend and not a lover flickered into my consciousness, so I tried to dampen some of the urges that were surging up in me at the moment.

Tears started to fall down my face as he put his knife away. "Because," I whispered in a voice I hadn't used for years. "I've lost one of my best

friends and right now I really, really need my Uncle Harry.”

He looked at me for a second and then pulled me down against him, and I started to cry. I cried for my knowledge, I cried for Ginny, and I cried for this man I've loved as my consort since I was born who was in so much pain.

He couldn't even pat my back, but I could feel his tears on my neck as he was holding me. I didn't feel the lust this time, the reaction had vanished as I touched him; this was purely about comfort and grieving, about letting go of the guilt and grief that we both felt for different reasons.

I don't know how long we stayed that way, holding each other and crying until we couldn't cry anymore.

We slept, we cried, but slowly, we started to talk. We'd shared so many memories of Ginny that we could finish each others stories, but that didn't stop us as we told them again and again.

We didn't come out from that cabin for over a week, we hardly even moved from the couch, magic took care of our biological needs and the only fluid that passed our lips was the never ending bottle of rum.

It was Harry that ended it. I woke up, it was bright outside, and Harry was carrying me.

“Harry?”

“We stink.”

I inhaled and was almost sick. He wasn't kidding.

He carried me into the water and we started to swim. It wasn't much, but it was a start.

Two days later I received an owl from Dad. It was short and simple.

Samantha,

Gabrielle has explained everything. It took her a long time to get through to Fleur. We understand and we love you. Bring him back to us when you can.

Mum blames herself, but I'm getting her through that. As for me, I guess I've always known. You have always been a little spoilt, getting what you wanted, and you've always wanted him. Now that you can do something about it, we just have to trust you to pay heed to the lessons we taught when you were ours. But no matter whether you are ours or his, we love you just the same.

Love,

Dad.

I laughed under my breath and burned the letter. If dad could see me now, scraggly hair, slightly underweight, and sunburnt, he wouldn't even be thinking along those lines. I don't feel like a femme fatale, and I certainly don't look it.

It's not time, it might never be time, but I'm prepared to wait for what I want, for who I want.

We spend our days together now, we reminisce a lot, talking about the woman we both lost. But slowly, we are getting over it. There will always be a hole in both our hearts, but we are healing together. If he thinks of me as anything other than the child of two of his friends, he's not showing it – at least to me.

When I'm feeling optimistic, which is my basic approach to life, I think I will get him, or maybe he will get me. In life everyone underestimates Harry Potter; everyone forgets that under those bright green eyes is a brain of considerable intelligence. He told me what Ginny said as she died last week, his eyes on me, and I couldn't help the blush. He told me that Ginny told him to have me explain things. So I did – I thought I was going to lose him all over again when I told him about her condition before she went out on the hostage mission.

It hurt like hell to explain that Ginny had the Wizarding version of Alzheimer's – she knew that in a year or two she'd be losing her mind, which was why she was going out on every dangerous mission – she was hoping that she could die in action so Harry wouldn't have to lose her to a disease that would take her mind while leaving her body mockingly sound. He nodded, gulping a bit as he pushed that news into whatever box he uses to store his grief. It must be a pretty damn big box. Then he asked me about the imprinting.

I thought I was going to die on the spot, but I explained it as best I could. He didn't say anything for the longest while. It was the longest silence in my life.

“So, you think you're going to be my *consort*?” he asked, wrinkling his nose as he pronounced the last word.

“Yeah, unless you send me away,” I replied.

“What happens then?” he inquired.

“I go away – that's the way these things work,” I said, trying to keep the horror that was swelling up inside me from showing on my face.

“Okay,” he said, not elaborating if that was ‘okay, I'll accept you as my consort,’ or ‘okay, I understand’ or ‘okay, it's time for you to start packing.’ He can be maddeningly imprecise at times.

He isn't ready, I can see that, and he practically told me, but it doesn't matter. I'll wait, for as long as it takes, I'll wait. And in the meantime, I'll heal and I'll help him heal.

Beyond being my aunt, Ginny was my best female friend. She never held me responsible against me, she never got in the way of my relationship with Harry, in fact, she encouraged it. She was beautiful, smart, and never boring.

