How Many Snakes Do We Need to Turn a House into a Home?

by SofiaBane

Summary

Harrymort domesticity, fluff, and kidfic oneshots. With the last peace treaty sworn in their marriage vows, the world is quieter now. Voldemort serves in the Wizengamot and Harry in the Muggle Liaison Office, working on new legislation together now that the Statute of Secrecy has been repealed. The only three things Harry wants out of life are 1) a family and a good home for them, 2) good lives for all his friends, and 3) not a single damn adventure to happen to him for at least another decade.

These oneshots are all set after Cicatriziation, but it's not required to understand them. I'm leaving the series open because I'll just add to this as the mood strikes.
Chapter Summary

The summer after leaving Hogwarts, Harry’s cohort is spending as much time together as possible. Normally Ron and Hermione can host their Friday night parties, but Harry would love to have everyone over to the Slytherin estate, sometime.

(See the end notes for more background and anything else you might need.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry’s cohort had been pretty good at gathering for weekly drinks in the summer after leaving Hogwarts. Ron and Hermione would host in their shared home, partly because they had the most space for it and partly because Hermione wouldn’t entrust the responsibility to anyone else. “It’s just a get-together,” Ron muttered as he scooped a wide divot out of the cheese ball with a cracker. When Hermione looked at him in horror, he shrugged and charmed the cheese in a spiky shape, hiding his crime. “Eating for two,” he reminded her.

This was true, anyway: he was five months pregnant and his frame had filled out significantly. He had hips now, which he said would go away after birth, but for now he’d stopped wearing trousers under his robes. Harry hadn’t yet asked how the birth would happen precisely. Gryffindor or no, he may never be bold enough to ask.

For now, Harry had left work at the Ministry early-ish to help Ron and Hermione clean up their place before everyone would arrive. They were all there, actually: Harry in the Muggle Liaison Office, Ron in the tech and weaponry lab of the DMLE. Hermione in a summer internship under Madam Bones, and sometimes she hesitantly brought news of Percy, also working there, back to Ron. Ginny had just started the three years of Auror training, and she said she wasn’t allowed to discuss much of it but she was allowed to show off a new and dire bruise each day.

Of course Voldemort was still in the Ministry too, drafting legislation for the Wizengamot. More of the public felt mildly grateful to him once more, with the Humneré neutralized, so – well, the protestors were quiet for the moment. This irritated Hermione (“when we’re not in conflict is when we’ll achieve the most,” and Harry didn’t even disagree with her, but), but the population was really interested in how the Unification would unfold. They had new tax laws, new trade laws, new laws for patenting and selling magic to Muggles. Granted, it wasn’t significant magic yet – one of the products to kick off the Muggle craze had been a charmed dust pan – but there would be an economic boom, anyway. It made everything easier.

Luna wafted in with the Patil twins. Ginny and Tonks were behind them. “I picked up – what did I pick up?” Tonks asked, turning to Ginny, who held the paper bag. “Some sort of dwarven ale.” She was reaching to lift it out of the bag, until Ginny squeaked in protest. “Ugh, fine. Amber Mountain or something like that.”

Harry grinned at them both. “Thanks. You know where the kitchen is.”

Dean came, with Neville in tow. (“I can’t stay with Gran over the summer,” Neville had muttered to
them his first night back from uni. “I love them but I still feel like an eleven year old in her house.”

So Dean had a spare room, and Neville was only around until term began later this month anyway.)

And then George, bringing Lee with him. “My dear twin’s turn to close up,” he said, shrugging.

“You know, if we never see you together in a room anymore…” Ginny began.

“He might have killed me and taken my place? Yeah. Hey, test these?” And he was putting down an overly-innocent plate of pink macarons.

Ron eyed them. “Test them for what, exactly?”

“Invisibility.”

“Well, that’s going to make for an awkward party,” Hermione said, coming up behind Ron and pushing a cranberry seltzer into his hand. (Pregnant wixies could drink, Hermione had looked it up a thousand times and still didn’t really believe it. Ron said he liked seltzer by that time anyway, and it was another tiny way they kept peace between them.)

“I think it’d make for a stunning party,” George objected. “Let’s all get sloshed and invisible, and play tag in that field behind the house. Ahh – ‘ Ron was reaching for a macaron, and George jerked to stop him. “Maybe not you. Being in the family way and all.”

“Can you stop saying it like that,” Ron muttered, going pink. “Pregnant. I’m just pregnant.”

“You sure are,” George agreed. “Anyway, I stopped by Gringotts for a deposit, and Bill said he’d bring Fleur around tonight. Even though it’s the first night in weeks she hasn’t been wining and dining ze clients.”

“So atrocious, it borders on offensive;” Lee marveled as he poured them both drinks. George gave a little curtsy.

Lavender and Lisa were the last to show up, for now. Lisa embraced Luna and each of the Patils in turn, but Lavender went right for Hermione. “Do you want these?” She was holding out a bag.

“Haircare. I’m shaving all mine off, I think a buzzcut really accentuates my cheekbones, so….”

Hermione’s expression was careful. Lavender’s hair also took attention away from her scars, by Greyback. They still ran puckered and pink along half her face. “Yeah,” Hermione said, reaching up to finger her own cloud of hair. “Thanks. Thank you. Would you like a drink?”

“God, yes. I was shadowing in pediatrics today, and we’re not allowed to cast silencing spells on the kids, no matter how loud they’re screaming…. “ She followed Hermione into the kitchen.

Meanwhile Lisa took a seat beside Harry. “We had a floo call with Draco today,” she offered.

We. “You and Daphne are living together?” He hadn’t realized, but then, he could be very thick about such things.

“Well. I’m staying in her manor. It was a nightmare to get permission to move in – her Mum’s going to be under house arrest for at least another five or six years, and it was a lot for Daph to tend to all by herself. I like it, though. They’ve got their own observatory. But,” she made a gesture. “Draco.”

“Right. He’s in France still?”

“Yeah. Finally. He said – “ she dropped her voice a bit “ – he and Tom did some traveling, saw
some people who’d, y’know, help Tom. But he’s apparently legal now. Got a passport and everything.”

God almighty, the weirdest part of this year had to be that Malfoy was dating the locket. Harry felt that even if he and Malfoy were sort-of-technically dating the same person, they were mutually horrified by one another’s choice of partner. Anyway, it was really only the Slytherins who knew of the Horcruxes, but Lisa had spent enough time with Daphne that they’d incorporated her into their little clique. “Is he still going by Tom, too?”

She scrunched her nose. “He’s passing himself off as part of the Black family, so – “

“Malfoy is part of the Black family.”

“We all are, in one way or another,” Lisa sighed. “They married into a lot of their wealth. Anyway, Tom doesn’t quite fit on the family tree, right? He said he’s got all his papers as Corvus Black now.”

Corvus. Well. “Great. And they’re living… on a vineyard?”

A nod. “Malfoy said it’s nice. He says he’ll send wine if they’ve got a good yield.”

For a moment, Harry tipped his head back. Malfoy felt like his most significant failure of the past year, that Harry was so ill-equipped to help him at all after he’d lost everything. “Great,” he said again. “How’s Daphne?”

At this, Lisa plastered a smile on. “It’s hard for her. Astoria, her brothers…. But she’ll be alright. She’s looking at uni, to get out of the house.”

“Any chance you’ll bring her here sometime?”

Lisa’s smile went from practiced to sad. “No. Probably not. It’s just – too late, for them. Maybe if our time in school had gone differently – but it didn’t. She knows she’s invited, though.”

It was confusing – the Slytherins were all still difficult and unpleasant. They still had nothing good to say about Muggles. Harry had a much harder time with this sort of pity, the discomfort of wanting to help people with whom he had decided antipathy. “Right. Thanks for telling me about Malfoy. And – christ, what was it? Corvus.” Lisa smiled at his tone.

He hadn’t checked in with the other Horcrux recently, either. The diadem was at Hogwarts now, tutoring the Slytherins who would be taking OWLs later that summer. By all counts, they were fine. Harry and Voldemort hadn’t been asked to help repair the damage to the castle, Riddle was apparently doing it all, so. It was fine.

Soon they are settled with drinks, and nobody has yet dared to eat an invisibility macaron, and Neville is showing Luna a soft pink plant that would butt up against their hands to be petted, and Padma is putting her newest mixtape into their radio, and Hermione has just collapsed on the sofa beside Ron, finding the festivities acceptably organized for now. Ron pats her on the shoulder, and she swallows wine.

Ginny and Tonks are telling Lee and George about the Quidditch game they went to last weekend. “– Puddlemere was a disaster, but maybe they wouldn’t be if they put Oliver on the pitch,” Ginny was saying. “But Kenmare’s got this new formation, where the beaters fly inside the chasers. It’ll get a chaser killed someday, but Puddlemere had no idea what to do with it….”

Harry had slid in beside Ginny, listening contentedly. He hadn’t been to any Quidditch games yet this summer: weekends were mostly spent with Voldemort, since they saw each other less often than
one might expect. Voldemort kept long, long hours at the Ministry, and they each had a business dinner at least once a week. Harry would sometimes join Voldemort at his dinners – they hardly pretended it wasn’t to soothe people’s intimidation – but that was nothing like being alone together. Anyway, the Slytherin estate still needed a lot of work done.

But he missed Quidditch a lot. “I want to join a rec league,” he said. “Angelina’s got one, right?”

“The Busted Bumblebees,” George pronounced. At Harry’s blank look, he shrugged. “I don’t get it either. I think she’s coming with Fred later, if it’s not a night she’s seeing her parents.”

“I’d join with you,” Ginny said brightly. “I miss it too.”

Secretly Harry thought Ginny might miss hollering at her team when they messed up the most. He grinned at her. “Cool.”

And then a bit later there was a knock at the door, and an entire crowd joined them – Bill and Fleur, Fred and Angelina. And there was chaos for a bit as everyone said hi and got them drinks and traded news. When Angelina settled onto an ottoman near them, Ginny caught her eye. “Harry and I want on the Bees.”

Angelina gave her a playful smile. “Do you?”

“I am going to be in the best shape of my life, after Auror training,” Ginny said. “We start every day in the weights room. Look.” And she was tugging back her sleeves to flex her biceps. They were quite defined already.

“Nice,” Angelina said. Looking over: “And you, Potter?”

“Uh, I sit at a desk all day now. I think my arse has gone flat.”

“It has,” George agreed. Harry glared and shot a glitter hex at him.

