

## CHAPTER 37

### HARRY'S PROPOSAL

Late afternoon on Valentine's Day, Harry lingered in the archway of the enchanted entrance to the secret room at Grimmauld Place, calling out for Hannah. Within an instant, she emerged at the top of the staircase and was standing before him shimmering beautifully beneath her delicate and curious grin.

"Alright, what's this great surprise you have for me?" she said sweetly.

"You'll see. Now, close your eyes," said Harry.

"Right then," said Hannah softly. She drew her eyes closed, feeling the warm sensation of the palm of Harry's hand as it rested against her middle back to gently nudge her through the enchanted doorway and into the secret room.

"You ready?" asked Harry.

"Mmmmmmm. Something smells *delicious*," murmured Hannah.

"Open your eyes," said Harry through a great wisp of jitters.

On his word, Hannah obliged, finding herself gaping at the spectacular sight of passion and romance unfolding before her:

The entire sitting area had been spectacularly adorned in clear crystal-cut vases stowed with flowing symphonies of pure white orchid sprays, delicate sprigs of curly willow, and radiant long-stemmed velvety-red roses. The ambitious floral collection was woven into an enchanting open heart-shaped ensemble, opening to the full view of the fireplace. Some of the bouquets reached the pinnacle of her chest, while others stretched only to her waist. This stunning show remained smoothly arranged, surrounding a large rounded downy mattress-pillow, which was veiled in white silken bedding and sprinkled with soft red rose petals. Hannah's eyes danced beyond the whimsical vision, to where an elegant rounded dining set stood intricately garnished with silver trimmed porcelain china, elegant crystal wine goblets, silver-plated serving dishes and flatware, and a setting of delicate crystal cut candleholders topped with white tapered glowing candles.

"Harry!" she exclaimed.

"What do you think? I took a shot at some of my elf magic," he boasted.

“It’s *fantastic!*” said Hannah, brushing past the flowers, leaning into them, and cupping her hand beneath their blossoming buds to collect their enchanting fragrance as she made her way over to the dining table.

One by one, she lifted the lids of the serving dishes to peak inside of them, imparting upon Harry a look of wonderment as she addressed the contents aloud. “Chicken Rosemary with white wine sauce, squash Provençal, green beans Almondine, Gateau... These are my *favorite* French dishes! I-I can’t believe you did all of this!”

“Well, I can’t take *all* the credit for the nosh,” said Harry humbly. “Mrs. Weasley made most of it. I helped, but I’m not exactly a master in the kitchen. I suffered some nasty burns assisting her in getting everything ready.”

“This is so *sweet!*” said Hannah, throwing her arms around him and offering him delectable kiss.

“Well, let’s eat. I have another surprise for you, later, after we...*you know,*” he said with a suggestive wink and a crafty smirk.

“I say we get to the ‘*you know*’ first,” said Hannah with a toothy grin, clawing eagerly at his chest.

“Aren’t you hungry?”

“Not for *food,*” said Hannah in a wicked breathy tone, smoothing her willing hands up and down the front of his torso.

Harry flashed her a subtle expression of disillusionment, to which she was quick to appease him.

“Oh, come now, Potter. We can put a Warming Spell on the platters to keep them from spoiling. We’ll eat the ‘*food*’ later.”

He shook his head in amusement over Hannah’s relentless ‘*appetite*’.

“I warned you that I was a sensual woman before we got together, you know,” murmured Hannah, raising her brow while she closed in on him.

“Hey, I’m not complaining,” said Harry with conviction, welcoming her into his arms.

“Good. I was worried I might be wearing you out,” said Hannah teasingly, leaning back to catch a better glimpse of him.

“It’s *you* who should be worried,” said Harry playfully, with a flood of seriousness in his tendency that left Hannah brimming with hope.

Harry took her hand and led her over to the feather bedding by the fireside.

Turning to meet him, Hannah leaned into him, delivering him an intense electrifying kiss that instantly sent his blood racing like wildfire coursing through his veins.

They embraced one another fully, losing themselves within the passionate calls of one another's lips.