She was my sister, my idol, and my rock. She meant even more to Harry, but you can't compare grief, I know that now. You can only feel what you are feeling; you can only deal with what you know.

I thought I'd heal a lot faster than he would, but that was me underestimating him. Harry has dealt with more pain in his life than I ever will, more than anyone ever should.

---

I'd been there for a month and a half when Ron and Hermione came for a visit – I figured they wanted to talk privately, so I took the catamaran and went fishing, hoping to catch enough for dinner. Ron met me when I sailed into the inlet that we used as our private harbour.

"Are you sure you want Harry?" he asked me simply.

I nodded. I've been sure all my life.

"If you deliberately do something to hurt him, I will kill you," Ron said softly.

I gaped at him. "Then you better kill me now, Uncle Ron, because win, lose or draw, someday I'm going to do something to hurt him," I said.

He looked at me in a way that conveyed his irritation at my immediate response. "I'm not talking about *arguments*, every couple has them – but if you cheat on him, if you abandon him, or if you use him . . . he's on the edge of losing it right now," Ron continued. "One more thing could tip him, and I will *not* lose my best friend. My sister took the coward's way out, despite her best intentions, and it's worse because Harry knows she was *trying* to kill herself."

I opened my mouth; this was my newly dead best friend he was bad-mouthing.

"Shut up and listen, Samantha," Ron growled and I did as I was told. I've seen Hermione mad. I've seen Harry mad, but never Uncle Ron – he's always been the even tempered one. For the first time I remembered that there was three of them originally, three of them who trained together, three of them who demolished the Death Eaters, and that Ron, in addition to being everyone's favourite uncle, was also one of the most determined men on the planet.

"Ginny had a choice, and she took the wrong one. It will take me a long time to forgive her, because despite her intentions, she screwed Harry over. If you are going to have a –" he paused, "*relationship* with Harry, you're going to have to understand that three of us are closer than blood.

"Hermione is making sure Harry understands that the family is not going to be upset if he decides to be with you, but that's his decision, there is absolutely no obligation for him to do anything with you at all. No one back home will blame him if he walks away."

I nodded, gulping. I couldn't remember anyone ever talking to me like this.

"What we three have is unique – a level of trust and love that no one else understands. If Harry or I need Hermione, she comes and *vice versa*, that's just how it is. If you and Harry work out a relationship, that's not going to change. Can you accept that?"

I nodded my 'yes' before he finished speaking.

He nodded back at me. "We think you could be good for him, Samantha, but take your time; he needs you as a friend more than a lover at the moment."

I nodded again, starting to breathe more easily.

Uncle Ron's voice changed slightly, as he continued, "Take the time you have to make sure you're ready, because I've seen Harry in 'seduce mood' and he can be pretty irresistible."

I started to blush fiercely as I realised what he was saying.

"Not that it's any of your business, Uncle Ron, but I wasn't planning on resisting," I replied sombrely.

He laughed and hugged me, and I sagged against him, glad that was over. That I had passed my biggest ever test, being tried and found worthy by Harry's best friend.

I walked back with Uncle Ron and sat down next to Harry. Bill and Sumi came through the Floo, and we spent the evening chatting.

Chatting like three couples.

In the dreams I've had since I was little I'd always see what it would be like if I was Harry's – his wife or consort or significant other – it was always life with Harry – waking up with him, working out with him, cleaning the house with him and after puberty hit the occasional odd dream where he was shagging my brains out. That evening was the first time I saw *in life* what I'd been seeing in these dreams. I think I'm falling in love with him all over again.

So I wait, hoping that it won't be long now. The way I felt just after the funeral is becoming more and more normal. The dreams, however, haven't changed.

As long as it takes, I'll wait.

From the beginning, there were a few things I knew for certain: Mum and Dad loved me; dragons were way cool; and Harry Potter was the bestest wizard in the whole world. More things became certain over time, and a lot of *those* things developed nuances over the years, but those core truths remain unshakable.

## These Dreams These Dreams - Epilogue

Dear Hermione,

The morning after the night you spent with us at the cottage, Harry announced that he was going to build another boat. The boats he'd built with Ginny had been sold or damaged in a storm, so he decided that we'd build another one. I was initially crushed when I saw that he was using the plans for the original boat, a tetchy little thing that's basically a one-man craft. I thought it was his way of letting me know that he was going to send me away as soon as the boat was finished.