“Anyway, I didn’t play at Hogwarts last year and it sucked. Also, this is great,” he gestured to the party around them, “but the rest of the week I’m surrounded by people fifty years older than me.”

“Like your husband?” George asked innocently, even as he was still mopping glitter from his face.

“Worse,” Harry sighed. “The entire MLO. Oh, also, we just put out our five year plan to, uh, rebrand Muggles. Something less patronizing. I thought maybe you’d all have ideas.”


“Those are all awful.”

“We don’t want to say the Muggles are normal and we’re abnormal,” Harry said.

“We are, though,” Fred said reasonably.

“Well, yeah, but it wouldn’t help. We looked at other countries, and some of them say non-magical and that’s fine, but. Uh. Not catchy. Holland calls them Mundanes and Indonesia calls them Seculars, and it’s all a bit awkward. Hey. Luna,” he said as she passed by their sofa with a fizzy drink in hand. “You’re creative. What should we call the Muggles?”

“Hm.” She flopped down beside Lee, thinking. “The Empties.”
“The Empties?”

“Of magic.”

“No, I got it. Just – we’re going to have to say this to their faces.”

She sipped her drink as she thought. (And beside her, Lee was dying of laughter. Luna was unmoved.) “Civilians? Commoners? Populars?”


Harry needed another drink. “We’ll think about it.”

It was sort of expected they’d get sloshed at these get-togethers, so an hour or so later, Padma was putting on her new electronica music and charming the lights low. Lavender and Luna and George and Lee were dancing with varying degrees of sincerity, while a lot of the party had decamped to the kitchen for food.

Angelina joined Harry over a tub of hummus. “So, that got away from you,” she said with a grin.

“Yeah. I really want to play, though.”

“Sure, yeah. Can we try you out as Chaser sometime, too?”

The obvious answer was yes, but he had a moment of missing the Seeker position, the only one in the game that really mattered. Still: “Put me anywhere you’d like.”

“Cool.”

Neville slid in beside Harry then, and Harry thought he’d have to make introductions but Neville looked right to Angelina. “Bill said you work at St. Oswald’s?”

“I’m an orderly there, yeah.”

Neville licked his lips. “What do you think it would take, to – bring a patient home, and take care of them? Well, two patients.”

Harry’s heart constricted in his chest. As quietly as he could, he removed himself from this conversation, squeezing Neville’s shoulder as he went.

Walking back into the sitting room, he was grabbed by Ginny, who pulled him into the circle of people before the radio. “Dance with us,” she said, flashing her teeth.

Padma had explained electronica to them last week. She had not explained how to dance to it. “Er.”

“Oh for god’s sake. Here. Don’t think too much.” And then she was passing him a joint with a bubblehead charm over the end, because Ron was still sensitive to some smells and Hermione didn’t like having the house smell of delinquency after a party. Harry took a hit, then another, then passed it back. His insides loosened, and the music started to feel good.

Ginny flashed him another smile, throwing her arms over his shoulders and leaning in to talk. “Tonks said she’d take me to a gay club this summer. Babe….” She looked over her shoulder, summoning Tonks close. “What place were you talking about?”
Tonks was unbuttoning the top of her shirt as she stepped in. “Wands Up. It is *not* subtle,” she said at Harry’s look. “It’s at the edge of Knockturn Alley so, uh, we should all go in glamours. It’d be a bit of a scandal otherwise.”

“I like it,” Ginny said. “We can be mysterious strangers, just spotting each other across the club. And I’ll spend all night wondering who the hot futch is but maybe I’m too shy.” Reaching over, she popped another one of Tonks’s buttons, so the top of her sports bra showed. They were both laughing. “Harry can be my wingman,” Ginny added, with a mischievous glance back at him.

“That’s what I’m here for.”

“So you’ll go?” she asked brightly.

“Uh. I dunno if I – belong there,” he mumbled, unable to say it eloquently.

Ginny could. “You don’t know if you’re queer enough,” she said, still teasing. “Well, if you’re not, better warn your husband.” And then Harry was laughing and summoning his drink from the coffee table, sinking into the music and the buzz across his skin.

As such, he was loose and loving a couple hours later when they were cleaning up. Ron was half-asleep on the sofa, holding open a bag into which Hermione levitated bottles. Padma was putting away her CDs, Bill and Fleur were doing the washing up, Lavender was packing up leftover food. Fred was hovering beside Luna, as he had just convinced her to eat an invisibility macaron. The room all held its breath as she took a bite.

Cheers and laughter as first her skin faded and then she disappeared completely. That is, her body did. Her bright green sundress and windchime earrings remained, moving curiously on their own.

“Huh,” Fred said, surveying the results. “Well, it won’t be the first product that we’ll have to put on a warning that it gets best results when you’re starkers.”

“Here.” George was fishing in his pockets. “D’you want to change back?”

“No.” Luna’s voice was soft and serene. “This is beautiful. I feel so liberated.”

Fred and George shared a look, clearly wondering if this was an unexpected side effect or just Luna being Luna. “Right. Well, it wears off naturally within the hour or so. Don’t walk into any roads.”

But when cleanup had been accomplished, Hermione was tugging at her hair nervously. “We can’t do this next week,” she announced to the room. “My parents are coming to visit – “

“Wait, your parents are coming on Sunday.” Ron sounded mildly panicked.

“Yes. And we’re normally in no state on Saturdays to clean the house, so.”

Sticky silence as they all considered this. They had very few weeks of summer left, before everyone would have more significant obligations – Neville would be returning to uni, Lisa and Padma both starting programs, Dean and Justin starting new jobs. They looked around to consider who could possibly take over, but their flats were all equally shitty flats of young adults.

With the exception of Harry, who lived at the very spacious and luxurious Slytherin estate with Voldemort. “Come to our place,” he offered, looking to the back of the room so he wouldn’t have to watch their (likely horrified) expressions. “We’ve got loads of space. I’ll show you the estate.”

“It’s really nice,” Luna’s disembodied voice chirruped.
Dubious glanced exchanged. “We wouldn’t want to get you in trouble,” Parvati said lowly.

Oh god. That hurt. “Nobody’s getting in trouble,” he said. “Of course he wants me to have friends around. And – it hardly matters anyway, as he doesn’t get home until at least nine every night. And he knows how to stay out of people’s way.”

The silence was dire. Then Hermione, his least likely advocate, squared her shoulders. “That’d be great,” she said decisively. “Thank you, Harry.”

“Sure, yeah.” He felt a little light-headed. “It hasn’t got a real address, I’ll send you all a charm with the coordinates.” He swallowed the last of his whiskey, still bracing for objections.

Neville, then, the bravest of Gryffindors: “What should we bring?”

Thank god. The rest of them had a week to work out their misgivings, but that was fine. He’d never expected more than a complete barrier between these two halves of his life. This was good.

He’d flown Sirius’s motorbike over. It was newly restored, and very shiny, and he loved it. Voldemort had consented to ride it with him once before, just over some reserves near their home, and pronounced it nearly acceptable. Anyway, if Harry charmed it just a bit faster than it was meant to go, he could get home in just under an hour. He pulled on his leather jacket. (“It’s for safety,” he’d protested when Ginny had laughed at him) and circled the room to say his goodbyes. “Next week,” he promised, though in reality he’d see half of them in the Ministry canteen again Monday. “See you then. ‘Night.” He got a peck on the cheek from Fleur, a handshake from Bill and a ruffling of his hair from Fred and George. He left.

Flying at night was tranquil and glorious. He charmed reflector spells on himself and his bike, but put a silencing charm on the engine, so he could glide through the air like an owl. Goggles, gloves, and then he kicked off.

The bike essentially flew on auto pilot, having done the route between Liphook and the fens so often that it knew the way. He gazed up at the night sky, vast and weighty above him. He was lucky.

As he descended upon the estate he spotted light from the back door, filtering into the courtyard. Tilting the bike, he landed it neatly in the garden.

Voldemort was just bringing Moira in for the night, and even though Harry had landed in perfect silence Voldemort had not been startled. Their souls would grow warm in proximity. “Hey,” Harry said, pulling off his goggles before he moved to kiss Voldemort. “Good day?”

“Yes. Yours?”

“Good. Really good.” He peeled off his jacket and gloves as they returned inside. “Padma sent me home with spanakopita, and these new almond flour pastries she was trying out. D’you want some?” They entered the kitchen, which looked so spotless that Harry blinked. “What, you haven’t just gotten home? It’s nearly midnight.”

“I have just gotten home, because half the Wizengamot would rather work all night Friday than to come in on a Saturday. Thank you,” he said as Harry handed him the tin of spanakopita. “We’re meant to pass another trade bill next week and is still a disaster. Some of them want to charge tariffs on interworld trade, which is stupid and spiteful.”

Harry couldn’t help it, he grinned. He loved Voldemort when he was dismissive and arrogant. “Sorry.”
Voldemort waved him off. “It will be resolved within the week. I hope they use this weekend to reflect on why they are wrong.”

Harry popped a flaky square of spanakopita in his mouth. Padma and Dean were the best cooks among them and were definitely invited to every party forever. “So Ron and Hermione won’t be able to have people over next week,” he said, plunging in. “But we haven’t got a lot of time left together. So I invited them all here instead.”

“Next Friday?”

“Yeah. Look – come home, you haven’t got to avoid them that much,” he said, at Voldemort’s thoughtful look. “We’ll just get pissed for a few hours in the drawing room. It’ll be fine.”

Voldemort ran his fingers through Harry’s hair in that way he did. “It will be,” he agreed. “Really, this seems overdue.”

He shrugged. He didn’t know what timeline he should expect, of how readily his friends would no longer be terrified of Voldemort. “Maybe. – Oh, and Lisa and Daphne talked to Malfoy.” (Voldemort knew all his friends by name now. It was gratifying and strange.)

“And how is he?”

“Alright. Back in France, with the locket,” he said a bit awkwardly. “Apparently his new identity is some branch of the Black family. He’s going by Corvus.”

Voldemort did not think it was a funny name, because Voldemort had lived among purebloods for far too long. “Good,” he said instead. “That is quite reasonable.”

“Is it, though?”

Voldemort’s smile was indulgent. “I learned the Black family tree as a means of flattering them in school. How fortuitous that knowledge should be put to better use now.”

“Great,” Harry muttered. “Anyway, they’re fine. And Tonks said everything is fine at Hogwarts, too. So.”

“Good.” He was summoning wine and a glass. A bit of the day’s tension was receding.

“And Ginny and I are joining a Quidditch club. Angelina is captain.”