Harry smoothed his hands tenderly along Hannah's perfect curves, lowering her toward the floor amidst a medley of his heavenly kisses, nestling her like a cherished treasure into the soft folds of the bedding. His love for her was unbounded and his desire to prove it to her was insatiable.

Slowly, tenderly, and lovingly he led her into a paradise she'd never before known by such a masterful means that he hoped she'd never dare wish to leave it....

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Afterward, they lay together entangled within the ivory silken sheets, motionless and dazed for a long while. Harry was the first to surface from the depths of this elation. He propped himself up on his elbow and took hold of Hannah's right hand. Then, impressing a gentle kiss upon it, he said tenderly, "I love you, Hannah."

Hannah smiled a lazy, contented smile and responded softly, "I love you too, Harry."

"This has been the most incredible night for me."

"Oh, yes, indeed; for me, as well," she drawled.

"I have something for you."

"*Ooh*, that's right. I get a present, too. Let's have it, then," said Hannah with a tinge of excitement laced in her exhausted breath.

"Alright then," he said.

Leaning over, he slipped his hand beneath the head of the pillow, recovering a small black velvet box from beneath it. He snuggled back down into the comfort of the bedding with her and propped himself on his elbow, pulling her onto her side to face him. With a sharp exhale of his mounting nerves, he withdrew the lid from the box to reveal a brilliant, emerald-cut diamond ring resting on a white satiny cushion.

Hannah let out a light staggered gasp as her eyes arced from the spectacular jewel, to a clearly nervous Harry.

“Hannah,” he started, his voice trembling upon the deliverance of the words, “will you marry me?”

“*Whoa...*” exhaled Hannah dramatically in a breathless state of shock and awe. It was all she could think to say.

Harry plucked the ring from its satiny bedding and slipped it down the delicate ring finger of her shaking right hand. Hannah continued to alternate her wide-eyed stare between him and the hypnotic sparkle coming from the eye-catching, two-carat stone, for several minutes, stumped for further thoughts or words.

Harry collected her ring bejeweled hand in his and kissed it again, finding new confidence in the warmth of her touch, speaking with a bold sense of conviction as he pressed on steadily, “I know we’ve only been going out for a few months, but I’ve never felt like this about *anyone*. It’s as though I was meant to have known you my *entire life*, like a part of me had gone missing until I found you. You’re *everything* I could ever wish for. These past few months have been like a dream to me, knowing you, being with you, *loving you*. I’m certain with all that I am that you’re the one I want to spend the rest of my life with.”

Hannah let out a broken, winded sigh, and in a choking whisper, she said, “I- I don’t know what to say.”

“Say *yes*,” pleaded Harry softly.

“It’s just so unexpected, I—” she said quietly, her voice cracking between the words. Her eyes were now brimming with tears of emotion so intense that her entire body began numbing itself from the inside out, clearly in an attempt at shielding her from feeling any further, as she would surely burst otherwise.

Harry kissed her hand again, gazed into her brilliant green eyes, and repeated more firmly, “Say *yes*.”

“Yes,” said Hannah out of instinct, as all sense of self-control over her conscious mind had completely deserted her.

Harry let out a grunt of elation, whisked her into his arms, and kissed over her.

“*W-wait!*” said Hannah, reclaiming her senses and pushing away from him.

“What’s the matter?”

“This — I — it’s —” spluttered Hannah, marveling over the magnificent diamond as she twirled the ring in persistent circles around her finger. She still couldn’t think of the words. *Why couldn’t she find the words?*

“Hannah, what? What is it?” inquired Harry with a hint of anxiety laced in his speech.

“Harry —”

“*What?*” he pressed on impatiently, sounding as though he knew the words she needed weren’t hidden, but were floating right in front of her, and he wondered why she couldn’t find them.

Hannah met his gaze and opened her mouth to speak, but instead she let out a quivering gasp: Perhaps, it was a trick of the light? Certainly not. She had seen it: a flicker of scarlet in Harry’s eyes so fleeting that it had gone before she could confirm it for certain.