It never dawned on me that he was trying to tell me just the opposite. We finished the boat and then went out for dinner and dancing to celebrate. When we came back to the cabin, I packed my bags, hoping to leave before dawn, trying to put on a brave front, notwithstanding the fact that I cried myself to sleep that night. Fortunately for me, Harry's a pretty early riser, and he questioned where I was going before breakfast. He got the shock of his life when I answered his question by telling him that I was going back to England. The dialogue that followed was classic:

"I thought you'd go sailing with me, Sam," he said, looking at me like a child who'd just been told that Christmas was cancelled.

"The boat only has a berth for one, Harry," I countered.

"I thought we could work that out," he replied with a warm smile.

And so we departed.

We've been sailing the islands of the Caribbean for the last year, so it's been hit-and-miss as far as sending letters in reply to our incoming post. We got married in Bermuda. The rector of St. Dismas' chapel was willing to post the banns on a Saturday and marry us Sunday afternoon. Another example of how little rules get bent when Potters are involved.

As you may have heard, I've resigned from the Aurors. Tonks wasn't surprised, and she wrote that if I ever came back, she'd have a job waiting for me. I don't know if we're ever going to come back to England for good. If we do, and if I do return to the Aurors, I'm not going to be Ginny Mark II, I'm going to be Samantha Mark I. I owe that to myself, and I owe that to him.

Oh, Harry says I should tell you that you're going to be an Aunt again, sometime in September. As a Healer I can tell you it's a very normal pregnancy. As a mum, I can tell you it's a girl, and I'm really going to be glad to move back to shore, as the tight confines of this boat are not well suited to a pregnant sailor.

I appreciate your help and encouragement. The old Harry is back – the whoop he let out when I told him we'd conceived should have been audible in England. I don't have to use that charm every morning to banish my dreams from my memory any more. My life is beginning to look a lot like those dreams, or is it the other way around?

As ever, I remain your friend,

Samantha Potter

---

Dear Samantha,

I don't know whether to congratulate you, or on behalf of your extended family to throttle you!

If I were you, I would expect a few Howlers in the next few days, as your mother and grandmother are rather upset with you. The idea of you and Harry getting married in secret had them horrified. Your mother, in particular, was, well, peeved would be the polite word.

Apart from that, congratulations on your pregnancy.

But more than anything else, thank you for bringing Harry back. His communiqés have been happier over the past few months (although the news that you two were married and now expecting somehow slipped his mind).

Hermione

---

Dear Auntie H,

It *wasn't* a secret wedding - the Bahamian Minister of Magic, Chief Auror and the master of the grounds for the Bahamian Quidditch Team's stadium all witnessed the wedding.

Remind me to tell you why we got married like that at some time.

Gotta run, Harry's feeling frisky.

Love,

S.P. (How I love these initials)

---

Dear brat,

*Sophistry: soph-is-try, noun, a plausible but fallacious argumentation.*

While I admit that, semantically, and canonically a secret wedding is impossible, you are deliberately interpreting my previous letter a little too literally.

A marriage that your mother, father, grandparents, extended family, and friends did not know about until (well) after the fact, is a secret wedding, even if it was witnessed by the entire French National Gobstones team!

That being said, I will not mention the subject any further – you will pay for your sins, I'm sure – many times over if I know my mother-in-law and your mother.

Oh, and consider this letter a reminder for your story on just why you decided that a secret wedding was so important.

Love,

H.W. (I always thought I'd end up with these initials, I just started with the wrong brother)

Dear Hermione, Fleur and Molly,

First off, please do *not* send Howlers to my wife. I'm sure I don't need to remind any of you of how you felt when you were pregnant, and for reasons that should be obvious, I'm feeling particularly protective right now. The fact that you are family and well intentioned is not particularly relevant to me at the moment.

While I apologise for marrying Samantha without involving the rest of the family, it was the best thing for the two of us, and as much as I love the rest of you, this was about us.

There will be a party here next weekend – and you are all invited this time. Portkeys and the like have been arranged, and word has been spread for those that have to work that I really want them here, so they should get the time off.