“Good,” he said again. He dropped the last corner of spanakopita into Moira’s patiently waiting mouth.

“No – Vol, really, is it? It seems like – we already don’t have a lot of time together.”

“Would you like to change how we spend time together?”

Harry tried to keep frustration out of his voice. “I want to know what you want,” he stressed. “You haven’t just got to accept it all.”

Voldemort had been light and easy before; he went serious now. “I don’t want to take these years from you,” he said. “Out of school but with your peer group still intact, all of them embarking on the rest of their lives – it will not stay like this for long. You already know that your relationship with Ron and Hermione will change when their child is born. You should spend as much time with them now as is feasible.”
“… Right. Yeah.” It scared him a bit, to think of how abruptly Ron and Hermione would change. Their child was due around Christmas, and as was expected Hermione had a massive stash of parenting books, and Ron said he’d look at them in a few months. “It’s a boy, did I tell you? Well, tentatively a boy, Hermione says, until it’s old enough to say so itself.”

“You may also have the baby shower here.”

“Huh. Yeah, we might.” Though he already anticipated Ron’s answer that being nervous around Voldemort may induce premature labor. So. He stole Voldemort’s glass, taking a swallow of wine even though he did not need to be any more pissed. “Thanks,” he smiled at Voldemort, fully confident that peace had been restored. In response, Voldemort kissed him, and the spice of the wine mingled on their lips.

But that wasn’t the last he’d think of Ron’s pregnancy that night. His bedside table contained a book (White Teeth, this week), his Panopticon, and a scroll that he and Ron and occasionally Hermione wrote to each other with.

Tonight, when he entered the bedroom, it was already glowing. “Huh.” He sat down on the bed. “You take the bath first,” he said to Voldemort behind him. “I’m gonna….” He unfurled the scroll.

FLEUR IS PREGNANT, Ron had written in block letters. There was no timestamp on the scroll, but since it was still so warm, it was probably recent. Harry rummaged through his drawer until he found a quill.

Tell her congratulations. She didn’t seem different.

Ron’s handwriting was blotchy with speed. She and Bill stayed late. She said she wanted to tell me first. She brought me lotion with vitamins in.

Harry didn’t know quite what to say to that. Are you OK?

She’ll be so much better at it than me. She’s so poised. My fingers already look like sausages.

Harry smiled. Maybe hers will too, soon.

But they’ve done it right. They’re older, they’ve established a life already. We should probably be waiting another decade.

Ron and Hermione would be thought of as young parents in the Muggle world. They were quite young in the wixen world, since the longer lifespan meant people could have children later. But then, Lily had gotten pregnant at nineteen. Molly had only been twenty. It happened. Anyway, Harry was very certain there was no such thing as a wrong family. He had grown up acutely aware that he’d ruined the Dursleys’ vision of a shiny nuclear family, and he would never let another child feel that way again.

Do you still want to do this? he wrote carefully. He thought it was too late for a magic abortion (or maybe not?) but adoption would be possible….

Of course I do. It will be an adventure.

They’d all said to a few times now, about the pregnancy. And while Harry wasn’t entirely convinced, he had nothing more to offer Ron right now. Neither of them were so sentimental. Good, he wrote. Now that you know it’s a boy, you’ll have to rename him. No more little Dorcas.
Hermione had shown Ron *The Winter’s Tale*, what her parents had named her after, and Ron had found the character of Dorcas the funniest thing he’d ever heard. Sadly, it was a girl’s name, so they’d have to choose another.

*It doesn’t matter,* Ron wrote. *Little Dorko’s never going to be cooler than his French cousin anyway. We might as well set him up for failure.*

By the time Voldemort emerged from the bath in a cloud of steam, Harry was grinning. “Hm?”

“Nothing. Ron’s being thick.” He set the scroll aside so he could go shower. “Hey, I think I’m taking our bike out tomorrow morning, before it gets warm. Want to come?”

Voldemort considered. “Yes.”

“Cool.” He ducked into the bath.

But a week later, and Harry would never admit it, but he was nervous.

About what? Not anything Voldemort would do. Not anything his friends would do. Just the anxiety that they might not show up, that coming to the Slytherin estate and Voldemort’s home would be too daunting. He distracted himself with baking until finally, finally the wards of the front door chimed.

Ron and Hermione, with Ginny and Lisa behind them. “Hey,” Harry said, wildly relieved. “Here, come in – Moi, no,” he said uselessly as his dog came clattering through the front hall. Ginny scooped her up easily. “Come in – I’ve got a few things in the kitchen – damn, can someone conjure ice? And a bucket?”

He didn’t stop until at last Ron grabbed him by both shoulders. “Mate. You’ll be brilliant. Here. Gin brought honeyed whiskey. You’ll like it.”

Harry shrugged him off, leading them the rest of the way into the kitchen. “I am fine.” He still threw open the oven far too forcefully.

“I don’t know how I thought you’d both decorate,” Lisa mused, peering at the kitchen and the dining room beyond it. “But this is decidedly ungothic.”

Harry had insisted on light rooms – physically light, with as many windows as the builders would put in, but also light-feeling, with small and simple furniture and fixtures. Grimmauld Place had made him feel like he’d been buried alive, and he needed the opposite of that now. “Yeah,” he agreed. “I’ll show you all around. We can even stay out in the courtyard, if you don’t mind that some corners are dug up, we haven’t decided what to plant yet.”

By the time Fred, Lee, and Angelina arrived, the five of them were in the courtyard, and Harry was on his second drink. “Not as much as snake décor as I thought it’d have,” Fred said, looking around.

Lisa snapped her fingers. “That’s it,” she said. “I said it wasn’t gothic enough, but I knew there was something else.”

“Right? Not to stereotype the Slytherins, but everyone knows they’ve got some insecurities.”

“You are better than a cheap dick joke,” George scolded him.

“Really, I’m not.”
Hannah and Neville arrived next, without Dean in tow. “He had a thing? With his sister?” Hannah shrugged. “But he sent us with these.” She held out a tupperware of velvety mousse bars.

Harry grinned, definitely a bit drunk by now. “He is forgiven, then.”

Neville was looking around the garden curiously. “What’re you doing in the southeast corner?” he asked, nodding to a dug-up bit of earth.

“Potions things. Some bloodberries and scented effodil and ginger.” The ginger was for kaval, because Harry was still low-key addicted. Voldemort would let him drink it out of a baby bottle every night, and while Harry didn’t measure it himself, Voldemort swore he was tapering very slowly. It felt obvious, when he said it to Neville, as ginger wasn’t used for potions often, but he didn’t remark on it.

Instead his eyes had gone bright, as they did when talking about plants. “Plant the bloodberries upwind of the effodil, and anything else fragrant, as they absorb quite a lot. And then you can….” And then he was off, ready to plan their garden for them. Harry ran after him.

Last to arrive were Luna and Padma. That was everyone Harry had heard from, anyway. The group was a smaller one this week, but – well. He was happy for it, in any case.

Luna had been here before, had written an article about it and them a couple months prior. “And there’s a library back that way, and a ballroom, and then Harry said we weren’t allowed upstairs….”

“You’re allowed up there,” he protested. “But there’s just nothing there yet. Or there wasn’t last time you saw the house. He’s got a study now, and we’ve furnished a guest bedroom, and there’s a niche for Hedwig…. Here, everyone’s here.” He moved to the back door, addressing his friends. “D’you want to see the house?”

They did. And Fawkes was just coming in for the day, so he perched on Luna’s shoulder and basked in all the attention as they walked the house. “Voldemort’s been with the wedding planners a lot,” Harry said as they stepped into the ballroom. “To make sure we could have the reception here. It’s a horror in terms of warding the place, and transit, and liability, but they think it’ll look really, ah, relatable.” It would look good if Voldemort and Harry opened up their home for public scrutiny. Both of them were private enough that this sort of made them itch, but – the greater good, Voldemort had muttered once. Harry had given him an unamused look, at that.

And Voldemort hadn’t been in touch with the wedding planners at large – he’d been in Penelope Clearwater’s office specifically nearly every day. They had similar impatience with the public and similar obsessions with perfection; Voldemort swore he’d poach her from the Department of Society and Event after this to work as his personal assistant, and Harry had begun to believe it.

They left the ballroom, crossing into the drawing room. It looked stuffy now, but only because all the electronics were behind discretion charms. “Here.” Fishing his wand from his pocket, he flicked it, and bits of the wallpaper seemed to disintegrate into a television and sound system. “Nice,” Lee said, blinking up at it. “Uh, he lets you?”

It was hard not to be frustrated by these moments. He knew what Lee meant, that Muggle electronics were not Voldemort’s aesthetic, and likely not his ethic either. But – “We’re partners,” he tried to say. “I just – do things.”

“Right. Yeah.” Lee’s eyes were still on the room. Clearly nobody else wanted to engage him on this. But they ended up in the drawing room again later that night, eating delivery and putting on Padma’s
music. Fred and George were prototyping a card game, something between exploding snap and spoons, so soon they’d cleared off the coffee table and were all sprawled along the floor to play. Hermione was twitchy, casting unspillable charms frantically over everyone’s drinks, and it was cute but Harry knew nothing if not how to get liquid off upholstery. He was handed five cards and a balloon filled with glitter.

Three rounds in and everyone was gently coated in the glitter (“It dissolves within the hour,” Fred promised as Hermione unsuccessfully picked it out of her hair) and the cards had started to taunt them. It was great, and Harry was drinking and he couldn’t stop laughing.

The front door’s wards chimed.

Everyone stopped, going very quiet. The part of Harry’s soul that connected him with Voldemort was taut, and he’d be happy if not for how tense all his friends looked.

“Harry?” Voldemort’s boots and staff echoed in the entry hall. Moira, who had been sitting in Neville’s lap, was now wagging her tail furiously, and for that at least Harry felt vindicated.

“Hi,” he called back. It took him two tries to get off the floor. “We’re in here. Just, stay,” he added to his friends, who were still quiet.

“You haven’t got to get up. I am quite self-sufficient.”

But Harry was already ducking out of the drawing room. “Jerk,” he chided (English, they’d speak in English for the sake of being overheard). “Have you eaten? We got Indian, I got you a green curry, it’s under the warming charm…. And he rounded the corner, to find Voldemort just entering the kitchen. “Hi,” he said, softer, catching him at the elbows and kissing him hello.

From the drawing room they heard someone crack into a giggle, unable to keep their silence any longer. Harry grinned. “Sorry. We’re….” He made a sweeping motion that meant nothing.