“What’s going on with you?” snapped Harry quietly.

“Nothing, nothing,” whimpered Hannah, still staring into his eyes for verification of the light she swore she had seen reflecting in them seconds earlier.

“Nothing?” inquired Harry skeptically.

“It’s nothing, really, Harry. I’m just a bit overcome by emotion, you see,” she lied. *Why did she lie?*

“Ah,” said Harry, instantly relaxing, as he fully believed her.

“You know something? I’m kind of hungry. I think I’m going to slip into my nightclothes and have some of that excellent nosh you and Mrs. Weasley prepared,” said Hannah, robing herself using one of the silken sheets and scurrying off toward her walk-in wardrobe.

“Yeah, me too.” said Harry, throwing on his pants and trailing swiftly behind her.

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A few nights later, Harry lay on his four-poster bed in his dorm room, staring up at the face of the ceiling, thinking of how he couldn’t possibly know of a greater happiness. He had everything he could possibly want. All he needed was to figure out how to remove the Horcrux from within him, destroy Voldemort, and his life would be... perfect.

“I can’t believe she said *yes*,” said Ron sourly as he sorted through his trunk.

“*Nor can I*,” said Harry incredulously.

“I tell you, you’ve got to be the luckiest bloke alive. Everyone’s going on about it. Except for Ginny. She recons you ought to be cursed into the next millennium.”

“Yeah, I reckon it wasn’t quite fair of me to break it off with her for the reasons I did, then go and strike up a relationship with someone else,” agreed Harry justly.

“That’s funny, that’s *exactly* what Ginny said.”

“Hmmm, I reckon I’m finally catching on to this girl bit after all.”

“If you call that ‘*catching on*’. As for me, I’ll never understand the lot of them,” said Ron.

“Oh. Hermione’s miffed with you again, is she?”

“Yeah. I can’t figure out why, though.”

“Perhaps it might have been your saying that I was the envy of every man who ever laid eyes on Hannah?”

“Well, *you are*,” said Ron.

“Yes, but perhaps you ought *not* to tell her those things, Ron.”

“Why not? It’s the truth, isn’t it?”

“Sometimes the truth is better left untold. Particularly the awful ones you tend to shell out.”

“Piss off, Harry.”

“Oh, come on, then. Go and tell Hermione you’re sorry if it bothers you so much.”

“I tried. Every time I get near her, she hexes me....as does Ginny.”

Harry couldn’t help but laugh at how clueless his best friend could be when it came to women; all the while, he felt entirely sorry for him, knowing he would probably remain as such.

“Say, Harry, isn’t that Hedwig?” said Ron instantly, pointing to a snowy white owl perched outside their dormitory window.

“Yeah, I wonder what she’s doing here. I left her in the Owlry only an hour ago.”

“She’s probably delivering another urgent owl from Hannah requesting that you meet her in some ruddy broom cupboard somewhere — lucky bastard,” grumbled Ron.

Harry chuckled and blushed; although, he *was* hopeful. He cracked open the window and removed a small parcel from Hedwig's beak and tossed her a butter biscuit from a small silver tin sitting on his nightstand.

"Well, who's it from?" asked Ron.

"You were right; it's from Hannah," he said, opening the parcel and feeling his breath stop the instant he laid his eyes upon its contents.

Ron stood beside him equally as stunned.

Harry reached forward and plucked a brilliant diamond ring from within the packaging, followed by a small piece of folded parchment that rested beneath it.

"Oh, mate," said Ron empathetically, shaking his head as he examined the look of grief slowly infecting Harry's face.

"I-I don't believe this," choked Harry after reading the note.

"What does it say?"

Harry couldn't speak any further. He tossed the parchment to Ron, who inclined forward and snatched it up to read it:

*"Harry,*

*I'm so sorry. . . I just can't. . . Please don't hate me. . .*

*Hannah"*

"That's just bloody cruel," said Ron in disbelief.

"I've got to talk to her," said Harry desperately, snapping the parchment from Ron's hand.