There will be a ceremony of sorts, blessed by the local vicar, so you will be able to witness a ceremony even if it was not *the* ceremony.

While I finish of a few changes to the cabin to accommodate everyone, Samantha will be flying home on a Muggle jet (no Portkeys or Apparating for her while she is pregnant) on Monday. She has full access to my bank accounts, and I expect sizeable withdrawals by the time you, Fleur, Molly and Samantha have ordered whatever it is that you lot think is necessary for such an occasion.

Love,  
H.J.P.

Hermione,

Be a dear and tell Ron that if he ever threatens my wife again, I'll remove his teeth with a pair of pliers and give them to Sam as a necklace.

Love,  
Harry

Harry,

Ha, bloody, ha.

If I thought you were even slightly serious, I'd be sending you a Howler right now.

As you're not, I'll explain something for you. Ron likes Sammy, but thinks that she's a hell of a tease and an immature brat. While he's forgiven her for her 'practising' he hasn't forgotten. He, and I, just wanted to be sure that she knew what she was getting into – and that she wasn't just reacting to those hormones she was releasing.

Love,  
Hermione

Hermione,

I was serious – about the pliers, if not the necklace.

I guess I never thought about what Ron was going through when Sam was playing; I just presumed that, as he never mentioned it, he wasn't that upset. I'll talk to him later, explain a few more things.

As we're explaining things... I was the one who asked Fleur's mum to come up with that charm that got Sammy to stop. If she hadn't, I was going to take things a little further – and I don't think Fleur OR Sammy would have liked my back up plan.

Love,  
Harry

Harry,

Do tell.

Hermione

Hermione,

Let's just say that common sense, and the remembrance that Sammy was fifteen and nicely past puberty, persuaded me that the idea, however satisfying, was inappropriate.

Harry

Harry,

You were going to give her a spanking!?! I think half the family would have paid to see that.

Of course, I would have spent a good few minutes pointing out the child abuse issues involved.

Love,  
Hermione

Hermione,

Only a few minutes? You would have approved as well?

Harry

Harry,

Can I plead the fifth?

Hermione

Hermione,

No. You're not American. Don't worry, I won't ever tell.

But moving on, can you do me a favour?

Take some money from my account and make sure Sammy gets a whole new wardrobe. At some stage, I'm going to have to go back to work, and I'm not doing it alone.

Love,  
Harry

---

Harry,  
Of course, it will be fun.

Love,  
Hermione

---

Ron,  
I understand why you said what you did to Sam. Do me a favour and don't do it again – she was biting her tongue all during the time you were waxing wise and avuncular.

Harry

---

Harry,  
Gee, thanks. I love you too, mate.  
Go on; let me know what she was going to say...

Ron

---

Ron.  
It was along the lines of ....  
"If you three are so tight, where were you when Harry was going to drink himself to death?"  
She was also going to point out that unlike your sister, she was not suicidal, not depressed, and not fertility impaired.

Harry

---

Harry,  
1) I'm guessing you've told her now?

2) Ouch

Ron

---

Ron,  
Yeah – she understands a bit more – and I think she was a little embarrassed that she really thought I was going to drink myself to death. Into a stupor – yes – that was the plan, after all, I've done that what, four times now? You know, I really need to come up with a new way of handling my grief. Murderous rampages and being inebriated to the point of a coma are all well and good when you're young, but I've got a kid on the way now.

Any ideas?

Harry

---

Harry,  
A few. One, talk to Sam. Obviously you're happy with her, so let her be what you need. Two, try physical activity. Tire yourself out the only fashioned way. I'm sure Sam will have some suggestions. Three, rant and rave at your friends – we do it to you enough.

Personally, I prefer three – why? Because it will give us a few chances to have embarrassing memories of you.

I'll see you at the weekend; Sumi and I are looking forward to it.

Ron

---

Ron,  
By that time, I should have our private Floo hooked up.