“You’re pissed and covered in glitter.” Some of it had detached itself onto Voldemort’s dark robes; Harry was useless at picking it off.

“It dissolves,” he promised. “Here.” He was opening the oven, where he’d left the curry and naan. “What time is it?” he muttered. “Your thing passed earlier today. Even we heard about it, and nobody brings news to the MLO. Did, uh, you go out to celebrate?”

“The trade bill passed with revisions. Therefore,” he held up an attaché case brimming with parchment, “I will be in the study.”

“Vol,” Harry sighed in pity. “Can I send you up with a drink, at least? This is not how normal people spend Friday night.”

A quirk of his mouth. “Well.”

Voldemort was the hardest-working person Harry knew. He was worse than Hermione. But then, he had a lot more to prove. “I will be fine,” Voldemort promised, taking the curry with him. “Return to your friends, Harry.”

“Yeah, alright.” He heaved himself off the island counter where he’d been slumped. “We’ll be done by midnight or so.”

“Not on my account, I hope.”
“Nah.” A last playful kiss, and he took the bottle of whiskey back with him into the drawing room.

His friends were huddled around the coffee table still, anxious and giggling with the tension of being quiet. Harry looked around, but words failed him. He set the whiskey among them.

“How’s your lover?” Angelina asked, mischievous.

He rolled his eyes. “My husband,” he said in a posh way, “is fine. And busy. He’s upstairs now, so…” He scooped up his cards, positive they’d been switched out for worse ones in his absence.

So they fell back into an easy, drunken night once more. Somehow they all lost the card game, and then they were turning up the music, and then Ginny was insisting Harry dance with her since Tonks hadn’t come that night. “I’m nothing like Tonks,” Harry protested, but already he was drowned out by the music. And then Ginny twirled him expertly and the room spun and he was laughing too much to protest any further.

The party broke up late, after Hannah and Fred had both fallen asleep, inexplicably, on the sofa in the middle of the room. And then there were long negotiations about how everyone was getting home because drunk apparition was dangerous and they didn’t yet have a floo, and Harry was about to offer their guest room until Ron said he’d just make a few trips back and forth, and then that was settled. Hermione helped him carry dishes back into the kitchen. “Was that okay?” Harry asked. She was always the most critical person in his life, the one who would never approve of Voldemort.

But she saw that he was vulnerable now (he was always a very soppy drunk), and softened her features. “Didn’t you think so?”

“Yeah. I mean. I dunno. Just put them in the sink, they’ll wash themselves,” he instructed, nodding to the plates.

Hermione blinked at this. “Sure,” and she did, and a sponge roused itself a bit resentfully to do the washing up. But she saw how desperate and pathetic Harry was, that he wanted this all to be okay, that he wanted to do it again. She turned away from the sink. “I don’t know who skipped this week because it was here,” she said plainly, because of course Harry had already wondered. “But maybe you can throw me a surprise birthday party here next month?”

He grinned. “Some surprise.”

“Well. It’s a valid reason.”

Giving it a bit of thought, he loved the idea. “Yeah,” he said. “A surprise party. The 19th is a….”

“A Sunday,” she said, “but we’re taking my parents to the Burrow that day – you should come too, they’d love to see you – so plan it for that Saturday instead. Other than that,” a bright smile, “you and Ron should have a brilliant time planning it.”

He was laughing by now. “We are hopeless without you, though.”

“Oh, I know.” And she was levitating portions of food into tinfoil, as Harry returned for the rest of the dishes.

By now Ron and Ginny were the only two of his friends still in the drawing room – Ron was waving a streamer for Moira to chase, Ginny was clicking through the telly with bemusement. “Want to plan Hermione a surprise party?” Harry offered them.

Ginny found this funny. “She asked for one, then.” It wasn’t even a question.
“What, do I not seem spontaneous enough?” he protested.

“You are incredibly spontaneous,” Ginny promised. “I just wondered how you’d get everyone back here.”

He grinned, completely caught. “Yeah, well. We’ll do it the Saturday before. It should still be nice out. I’ll barbecue.”

“She’s vegan now,” Ron interjected.

“I’ll barbecue a pineapple for her. Or a watermelon. People do that, you know.”

Neither of them told him it was a bad idea. They didn’t even seem especially hesitant. “Sure, yeah,” Ron said. “Thanks, mate.”

Thanks, as though Harry having people over here wasn’t just a massive concession to his insecurities and abandonment issues. Still, something eased inside him. “Thanks,” he echoed, and swallowed the last of his whiskey.

When the house was empty, Harry closed up the security wards and trudged upstairs. He was still quite drunk, ready to fall into bed. He felt the pop of a silencing charm halfway up the staircase – of course, they hadn’t been thinking about how loud they had been – and looked for a light in the study. It was dark, so he entered their bedroom.

Voldemort was reading in bed, his posture slack and exhausted and probably secondhand drunk. “Hey.” Harry was pulling his shirt over his head, suddenly over-warm. “We didn’t mean to keep you up. It must be late.”

“It is quite late, and you haven’t kept me up.” A slight stress on you. They were both fairly resigned to interrupted sleep these days. Not that it completely eliminated middle of the night insomnia fights when they were both disoriented and frustrated. But – well, they still kept dreamless sleep for the bad nights.

Harry was kicking off his jeans on the way to the toilet. “It was good, though.” He left the door open as he had a piss. “I mean – everyone was alright. I liked showing them the house.” Wash his hands, brush his teeth. “Sorry we were loud,” he said through a mouthful of foam.

“You were not.”

“Not sorry?” He stepped from the bath to give Voldemort a cheeky grin; he got a spell that turned his toothpaste burning hot in his mouth in return. “Ugh – what the fuck – “ He went to spit.

But as he crawled into bed, he ran a hand along Voldemort’s back. He was still injured – he would always be injured – and the puncture wounds were a bit inflamed. Making a concerned noise, he reached for an anti-inflammatory cream on their bedside table. “Turn over,” he commanded, and it was too late and they were both too tired to resist. Voldemort rolled to his stomach, propping his narrow chest on a pillow, and Harry applied the cream as he offered, “I’m throwing Hermione a surprise party next month. Here,” he clarified, though it seemed obvious.

“That’s clever of you.”

“Yeah, well. It was her idea.” And Voldemort snorted at this. “Hermione doesn’t actually like surprises,” Harry explained. “It’ll be a Saturday. Can you… be like this?”
It would be incoherent if they didn’t nearly share thoughts. He meant, could Voldemort be not really present, but not entirely absent either. It would be a slow, slow adaptation. “Yes,” Voldemort said, stretching out his back as Harry rubbed it. “If she’d like.”

He knew what Hermione would like is for circumstances to be differently entirely, and for Voldemort to be nowhere near Harry’s life anymore, but – well, his friends had all decided to play it as it lays. Make the best of it. It is not sweet, but it is something. “Thank you.”

Voldemort was really quite close to sleep, so he set the Panopticon on the nightstand and shifted the pillows beneath him. And he ended up spooning Harry, a bit because his back spasmed if he slept in any other position, a bit because they are just fucking adorable. Harry was a patient prop as he flipped open a book. “Hermione said I have to babyproof the house before I can even think of bringing their baby here.”

“Don’t tell her about the snakes,” Voldemort said, “or the pond. Or the toxic plants. Or the sheen of dark magic over everything.”

“I said there was no hope,” Harry agreed, though he hadn’t – he’d told them both he’d put an entire nursery in, if they wanted, as long as he got to be the cool godfather. Hermione’s mouth had worked until at last she’d said he should probably babysit at their home instead. Which was – making the most of it. “Ron said he’s holding out until after Christmas, because there’s no room in the Burrow for someone else.”

“You want to have Christmas here.” Voldemort’s voice was low, he’s close to sleep, and he wouldn’t have offered that if he were not so uninhibited.

“Not this year, though.” It hurt his heart to try to do the maths, how long must Voldemort be perfect before he had undone any previous harm to everyone else in Harry’s life. How long before they could remotely trust him. He felt like it would be measured in decades. If ever.

His mind was too open, and Voldemort made a small noise at the thought. “Harry….”

“Sorry.” He was too drunk to remember how to do Legilimency. “I was really happy that they – that anyone – came tonight.” He shut his book because he wasn’t reading it anyway. Taking Voldemort’s hand, he pulled it over his hip, rubbing at the taut tendons. “You were perfect.”

There was nothing to be said for this, really – Voldemort was perfect, would continue to be perfect, and it’d probably never be enough.

And then there was a kiss on the back of his neck. “Do not trouble yourself,” Voldemort said. “Spend time with them elsewhere if it can’t be here. You’ve done – admirably, already.”

Harry let Voldemort’s hand fall across his own stomach. “I know.”

“And tell Hermione she knows where my office is.”

At that, Harry shuddered. “I am not letting you go at it alone,” he said.

“I didn’t imagine it’d be a spectator sport, but if you must….”

And so he was laughing, horrified. “It’s for your sake, not hers,” he promised. “She is vicious. Ask her someday how she disfigured a girl in our fifth year.” And Voldemort’s surprised laughter was warm on his neck, and Harry curled into him, so their magic sparked against each other’s.

But when Voldemort was asleep and Harry was still drunkenly awake, he carefully pulled himself
from Voldemort’s touch.

As he gathered parchment and a quill, he thought of how Hermione had been with Tom, the diadem, months ago. She had hated him too, Harry knew, but in a way that she had found… engaging. A challenge Something. He entered the attic, set aside for Hedwig and Fawkes. “Hi,” he said to Fawkes, very quietly, as he opened one eye. Hedwig was out hunting. “Uh, I’ll leave this for her, for the morning….”

But Fawkes shook off, throwing sparks, and then fluffed his feathers importantly. “Really?” Harry asked. Phoenixes were diurnal, but Fawkes now burned a little brighter with interest. “Right. Uh. Give me a minute.”

But in the end, all he could think to write was what Voldemort had said to him. He says you know where his office is.

Folding it over, he wrote Hermione on the front. “Are you sure?” he asked again. With a low warble, Fawkes took it and soared out the open window.

In the morning, in the light of sobriety, Harry realized he’d made a massive mistake. He hadn’t dreamed it, had he? Sending Hermione a drunken note full of stupid ideas. One stupid idea, anyway. Voldemort was already awake and downstairs; Harry quaffed a hangover potion left on the nightstand and pulled on shorts before going down.

Voldemort was at the kitchen table. That he had coffee instead of tea typically meant he was going into the Ministry, despite it being a sunny Saturday. But he looked unperturbed, so presumably Hermione hadn’t (yet?) sent back his well-deserved Howler. “Morning,” Harry said. “Have you got to go in?”