"*What?* You're actually going to speak to that heartless git after what she's done to you?"

"Sod off, Ron!" said Harry angrily, drawing the drapes closed on his four-poster from the outside, then kneeling down to slip into and lace up his trainers.

“What do you think it is you’re doing?” asked Ron in bewilderment.

“If anyone asks, tell them I have a headache and that I’m sleeping. Tell them I’m not to be disturbed.”

“You’re not really going after her? What about Remus? He’s on duty tonight. You know he’ll be up here at some point to check on you. If he catches you missing, both you and Hannah will be in a heap of trouble.”

“I don’t really care.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you, mate,” said Ron, shaking his head in censure.

Harry grabbed his invisibility cloak and hurried into his wardrobe cupboard, tapping on the wall to conjure the enchanted entrance.

“What the —?” he said as he continued to tap furiously against it, re-uttering the incantations. With each try, he became more desperate, more frantic, the fury heaving up inside of him to the point he felt as though he was going to retch. “*I don’t believe this!*” he fumed, storming back into the dorm room.

“What?” said Ron with alarm.

“She’s blocked the passageway!”

“Leave it, Harry. She obviously doesn’t want to see you.”

“Caught on, have you?!” snarled Harry.

“*Excuuuuuse me!*” retorted Ron nastily.

“I’m going to try the third floor corridor. I’m sure I can get someone to distract Remus for me while I sneak out of the portrait hole.”

Ron shook his head, but he wisely kept his thoughts to himself, this time.

With Seamus’s distraction, Harry had managed to hustle out of Gryffindor tower and into the third floor corridor in an attempt to access the main enchanted entrance to Grimmauld.

“Dammit!” he shouted, when he realized the corridor’s magical entrance had also been sealed shut. So, he did the only other thing he knew to do: He took the secret passageway behind the stone statue of the humpbacked, one-eyed witch out of the castle, into Hogsmeade, and Apparated back to Grimmauld Place. Within minutes, he was standing in the Grimmauld upper corridor, tapping his wand feverishly against the main entrance to the secret room, and banging open the door.

There sat Hannah, lost beneath an ocean of her own tears, her back molded into the headboard of the four-poster bed. She was sitting alongside a shorthaired, heart-shaped-faced woman, who was looking on equally as heartbroken for her.

“Wocher Harry,” said the woman in a soft sympathetic voice, appearing as though she was anticipating his arrival.

“Tonks,” said Harry shortly. “I know what you’re going to say, and I really don’t care. You can sack me from the Order, lock me up in the castle, and expel me from Hogwarts. Do whatever you will, but I need to talk to Hannah, *NOW*.”

“Harry, it’s alright, I understand. Hannah, we’ll talk again in the morning. See to it that Harry gets back to the castle tonight. I’ll tend to Remus to make sure he doesn’t get caught,” said Tonks kindly. She hurried up the staircase to the secret kitchen, where she exited through the enchanted entryway, and headed off for the castle.

Harry rounded over his cowering, tear-strewn girlfriend, his eyes boring angrily into hers, while she was determined to avoid his heated stare.

“Well?” said Harry shortly, tapping his right foot impatiently against the floor.

Hannah kept silent, still refusing to face him.

“Are you going to tell me what this owl is about, or not?” asked Harry, waving the parchment rudely in her face.

Still, Hannah gave no reply.

“You don’t truly love me, do you?” he said, fully sodden in a quiet and withdrawn voice.

Hannah shook her head, and in a broken whispered response, she said, “That’s not true.”

Harry released a sharp exhale of relief, plopped down beside her, and pushed gently, “Then, why would you do this?”

“Harry, you don’t truly want me for your wife. I’m not right for you.”

“That’s a load of rubbish and you know it!” said Harry crossly. “Now, I want the truth! Why did you give me the ring back?”

“I told you why!”

“Don’t lie! I know you’re lying!”

“I’m not lying!” whimpered Hannah.

“Yes, you are! Now, STOP lying!”