Harry

---

Harry,  
I love you, man, really, I do.  
Ron – just grateful not to have to use public transport

---

Hermione,  
Okay, I'm going to tell you just why we got married when and how we did. This letter is charmed – only you and Auntie G can read it – and her only by your permission.  
Notwithstanding all the time I'd spent at the tiller of the catamaran, once we got out into deep water it took me a day to get used to it again. Veela or no Veela, it is impossible to look or feel sexy when you're puking every thirty minutes. I'd forgotten what it was like to be at sea in a small boat – and believe me; I much prefer Harry's usual sloop!  
Apart from the motion sickness, the weather down here is always gorgeous, and like I said, the boat was built with but one berth. The problem at the beginning was that I was still unclear as to his overall intentions, and as there was a hammock on the deck, and I presumed it was for me. So the first night was spent sleeping under the stars – after I'd cried myself out.  
The second night I was prepared for more of the same, when Harry came out of the cabin and leaned against the mast.  
He was gorgeous. Actually he *is* gorgeous, and I have every reason to believe that he will continue until the end of time to be gorgeous. He was wearing a thin pair of shorts and his skin gleamed in the moonlight, revealing those muscles I've dreamt about all my life. Did I tell you that he

looks particularly good in a swimsuit?

'Is there a particular reason you're sleeping there?' he asked, and I gaped at him.

'Isn't this where you wanted me to be?'

He shook his head. 'Nope, not at all, I built this boat with one bed for a reason.'

It took me a few seconds to work out what he meant, then I think any ships nearby could have navigated by the glow of my blush.

I made some comment, even now, I'm not sure what, but I think I was trying to be flippant.

He looked at me, and my insides melted, and my heart beat increased – and that was just from the look. He *prowed* toward me, and I remember gulping, thinking that he looked like he wanted to eat me – a prospect that was becoming more exciting by the moment.

I'd like to say that I did something suave and sexy, but I think I just squeaked.

And then he kissed me. He kissed me like he was planning on making permanent contact with my soul. Uncle Ron *had* warned me about Harry, and now, finally, I understood just exactly why he'd never had problems finding overnight company when he was younger – hell, I would have been happy with a one-night stand in exchange for more of those sort of kisses.

I'd been kissed before and even welcomed a wandering hand or two, but nothing like this. Nothing that dominated every sense I had, making me feel like I was drowning in desire.

I could feel his hands where I'd never had hands before. I responded accordingly.

When my mind came back from wherever it goes when it's overloaded, he was looking at me in surprise.

'You're still a virgin.'

I nodded in agreement. 'Yeah – I never found a man I wanted to wake up next to,' I said, panting lightly.

He kissed me gently, and said, 'Excuse me for a second.' Then he dived over the side of the boat into the water.

Not exactly what I expected!

A few minutes, a dripping wet, and well, visibly diminished, Harry returned.

I didn't know what to feel. One minute I was looking forward to seeing him naked, the next I was alone, my paramour having just jumped ship. If ever there was a moment that I doubted whether or not I was desirable, that was probably it.

'I've never slept with a virgin,' he said quietly. 'Especially not one I'm in love with. If we're going to do this, I think we need to do it properly: we need to get married.'

Well, first I was upset. I mean, I'd been waiting most of my life to do *things* with him, and here he was *procrastinating* again.

But then the rest of my mind kicked in. Harry - loved - me. Me. Samantha Weasley!

After blinking I looked at him, but he wasn't there - he was on one knee before me. "Samantha," he said softly, 'will you marry me?'

I burst into tears and pushed him over backwards, crying and kissing and talking incoherently.

He picked me up easily (he is so strong!) and kissed me back, before he mumbled, 'I'm guessing that's a 'yes' then.'

I nodded, and well, the 'get things done immediately' Harry Potter came out to play. Before I knew it, I was steering the boat toward shore, propelled by a magical breeze he'd created, and he was on the 'phone, making arrangements.

This was Friday, we were married on Sunday. And as for our wedding night... well, let me just say that it was well worth the wait, and every single female I know would give their eye teeth to be initiated in that particular fashion – it gives me goose bumps, even now, to think about it.

Lots of love,

Sam

---

My darling brat of a niece,

You appear to have broken Hermione.

I am impressed, in all the time I've known her, I've never seen her flush to quite that colour, or be that speechless.

Of all your other accomplishments, which are many, this one is truly the most impressive, my dear.

Now, having read your missive in detail, I'm wondering exactly why you didn't do any studying beforehand. I thought we taught you to always research new situations?