“For a bit. But I should be home early enough to take you out to dinner tonight.”

“Oh,” Harry said, surprised and touched. “Yeah, I’d like that.”

“Good.”

So Harry was smiling to himself as he cracked eggs into a pan. And then there was a knock at the window, and while Harry sprang for it, Voldemort was much closer, and let Pigwidgeon in. He caught the tiny rolled parchment just before Pig collapsed on their counter.

“Don’t open that,” Harry said reflexively, as Voldemort was peeling back the wax stamp. He raised his non-eyebrows but held the parchment out like a cigarette, between two long fingers. Harry took it, and sort of braced himself to be told he was extremely stupid and probably still drunk.

Instead, in Hermione’s neat hand, it read, I would be available for coffee this Wednesday at 3 pm.

This was still madness, but since his head still sort of throbbed, he was grateful it hadn’t been a Howler. He held it out, somewhat reluctantly, to Voldemort, who had watched in curiosity. “Last night – I was still drunk – uh, I wrote her.” He was moving back toward the stove to flip his eggs out of the pan. “It was stupid, you haven’t got to do it – “

“I’d like to,” Voldemort interrupted.

“Really?”
“If you’d allow it.”


“I don’t believe you’re meant to,” he said, looking back toward the parchment. “And haven’t you got a meeting that afternoon, anyway? With….” He waved his hand, popping Harry’s Ministry-issued agenda into his hand.

“Those are supposed to be confidential,” Harry objected. “You’re not supposed to be able to do that.”

“you should speak to the security and surveillance department,” Voldemort said, in a way that made clear he did not care. “Wednesday, 2-4 pm, a meeting with Hogwarts governors and the Secretary of Education. Topic: resources for Muggle parents of young Muggleborns.”

“Right.” He had sat down by now, breaking the egg yolks across his plate as though to diffuse his tension. “Should you be at that?” Education was the only time their work intersected.

“No. Though I’d be interested in your notes. But it seems,” he popped his own agenda into existence, “that I am free for coffee with Ms. Granger.” Limping to the table at last, he conjured a quill and wrote her in. Then, a more serious look: “It is alright with you?”

“… Sure, yeah.”

“Good.” He’d left Pig to recuperate, but looked doubtfully at him now. “I’ll put a note in the Ministry floo.”

“This is mad,” Harry muttered, mopping up egg with toast.

Voldemort clicked his tongue. “I had to win Bella over, as well, at nearly the same age. We will be fine.”

Oh, Hermione would not appreciate that comparison. Still, it felt… valid. Harry smiled at him weakly.

That night, Voldemort took him out to Hell’s Bells, a wixen restaurant in a cloaked plot of London. They’d apparated a distance away, walking past glowing boutiques, a chocolatier, a bookstore. It was all Muggle, so they wore glamours, but as soon as they reached this magic-infused space, Voldemort was peeling their disguises back. “It’s quite pureblood,” he said, easily taking Harry’s arm before they entered. “Abraxas used to smuggle me in, in the beginning. I am told their policies have since only been relaxed slightly.”

“I bloody hope so,” Harry muttered. But when they entered, all his misgivings evaporated. The outside had been plain brickwork, but the inside was enchanted to look like a gazebo, with latticework and climbing ivy and fairy lights, twinkling off the delicate glass tables. “Oh,” he said, enchanted.

And then – well, it was less weird than one might expect. The host greeted them (“Lord Slytherin,” which was becoming normal in formal circumstances) and brought them to a table in the corner. As with any fairly nice restaurant, there were already privacy charms around it, and as always, Voldemort cast more anyway. Harry smiled in indulgence. They spoke in Parseltongue, but the Prophet had recently hired a translator, even if none of the other papers could afford one. It was exhausting, especially because Voldemort specifically made himself available to journalists already,
but – well. People were still curious.

Wixen cuisine had grown on him recently – most of the dishes were of the typical English variety, but they incorporated magic herbs and edible potions. The ingredients were richer: warm cardamom, saffron, anise; grapeseed and macadamia oils; wild mushrooms and nettles and starthistle. Voldemort was committed to this sort of meal being served at their wedding, as a matter of patriotism, and Harry liked the idea too. He speared the gleaming copper leaves of his salad of niffler’s fancy with strawberries, marveling that even eight years into this world there were still new things for him to find in it.

“I saw the Secretary of Finance today,” Voldemort said, spinning a marinated gillyweed salad around his fork. “It won’t be official until she announces it Monday, but they’ve finally agreed to the budget for early education.”

“Finally,” Harry smiled. A year ago the Ministry hadn’t even considered an early education program. But they had a new surplus, and Voldemort had convinced the Wizengamot that progressing benefiting children would encourage population grown and immigration, both of which were currently too close to stagnation for anyone’s comfort. “When will the schools – themselves? Itself? – be open?”

“Three years. If any of your friends have a passion for teaching or administration, they should write the Department of Education.”

Harry was smiling. He’d promised the world Voldemort would do good for them, but it was still gratifying. “Thank you.”

“It’s certainly not for you. You’re a touch too old.”

If they’d been at home, this would be playful stinging hex or maybe just a handful of salad thrown across the table. Instead, he made a face. “There should probably be…” He sighed. “Can you look over my notes for Wednesday? The Muggle parents meeting. I dunno how early education would fit into it.”

“Of course.”

Dinner was good. They were left alone, as none of the other clientele either noticed them or cared. It was dark by the time they walked through a nearby statue park, and then Voldemort was kissing him, then he was dropping some heavy privacy spells over them both, then he was pushing Harry against a swirling Baroque statue, then his hand was inside Harry’s pants. He was smirking against Harry’s mouth at how quickly he got hard, melting into Voldemort’s touch. And all this – hot touch in the night air, alone together – all that was good too.

On Wednesday morning, Harry was sort of twitchy, because of Voldemort’s coffee date with Hermione. He’d only seen her once this week – the Ministry was massive, but she’d had reason to come by the MLO on Monday – and he hadn’t been able to ask her then what the hell she’d planned to say to him. Now he was awake early, since Voldemort always left for work before him, and he was flitting around the kitchen with his undrunk coffee in hand, feeling quite mad. “I can beg off this,” he said, though it probably wasn’t true. “I’m always the least important person in the room. Only there for my good looks.”

He’d been saying these things all morning, and by now Voldemort was understandably exhausted. “Harry. What do you anticipate will happen?”
“You’ll fight and say terrible things to one another. Obviously. I don’t think it’ll be – “ The words stuck. Dangerous. Voldemort didn’t speak hyperbolically of killing people because it was still a bit too plausible. “It won’t get violent,” he decided on.

“Certainly not.”

“But.” It was embarrassing. “She could decide it’s not worth it.” They all could, really. Harry didn’t have the unconditional love of a family, he only had his friends and it’d felt tentative with them at times. He would fight harder if he weren’t so scared to lose them.

Voldemort considered this, pushing the exasperation off his face and out of their Legilimency. “I will not further ruin your life.”

“Oh my god,” and he was startled and he was laughing and was just shaken out of everything he was feeling. “I didn’t say that.”

“Nevertheless. I’ll get out if it becomes too toxic. But really,” he’d stepped in close now, running both hands down Harry’s arm so their magic crackled, “trust us.”

Suppressing a shiver, he stepped back. “I do. I’ll stop.” And when Voldemort pressed an incredibly patronizing kiss to his fringe, he laughed again and pushed him off. “Prat.”

“Have a good day, darling.” Transfiguring his coffee mug into a thermos, he moved to apparate from the front steps.

And then his day was too busy to worry. Neither of them had told Harry where they were meeting, and this was for the best, but he didn’t heart about any dust-ups or explosions or really anything of interest. Late that afternoon, he sent an intra-Ministry memo to Ron asking if he’d come out for a drink, and Ron agreed promptly. At 5 p.m., after casting a disillusionment over his papers to make his desk look tidy, Harry left to get Ron from the DMLE.

Ron had a more interesting job than Harry, by far. He’d brought in the magical weaponry they’d developed in the war, and the crossbow was currently being explored for martial use. Ron was happy with the recognition, and apparently happy with the excitement of working in the DMLE. But every time Harry stepped into the department, he felt scrutinized. He’d left his potential life as an Auror quite far behind him.

Ron shoved all his work in a desk drawer, locking it with a spell. “I asked Hermione,” he said, “but I haven’t heard back. Want to check on her?”

“… Yeah.”

The Wizengamot interns weren’t kept in the Wizengamot department proper, but on a quieter floor, in tiny offices down a dim corridor. But Ron moved easily, letting himself into a shared office. “Hey, Elle,” he said to a young woman just leaving. “Is Hermione still in here?”

“Yes, last one out as always. She’s…” Elle made a vague motion behind her. They went.

The offices were communal, but Hermione was the only one still in the only lit space now. “Hey,” Ron said as they entered. “Want to go out for a drink?”

Hermione had been using a Muggle highlighter on a very long scroll, but set them aside now. “Yeah,” she said. “I’d love that.”

So Ron chattered about work as they took the lift up, and Hermione listened and didn’t quite look at
Harry. There was a decent pub just a few blocks away, so they walked in the warm evening.

At last, seated in a booth together with drinks, Harry looked to Hermione. “Can I ask….”

She hummed, toying with her hair for a bit. “I had tea with Voldemort this afternoon,” she said to Ron, as he looked between them.

“Oh,” Ron said, blanching a bit. “Alone?”

“Perfectly alone.”

“For… the Wizengamot? Bones sent you to talk about… anti-centaur legislation?”

She looked at him with mild surprise. “That is what I’m researching,” she said, clearly not expecting to him to have known that. “It wasn’t what we talked about.”

“Then – what?”

By now she couldn’t hide the curve of her smile. She enjoyed having this secret. “That’s personal.”

They both laughed, but she didn’t elucidate. And then Harry leaned in. “But it was – alright?”

Her mouth worked for a moment, the secretive smile vanishing. “I owe you an apology,” she said. “You shouldn’t have – absorbed everything I felt about him.”

Harry considered it practically his job to answer for Voldemort, so this apology was startling.

“Hermione – “

“Harry, no,” she interrupted, albeit lightly. “You can – really – expect more from your friends. From me. Anyway,” she heaved a sigh, a bit self-deprecating. “He has been really good to you.”

At this he smiled. “Yeah. He is.”

“And that’s enough.”