“Harry—”

“Ah, I know what this is about. You’re pushing me away again. You don’t think I’m going to make it through this, do you? You think Voldemort’s going to finish me off, and you don’t want your heart broken if he does!”

“I don’t think that!”

“Yes, yes, you do! I can see it in your eyes! You don’t think you’re going to be able to get this piece of his soul out of me! You think I’m done for, so you’re trying to get rid of me!” spat Harry heatedly. Then, he shoved off the bed and took to pacing the floor in ire.

Hannah shook her head no.

“*I don’t get you!*” said Harry in frustration. “We had the most *perfect* night together! It was the most incredible night I’ve ever spent with anyone — that *you’ve* ever spent with anyone! You said so yourself! And now, *this!*”

“Harry, I tried to tell you, but I didn’t know how, and I didn’t want to hurt you.”

“Well this owl definitely softened the blow,” said Harry sarcastically.

“Look, I’ve given you my answer —”

“Yeah, and it was right shallow of you, too! I deserve far better than a load of rubbish scribbled on a piece of shoddy parchment!” snapped Harry.

“You’re right. I’m sorry,” said Hannah agreeably.

Harry scoffed and stopped pacing.

“Harry, I think you should return to the castle. I also believe it would be best for you to spend your weekends there for a little while.”

“Oh, no, *No!* I’m not letting you push me away again. I won’t let you do this to us; forget it! Now, I don’t know what it is you’re playing at, but I’m not going anywhere until we figure this out — until I get the *truth* from you. So, let’s have it!”

“Harry, I’ve said I won’t marry you; now, drop it, or I *will* push you away *for good!*” snarled Hannah nastily.

Harry stood before her winded and gaping.

Hannah instantly sprung from the bed at the sight of his devastated expression, squeezed his hands in hers, and said briskly, “Ugh! *I’m sorry! I’m so sorry!* I didn’t mean that. I didn’t mean to be cruel. I’m just — *upset*. Listen to me, Harry. I’m in love with you, I truly am. You must believe me when I tell you that. Still, I’m not prepared to make this commitment with you, not yet. Please try to understand.”

Harry studied her for a moment, offering no response.

“Harry, *please*,” said Hannah beseechingly.

“I suppose I did rush things a bit,” mumbled Harry reluctantly.

“You did, *a bit*,” said Hannah gently.

“But, I know this is what I truly want — to be with you...*forever*.”

“Harry, what you and I have is *fantastic*. I love every minute I spend with you and curse every second we’re apart. Can’t we enjoy each other as we are and take the time to get to know one another *fully* before we take the next step? What’s your hurry?”

“There’s no hurry. I know everything I need to know about you to realize that I don’t want to be without you.”

“Harry, you’re *seventeen*. You have your whole life ahead of you. You can’t possibly know for certain that *I’ll* be the one you’ll want years from now, let alone months from now for that matter.”

“*I do* know, Hannah, *I do!*”

“Alright, fine, fine,” said Hannah tenderly. “I’ll tell you what. Let’s get through this mess with Voldemort, give each other time to get over the emotional strain of it all, and then, if you still feel you want me as much, I’ll reconsider. I believe that’s more than fair.”

“Okay...but I’m holding you to that,” said Harry firmly.

Hannah forced a half smile and kissed him.

“I want to stay here with you tonight,” said Harry, stroking at her shoulders.

“No, not tonight.”

“Aw, come on.”

“*No*, Harry. You need time to think about what I said, to make sure it’s right for you. Much as I would like to have you spend the night —”

“There’s nothing to think about. You’ve given me your answer and I’ve accepted it. Now, let me stay. I want to be with you.”

“Harry, tomorrow is Friday and you’ll be free to stay here until Sunday night. We can have our own little dirty weekend if you’d like. We won’t even have to leave this room. However, for tonight, I need for you to return to the castle.”

“Only if you reconnect the passageways for me.”

“It’s already been done,” said Hannah with a wink and a tender smile.

“Alright, then, I’ll go. But, I’m not giving up on us,” said Harry resolutely, pulling her to him and holding her close.

“Nor am I, Harry. Nor am I.”