So, the other package attached to this owl is an instruction book for you, containing the best advice one Veela can give another (I never tried to forget my heritage, and found out some interesting facts when I reviewed the book before sending it on to you). I recommend you pay attention to the physiological differences between humans and Veela, especially the chapter on breathing.

As crass as it might sound, I guarantee that if you study hard there will be no ghosts in your bed.

Consider this a delayed thank you to Harry for saving me all those years ago.

Gabrielle

---

Auntie G,

I didn't even know that sort of thing was possible! It was the first time I took charge in the bedroom, and never have I felt so powerful – I had Harry under my control whilst giving him the pleasure he gives me all the time.

Thank you SO much, it has helped more than you can know. We are more equal now, no longer the teacher and eager student, but two adults expressing their love in every way possible.

Harry's sending me home in a few days to do some pre-celebration shopping; will you please come as well?

Much love,

Sam (and you *do* look like my non-pregnant sister, not my aunt)

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Darling Samantha,

Flattery will get you everywhere.

Of course I'll be there!

Gabbi

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"What are you doing, love?"

I still smile at those words. "Just looking over some old letters," I reply.

His arms go around me, caressing my distended stomach. I swear the sight of me pregnant makes him hornier than ever.

I rest against him and smile softly.

“Did I ever mention that I love you?”

“A few times,” I allowed, teasing him.

It turned out that my parents and grandparents were not quite as upset as Hermione had reported although Mum was still sulking a bit by the time they reached the Caymans. I explained – in a LOT less detail – what happened that night on the boat and they swooned with the romance.

The celebration at our cabin was another success. It was a huge family reunion to start with, four generations of the family were there, and it was a lot of fun. Harry’s minor modifications turned out to be a little over the top in the usual Potter style.

He’d hired practically every wizard in the country to do the work, and the cabin was now big enough to easily hold everyone.

What’s more, our Floo was now officially hooked up to the international network – and, and I still don’t know how he arranged it – his private Floo with Ron and Hermione was there as well.

The vicar blessed us on the beach in front of our entire family and the setting sun.

I was in a full wedding dress which, notwithstanding my passenger, didn’t make me look like I’d swallowed a Bludger. Harry was looking gorgeous in his tuxedo – his recent work and sailing had helped him regain all his muscle tone, and I got weak at the knees when I saw him. Judging by the envious glares I got from some of my younger female relatives, I was not the only one to notice this.

I walked out to meet him, proudly holding Dad’s arm – he was looking good too, and I now recognised the look in Mum’s eyes that said I wouldn’t be the only Veela celebrating tonight.

I am a Veela, I have nearly always looked good in whatever I am wearing, but by the time Auntie Gabrielle finished with me, even I was breathless – literally and figuratively. The dress and under-garments were a little tighter than I was used to in places, but all of a sudden the curves I’d always been happy with were looking extra curvy – including the bonus curve out front.

I can’t remember much of what the vicar said as I was locked on Harry’s face as he smiled at me, and I finally accepted that this was it – Ginny was gone, and he was mine now, until the end of our days.

I thanked her then and there for her selflessness, for being my best friend, and for giving me the biggest gift of all – Harry. And I felt that the best way I could ever repay her was by making sure that Harry was happy.

I’ve worked hard on that promise.

“You’re pensive, love,” he whispered.

“Just thinking about the past,” I said, tilting my head to allow him access to my neck.

“Good things?” he asked, as he started to nuzzle me.

I sighed happily, nuzzling always makes me feel better. And now, with a son on the way, I have everything I ever wanted.

“Always,” I reply.

“I love you,” he whispers, and I crane my neck to kiss him.

“I love you back,” I tell him, meaning every word with all my soul.

And this is it, proof that these dreams of mine couldn’t hold a candle to reality.

It hasn’t been all sunshine, wine and roses. There have been dry and terrible times, and I’ve gone without sleep more times than I can remember, but on the whole, I am happier than I’ve ever been, more loved and fulfilled than I ever dreamed I could be, and soon, with our second child, we will have everything we ever wanted.

But for now, my husband’s hands are wandering and I would rather pay attention to the present than remember the past.

I am a woman, a witch, a Veela, a healer, a wife and a mother. Of all the credentials, titles and awards, the one I’m most proud of is the simplest.

I am Samantha Potter.