Was it? Harry couldn’t think straight. He’d never quite figured out the maths, how many good deeds would redeem Voldemort. “Uh. Thanks. I mean – I got it, why anyone would feel that way about him, so – “

“You need friends more than he needs condemnation,” she said resolutely.

This made his stomach feel funny. “Thanks. Thank you.” He brought his whiskey to his mouth too quickly.

“Should I have been there?” Ron asked, bewildered. “You never mentioned….”

“Well, I didn’t know how it was going to go. If we do it again – “

“You’d do it again?” Ron interrupted, fascinated.

“Perhaps,” she said. “Though we’re both rather busy. But I’d bring you along, if you’d like.” Her eyes darted to Harry, mischievous. “Harry can’t come, though. We’re all too invested in you, it makes everything worse.”

“Hermione – “ Harry was laughing, and he was stunned and relieved and still bloody anxious to hear about this encounter for real. “Surprise party still on?”
“You’d be the one to know.”

When he got home later that evening, Voldemort had already made dinner for him and left it, so Harry stood over the range with a fork, eating aloo gobi out of the pan like a philistine. Voldemort protested with the tiniest noise when he entered. Harry swallowed. “Hi,” he said, giving him a grin that was mostly obnoxious as he took the entire pan to the counter island. “How was it with Hermione?”

“Weren’t you just with them?”

He faked a protest. “Maybe I’ve got loads of other friends you just don’t know about.”

“I’m sure you do. Granger was fine.”

“But what did you actually talk about?”

“That is personal.”

He actually laughed, throwing up his free hand. “Both of you!” he marveled. “What, did you coordinate it?”

The curve of Voldemort’s mouth was clever. “Harry. Darling. Please stop worrying, it was distracting today.”


“I didn’t do you a favor.”

“Still.”

Christmas in their home, he thought resolutely. It might still be a decade off. That was alright.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! Thanks for reading! This is not at all what I usually write! I needed a bit of a palate cleanser in between my typical angsty drama, so here’s some low-stakes fluff. The idea of Harrymort fluff – and kidfic, a few chapters from now – is just inherently funny and cracky to me, so I really wanted to play in this sandbox. There will be no angst, minimal drama, and really very little narrative tension at all. Just Harry being in love with Voldemort and staying close to his friends and everyone figuring out what their post-Hogwarts lives will be like.

Background and setting for this series, if you didn’t read through Cicatrization: Voldemort and Harry became allies during a war with the Muggles in 1997, which leads to peace treaties and to the suspension of the Statute of Secrecy. After Harry’s 8th year at Hogwarts, he is now employed by the Muggle Liaison Office and Voldemort has been sworn in to the Wizengamot, so they are both working on the Unification – the comprehensive integration of the magic world with the Muggle one. Voldemort and Harry will be getting married in 2000 in a final display of wizarding peace. They
currently live together in the Slytherin estate, with Fawkes and a lot of snakes and a winged dog named Moira. People accept Voldemort to varying degrees, but he’s been very helpful politically, and he’s made clear that he really loves and is loyal to Hogwarts and Harry, and that is sort of enough for most of them.

I’ve created a timeline for this series, to keep track of both political changes and so, so many babies that are going to be born in the next few years. You can find it [here](#).

Thanks for reading!
Everything about their upcoming wedding felt weighty, and significant, and much too important for Harry. Penelope Clearwater, now their coordinator from the Department of Society and Event, was contacting them at least a few times a week, and the wedding wasn’t even until March. But Voldemort, at least, cared about it all, and countless times he had tried to convince Harry that he should care as well.

Apparently this was the first British state wedding in thirty years – and all the previous ones had been a function of lingering colonialism, marrying prominent British subjects to the upper echelons in Tonga, Seychelles, Belize. Wixen Britain still hadn’t decided entirely what it meant to have the heir of Slytherin among them, but it meant *something* anyway. So – according to Voldemort, the wedding had to be perfect.

Today they were looking at wedding robes.

The wixen fashion world was small, but all the designers wanted to dress them. This was about the time that Harry grew tired of what a *production* every aspect of this wedding was, that they couldn’t just buy something already made, and Voldemort had to whisper soothing, understanding words and also promise a blowjob that night if Harry looked at just one lookbook and chose his favorite designs from it. “You’d blow me anyway,” Harry had objected.

“All the more reason to do me this favor.”

At last they’d designed on a young-ish Kiwi designer, and Penelope had written her for a fitting, and now they were going to spend a lovely Saturday morning trying on dress robes. Only morning sex had kept Harry from sulking.

The designer’s name was Zenobia Scarlett, and she greeted them and Penelope herself when they arrived in her studio. “I’ve set up a viewing, a few pieces aligned with your preferences.” Into a glowing white space with a dozen mannequins lining the walls. Each of the robes on them was a paradox – light and weightless, but significant-looking and complex.

(Voldemort had given up on the idea of very traditional robes the first time he’d held a photo of an intricate velvet piece beside Harry, grimacing. “It ages you thirty years,” he’d said. “People will remark that I’ve stolen decades of your life.”

“That doesn’t sound like a thing anyone would ever say.”

Already Voldemort had made up his mind. “You will wear something suitably timeless.”)

So that was what stood before them now – timeless, maybe even a bit more modern than traditional.
Still… it was all very much not Harry’s aesthetic. He accepted the sparkling water that Zenobia’s assistant had offered him, fiddling with the glass.

“May I tell you a bit about each piece?” she asked as they surveyed the room.

“We will look at them alone first. If you’d bring out your silks? Penny, please join her.”

Penelope found this un-extraordinary, and they went, but Harry shot Voldemort a questioning look when they were alone together. “What?”

Voldemort gestured to his half of the room. “What do you like?”

“… All of these look like they’re for girls.” The tucked waists and full skirts were nothing like the rest of his wardrobe. “I didn’t say I like…..” He made the approximate shape with his hands.

“No. But it is the current fashion. It’s not for girls.”

“Can’t I have, like, that.” There were more robes on hangers along the walls, less voluminous ones that didn’t have the flared skirt. “Those look normal.”

A glitter of amusement. “Those are slips,” he said. “They will be worn underneath.”

“Fuck me,” Harry sighed.

Voldemort stepped in, running a hand along the back of his neck. “Nobody will remotely think you look like a girl,” he said. “They will think you look like a poised and gracious young man, taking your place as their emblem of peace, their Chosen One, et cetera.”

Harry laughed. “You’re impossible.” He approached the mannequins, running the sleeve of a deep green robe through his fingers. “My first dress robes were green. Lighter than this. And my robe for the Yule Ball was that bright blue.”

“You should wear brighter colors,” Voldemort agreed. “Darker ones weigh you down.”

“You too,” Harry said, looking back at him. “I liked you in white at the ball.” Then he blinked. “Should we match?” He didn’t know what gay Muggles did. Two wedding dresses, two tuxedos?

“We should coordinate,” Voldemort said.

“My parents did,” Harry mused, stepping before a rich purple and silver robe. “They were both in gold. My mum had – almost like a dress? It was sleeveless, with a cape, like that one we looked at last night. And my dad’s was a bit darker, with a pattern in black…..”

Voldemort was listening with a thoughtful frown. “You should try on something in gold,” he said. “It is traditional, but I didn’t request it. It would lead to predictable headlines.”

“Yeah, it would.” The Golden Boy, all grown up. Et cetera.

“You’ll need a second robe for the reception,” Voldemort said. “And you should try – if not a fully sleeveless robe, at least a short-sleeve one. A bit less formal.”

Zenobia and Penelope re-emerged from the backroom just then – Zenobia levitating bolts of fabric before her, Penelope writing careful notes in a ledger. “Here,” Zenobia said, setting the fabric along an island counter where her design books sat. Then she summoned a sketch pad and quill not dissimilar to Rita’s. But instead of writing, it began to sketch. “Let’s talk about our options.”
It wasn’t difficult, at least. There was a charmed mirror, beside which Zenobia would hang a robe, and Harry’s reflection dutifully showed it off. He liked the fastenings on the front of the green robe and the collar of the purple one, and the sleeves of the red one. “And we should both be in brighter – lighter? – colors.”

“Ah.” A flick of her wand and the robe in the mirror shifted to a pale lilac. It made his hair look darker, his lips redder. She summoned some colored pencils to make swatches along the edge of the sketchbook. “Or a blue? A green? A pale pink would clash with your complexion, but a yellow….”

And it at least felt better to see himself in colors that were not so heavy and serious and old. His reflection smiled back at him, sweeping back his hair from the high collar of the current robe. Then behind him Voldemort said, “Would you grow your hair out?”

Harry looked back. “Sure. If you want. Why?”

“So it might lie flat for once.” Voldemort’s tone was light and teasing; Zenobia and Penelope both side-eyed them. “Also, there are ritual braids that should be put in the night before. Traditionally it’s done by a parent or older relative, but – ask whom you’d like.”

“Oh. Yeah. Would Mrs. Weasley know?” he asked, trying to remember what Bill’s hair had looked like at their wedding.

“She would.”

Harry hadn’t been looking to Penelope and Zenobia, but he fully felt the fragile awkwardness in the room. How blithely they could talk about dead parents. “Think I’ll grow out a beard, too,” he said, rubbing his recently-shaved chin. He knew his father’s jawline had strengthened sometime between the end of school and his death, but Harry’s hadn’t yet and he was impatient. “So I look less like a student, you know.”

“You will look nothing like a student,” Voldemort promised. “Especially not with your collarbone out like that.” The neckline of his current robe was a sort of v shape, lower than he usually wore. It was a bit provocative, and Harry grinned at him.

“I could raise the neckline,” Zenobia said, lifting her wand.

“Please don’t. I prefer it.”

“I do, too,” Harry agreed. So a v-neck went into the sketchbook for inspiration.

They experimented with designs and prints, deciding that solid colors with stitched accents looked best on both of them. They experimented with the silhouette, and Harry could bargain them down to a skirt only slightly more flared than his teaching robes.

The wedding robe would be a pale green, like the new spring, accentuated with gold fixtures and subtle pattern of white petals, actually swirling, along the hem. It looked young and vibrant. He quite liked it, actually.

He liked the reception robes even more. *That*, he’d bargained to a fairly casual drop waist robe, if he’d pin a more ornate cloak over it. It was pale gold, with wide structured sleeves that ended just below his elbow. It looked more like his mother’s robe than his father’s, and it was just – complicated, his feelings about his reflection as it looked back at him.

So with both of Harry’s outfits sketched, the designer turned to Voldemort.
“White,” Voldemort said. “Perhaps cream or champagne. As warm as the colors in Harry’s robes. I prefer volume from charms instead of structured material. But it must also be charmed to stay clear of my staff. A train might be acceptable.”

Harry found it charming, how straightforward he was. Zenobia summoned a mannequin and positioned it at a mirror beside Harry’s; Voldemort stepped before it to study his reflection. The first robe she offered was a soft blue with structured waves in the skirt; he considered it with a frown. “Brighter.” And a bright blue, sort of a turquoise, was a good color on him. Really, he looked something nearer to human in colors that counteracted his pallor, and while he generally didn’t care to be human, that was the point (or a point, at least) of the wedding.

More robes: a soft flowy one in dove grey, a drastically flared one in a swirling green pattern. Harry took a seat on a bench behind him, where Penelope wrote notes. “I like the back of that one,” he offered — it was a stitched-in cape that connected at each shoulder, falling into a train. “It’s very dramatic.”

Voldemort turned to study it in the mirror. “I like it as well.” And so it went into the sketchbook.

Zenobia ended up sketching him an ethereal robe, something between a priest and a desert prophet. It was a bright cream with soft draping and featherlight chambray over the top. A cowl was draped across the collarbone, running into the cape down the back. The fixtures were gold like Harry’s, and ritual knots would be stitched into the hem. And the reception robe would be properly white, with wide sleeves and a high collar. A coordinating gold patterned cloak over it would bring out color in his complexion. Harry only saw when looking at both sketches that Voldemort had quickly abandoned traditional for… easy. Something close to warm, even. Someone who belonged.

Zenobia said these outfits would take her a month, so if she could see them again at the end of September…?

Penelope followed them into the antechamber where the floo was located. “Starling wanted you both in purple,” she told Voldemort.

A minute shrug. “Tell him I will apologize to him personally when I’m next in the DSE.”

Penelope pinched the bridge of her nose. “It might be rather more than that.”

“Then I’ll write him this afternoon. Your copies of the sketches?” Penelope extracted a sheet from her ledger. “His ire will not befall you.”

A flicker of a smile. “I’m quite equipped to handle it, but thank you.” And she stepped into the floo to let herself out.

As soon as she did, Harry fell into a full body slump. “I need a nap.” He looked over at the sketches. “But that wasn’t bad. Really.”

“Good.”

“Are you happy?”

“Immensely.” He reached up, cupping Harry’s jaw. “And you should look good with a beard.”

Harry grinned at him. “Are you sure?” he asked. “Your soft, delicate thighs might — “ But then, shushing him, Voldemort pulled them both into the floo to return home.
When Voldemort Gets Invited to Christmas (December 2006)

Chapter Summary

Harry goes to the Burrow alone every year. Six years into his marriage to Voldemort, Molly knits a second jumper.

(Reposting from my tumblr because it was the piece that kicked off my brief foray into fluff. Nothing has been changed except details to fit this timeline.)

Harry still goes to Christmas at the Burrow alone, years into his marriage to Voldemort. There seems to be mutual disinterest from all parties in spending time together or bringing the halves of Harry’s life any nearer to one another, and that’s fine, Harry swears it’s fine. Voldemort says that Christmas is a Muggle holiday and he’s got work to do anyway, so. So.

At the Burrow he sinks back into being part of the loving chaos easily. Luna will ask about Voldemort (because they are strangely good together, even without Harry’s mediation) and so will Fleur (because Voldemort charmed her with French at their wedding, though they’ll never tell Harry what they discuss), but otherwise all the references to Voldemort are oblique – we’re doing well, he’s busy with new legislation. The conversations no longer go cold and brittle at the mention of him, anyway. Harry has never been happier, which is enough for them to nearly trust his intentions.

But this year, when they’re all squeezed into the living room and Victoire has decreed herself the one to distribute gifts from under the tree, Harry is handed an especially large and squishy package. He wonders if Molly knitted him a three piece suit. He feels the room watching with some interest as he peels back the gold wrapping paper.

On top is his jumper – deep blue this year, with designs of holly leaves at the sleeves and collar. “Thanks,” he grins at Molly, and immediately pulls it over his head. It feels like a warm embrace unto itself.

But then there’s another jumper underneath. And it’s not black or foreboding or malevolent, as one might expect a jumper knitted for Lord Voldemort to be. It is cream-colored, and soft, and across the shoulders in dark brown is a pattern of a snake, as though it’d just been draped there. And Harry’s chest goes funny for a moment, and he scrambles for a joke to cover it up. “So he’ll finally stop stealing mine for bed, then,” he says, and still his smile at Molly might have wavered. “Thank you. He’ll love it.”

“You’re welcome,” Molly says. “And… perhaps next year….”

He expects the room to go frigid, but it doesn’t. They clearly all had talked about this prior. “Next year we should have you all over instead,” he says.

“ Probably got to, if anyone else gets pregnant again this year,” Fred agrees. (He’s right, there are three kids and five partners and Luna and Harry in addition to the Weasleys, and the house’s expansion charms couldn’t do much more for them.) “Right, Gin?”

“Ew,” Ginny objects.
Before this devolves any further, Harry attempts to make his case – “The estate’s really nice in the snow, and we bring in these massive trees because I never know what to do with the high ceilings….” He’s still clutching the jumper to his chest. “We’ve got the formal dining room that we never use, really it’s ridiculous – and we’ve redone the sitting room, I put in a new sound system –”

“Harry,” Ron says beside him, patting him on the shoulder. “Shhh.”

Under other circumstances Harry would have laughed and called him an arsehole, but he’s a bit too sincere for that now. Arthur, probably embarrassed by how un-chill Harry’s plea had been, gives him a gentle smile. “It’s probably time to relocate somewhere more spacious for Christmas. That’s generous of you.” Some small noises of agreement from the others.

“Yeah,” Harry says. “I mean – of course. I’d love to have everyone over.” He refolds the jumper and pretends to not be an emotional mess for the rest of the day.

Returning home to the Slytherin estate late that night, he finds Voldemort in the library, reclined along a sofa. “Hey,” Harry says, ducking his head to kiss him. “Good day?”

“Yes. How are they?”

“Good. Really good. This is from Molly.” He’s rewrapped Voldemort’s jumper, and so he holds out the gold parcel now. With a frown, Voldemort takes it.

He doesn’t understand the jumper at first – he assumes it is Harry’s, until he looks up to see that Harry is already wearing his. “Ah,” he says softly, shaking it out.

“She said you look like you’re cold all the time. And I said you are,” Harry says, scooping up Voldemort’s cool hands to rub them teasingly.

“Thank you. Tell her thank you.”

“Tell her yourself. I said we’re having Christmas here next year.”

“Are we?”

“Well, they want you to come, and there’s really no more space in the Burrow, so… they agreed to it, I mean.”

“Next Christmas, then.” Voldemort pulled the jumper over his head, on top of his robes. It looked good on him. Warm colors made him look soft, bringing a pinkish tinge to his complexion. He looked down at it. “I suppose I’ll have to stop taking yours, now?” he asked charmingly.

“Yeah. Exactly.” A last kiss, before Harry went to get ready for bed.
Harry was twenty-six when they began to talk about children.

Voldemort had insisted that Harry should wait, that he needn’t discard young adulthood too easily when they would have decades long to enjoy adulthood on its own time. And he did enjoy his time – they traveled, and he spent a lot of time with friends, and he played in a Quidditch rec club, and he still took out Sirius’s bike most weekends. His cooking had gotten quite good; he and Ron had learned to drive together (such that Ron and Hermione’s kids would only fall asleep to Ron’s driving when they’d been young); he hadn’t learned piano himself, but he would sometimes sit beside Voldemort and turn the sheet music for him as he taught himself. The sex was still really good – Harry dommed more often than not, smothering Voldemort in his own delighted humiliation at being so loved. So. They were happy.

It was Harry who asked about kids first, officially. He’d been thinking about it in the shower. There were a number of children peripherally in his life already – Ron and Hermione’s firstborn Max was inseparable from Bill and Fleur’s daughter Victoire, now both 5; Ron and Hermione’s daughter Portia was 2 and a force of chaos. (She’d cursed Hermione bald just last week. It was reversible, but Ron told her she looked like a high fashion model so she left it as it as a buzzcut.) Voldemort had poached Penelope Clearwater as his personal assistant after the wedding like he’d sworn he would, and she was beginning to talk of a baby soon. Babies were sticky and loud and a complete jeopardization of one’s time and identity and life, and god help him that he wanted all of that.

So when he emerged from the shower that night and slid into bed, Voldemort already had some sense that he had something important to say. He spelled Harry’s hair dry before he’d allow him to lean into his shoulder. “Yes?”

“It’ll take awhile to adopt,” he said, “especially abroad and all.” They’d planned to adopt Parselmouths, so they’d have to go abroad for them, India or somewhere nearby where there were entire Parselmouth communities. “Could we write Pembroke?” Their lawyer, with whom they’d already spoken about adoption before. “You said we could talk about it after my birthday.”

He really didn’t have to argue his case. “Yes,” Voldemort said, thoughtful. “If you’ve seen enough of the world.”

He made a face. “It’s not death. But yeah, I have.”

“Would you write her? I’ll write Pabita before she contacts them.”
Pabita was the Parselmouth neighborhood in Kolkata with whom Voldemort had ties. They’d stayed there for a few weeks last year, and apart from the effect of India on their delicate English constitutions, Harry had loved it. He’d been able to go out without Voldemort, befriending the local young adult Parselmouth community, and they’d shown him around. Meanwhile Voldemort had spent time in some magical archives and having politic meetings with important people. He’d made clear he wasn’t traveling on behalf of Britain, that the Ministry would have nothing to do with their visit, and that made things simpler. So Voldemort would return buzzing with the excitement of obscure magic, and Harry the excitement of exploration. They nearly came home with a new snake, too, before Harry questioned just how many snakes one household could need.

“I’ll write her,” Harry said, sitting up. “She hasn’t got this year’s taxes yet, and – what else did she say she would need?”

“Nothing else now. Home visits and interviews later.”

“‘Kay.” He was getting out of bed; Voldemort shot him an amused look. “What? I might as well.” He padded into the study down the way and pulled out nice parchment.

And so things unfolded from there. Madam Pembroke got their paperwork in order. They both sat a psychological profile and parenting competency interview. Pabita didn’t have an orphanage as such – Voldemort said there’d been a move away from institutions decades ago, and Harry secretly felt it was a tragedy that Tom hadn’t grown up in actual home instead, that maybe…. But nevermind. There were a few group homes for Parselmouth children. Pembroke said she’d liaison with some case workers and lawyers there and write to them soon.

They began spending their weekends preparing their home, childproofing some of its magic and painting a bedroom and picking out furniture. They didn’t know if it’d be a boy or girl yet, and since their age could be anywhere between 2 and 8, they held off on decorating much, when Harry said they’d take them out to pick out things for their own room. When Harry told Ron and Hermione, they were thrilled, and swore Max and Victoire would be their best friends.

It was only a couple months later, but felt like a lifetime of anticipation, when Harry woke to Voldemort’s hand on his shoulder. In their Legilimency he could feel how hesitant Voldemort was, and how… sick. “Sweetheart,” he murmured, still sleepy, attempting to pull Voldemort close to himself. Some nights were still bad, some nights were sick with guilt. Less often these days, but….

But Voldemort resisted his touch. “I need to tell you something,” he said. “And you need to listen.”

“Okay.” But his stomach was tightening. It was something severe, something wrong. He reached to hold both of Voldemort’s hands, pressing warm magic into his touch. “I’ll listen.”

Voldemort swallowed around the words blocking his throat. “I can’t adopt,” he said. “Not our first, at least. They’ll – need more than I can give them.”

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There it was. Harry slid in, pressing a kiss to Voldemort’s collarbone before laying his head there. “Are you sure?”

“I should have warned you from the beginning. Foster children – it can be volatile, they can be difficult.” He still struggled with the words, obviously saying more about his own childhood than any of the children now. “And I – don’t understand what it will mean to be a father. I would ruin them.”
Harry’s heart felt like crushed glass in his chest. “Okay,” he said again, in a slow breath. “That’s fine.”

“Really, it’s not.”

“It is,” he said. “I’m sorry I didn’t ask about – any of it. I know it’s complicated for you.”

“It is not complicated. It is only weak.”

Harry choked. “Don’t,” he begged. Voldemort’s soul was brittle and unresponsive to either magic or love. “Don’t. I love you. I should’ve asked.”

Voldemort swallowed the taste of self-loathing – it only welled up occasionally but it was interwoven with everything to do with his past. He hated feeling pity for the child he once had been, he hated drawing nearer to his father in any way, he hated feeling bad at anything, especially such things as love. He was no longer dismissive of love – it would be easier if he were – but he felt so ill-equipped to love a child. His child. The prospect scared him.

“I think you’ll be really good at it,” Harry said softly. Maybe their thoughts were enmeshed, maybe it was just obvious. “And – it’s not like I’ve seen much more in the way of good childhoods. But I knew I didn’t want them growing up feeling like I felt, or how you felt. And that could account for a lot.”

“Possibly.” He wouldn’t commit to it.

“Hey.” Another warm kiss to his clavicle. “I wouldn’t have told you I want a family with you if I didn’t think you’d be good at it.” Kiss. “I am sorry I didn’t ask.”

“Please don’t be.” He slumped backward, the worst of the conversation over now. “Should I write Hazel about setting up surrogacy appointments instead?”

“Oh,” Harry was charmed. He clearly hadn’t anticipated this. He’d expected to wait, or to discard his hope for a child altogether. “Yeah. Please.”

“It will delay everything.”

“I can wait.” He sank back onto the pillows, his face still pressed into Voldemort’s shoulder so his beard scratched. In adulthood, Harry had become this solid masculine presence, and it felt strangely comforting to have his weight beside Voldemort now.

“Maybe,” Voldemort offered into the darkness, “after a time – after our first – we will revisit the idea.” He knew that some part of Harry would like to save every child – even if a savior was the last thing an orphan needed, but they’d address that later. They had the money and space, but Voldemort did not yet know whether he had the emotional fortitude. He was certain they’d end up with a brood, one way or another. He was still weighing whether he deserved it.

Harry’s mouth curved against his shoulder. “Let’s survive one kid, first.”

“Yes.”

Harry was still tender and careful and a bit pitying, which Voldemort would already find disquieting, but he’d learned to live with it. He sank into the bed and let Harry’s strong arms encircle him.
Early 2007. So they adapt to this reality. Madam Pembroke sends their surrogacy papers, and they travel back to Kolkata to meet the potential surrogates. They agree on a tall, vibrant young woman named Miraz, and Harry must drag Voldemort away from insisting she live with them for the length of her pregnancy. Neither of them wants to be the biological father – Voldemort is uncertain his new body even could, and Harry’s Parseltongue may not be genetic, and anyway neither of them want to hear who the “real” father is in the papers when it will clearly be both of them. So Miraz introduces her boyfriend, quiet and gentle and a fellow Parselmouth, and Voldemort deems him acceptable. Miraz will have some medical procedures first – Parselmouths were apparently delicate pregnancies, mammalian and reptilian magics colliding inside them – and then they’d start trying.

It was actually a little hard for Harry, telling his friends. He, Ron, Hermione, and Ginny only had the same lunch hour once a week, so he picked at his ham sandwich for awhile, until there was a lull in Ginny’s newest story of Auror life. “So we’re not adopting,” he throws out to the table.


“We’ve gotten a surrogate,” he went on, alarmed at their reactions. “Y’know, to get pregnant? We thought – an older foster child could be complicated – “

“A biological child could be complicated – ow,” Hermione protested as Ginny kicked her. An unrepentant glare.

“And really, he shouldn’t have to deal with – all of that, his own childhood, the same time as we’re figuring out parenting,” Harry concluded.

“Yeah,” Ron said thoughtfully. “Mum said babies go – uh, psycho if they’re not held enough. There was this place in Russia….”

Molly loved reading the saddest stories she could find, just to cry over them. It was endearing. She was very present in their lives, looking after Ron and Hermione’s kids when they came back from school everyday. (Primary school for Max, who’d just turned 6; preschool for Portia when she’d turned 2 last year. Hermione regarded their educational system as the best thing Voldemort had ever done.)

“I’ll get one of those slings,” Harry said. “And take my baby with me everywhere.”


“Not yet. But she’s got medical things to do first, and Voldemort floos the doctor as often as they’ll let him,” Harry said with a grin. “Ugh, sorry it’ll be a little young for Max. Maybe a little young for Portia too.”

“Well.” Ron stole a glance at Hermione, checking this was okay. “We’re thinking of trying again? Portie’s 3rd birthday’s in May, they did get easier after that. So.” A shrug and a smile. “We can still make our kids be best friends.”

“Brilliant.”

The pregnancy takes a long time. Most of 2007 passes with news of medical complications, legal delays, political delays. Parselmouth pregnancy is apparently even more fragile when it’s both parents. Voldemort is surprisingly the one to offer that perhaps they should seek non-Parselmouth surrogates, but it strikes Harry as hideously sad to think of not sharing their private language with
their child. They persist.

He’s still overjoyed for Ron and Hermione when they announce their third pregnancy in the spring of 2008, but his heart twinges as well. It’s not like he’d been pining, exactly – he’s still quite young, and he’s got a lot to keep him busy at work and at home, and he still sees his friends quite often, and he still plays in Angelina’s Quidditch team, and Ron and Hermione’s kids were like the best of having children without (generally) the meltdowns or tedium or sacrifice. But still.

Voldemort dealt with the prospect of kids in his usual way, by obtaining hoards of books about parenting. A lot of them were magic – household spells, minor medical spells – but some were just advice. “They’re all written by purebloods,” he said darkly, flipping through one shiny tome over dinner. “How to teach them propriety. And while it would be a valuable life skill in some circumstances, it is hardly my first concern.”

Harry eyed the stack of similar books poking out of Voldemort’s bag. “Maybe,” he offered, “we haven’t got to read the magic ones?”

“Of course we do. It is an entirely different challenge than non-magical children.”

“But it’s not. The one I looked at yesterday didn’t have anything about feeding a baby. It had bits about which potions were safe at which age, and what to do if they swallowed magic components, and spells to safely heat the formula. Did you know there’s a potion for artificial breast milk?” he added.

“Yes. The Knockturn apothecary sells it, it’s not practical for home brewing. And,” he said with a sigh, “you’re correct.”

“Don’t sound so bloody disappointed,” Harry chided. “We’ll go to a bookstore this week. Ask Penelope to bring her baby in sometimes so you can hold it.”

“Why would I want to hold someone else’s baby?”

“Practice,” Harry pronounced. “I’m sorry I never brought Ron and Hermione’s kids here for you. Oh,” he said a bit flatly, recalling the news of a few days ago. “They’re having another. It’s due in the autumn.”

Voldemort studied his face. “I’m sorry.”

He’d expected something more positive, send them my congratulations or whatever. It strangely, really helped to hear this instead. “I know,” he said. “It’s fine. This one, I’ll make you hold.”

So when Miraz and her physician send word that she’s finally got a viable pregnancy, Harry cries. The news comes in July, they won’t find out the gender for another few months, but already Harry wants to pick out names and return to the half-furnished bedroom. They’d need a nursery, then. They’d need tiny clothing and soft toys. He told Voldemort he was in charge of buying children’s books.

They kept the news quiet – because anything could happen, but also because they didn’t want the attention of the public or press. Miraz said she would not be a spectacle, so they’d protect her first. So for a few months, Harry was quiet.

When it was far enough along to find out the gender, they took the floo to the physician’s office. Miraz was waiting already in the antechamber. “Harry,” she said, lighting up and kissing his cheeks.
“Lord Voldemort,” she added, dipping into a bow that Voldemort returned. (This was their usual dynamic – she was a few years younger than Harry and had warmed to him in a sibling sort of way. It was nice.) “He said whenever you arrived, we should go in.”

“Do you already know?” Harry asked, curious.

A shake of her head, sending dark curls down her back. “I would prefer the surprise now.”

Dr. Bhattacharya had spent the last few years studying Parselmouth pregnancies, letting Voldemort in on as much as he asked, most of the time. He was waiting in crisp blue robes, a contrast to the loose and cool outfits Harry had seen in the rest of Kolkata. Miraz slid onto an exam bed that then levitated itself; Voldemort and Harry took seats along the other wall.

The doctor looked to them first. “What are you hoping for?” he asked. “Girl or boy?”

“Anything.” Harry’s answer was honest and immediate. They had discussed it. Harry thought there were many things about girls that were still a mystery, but with Hermione and Ginny and Luna around – he had enough educators. Or a boy, who may play quidditch like him or piano like Voldemort or both. “We want this baby no matter what.”

“Very well.” He turned, arranging some ritual elements around Miraz, casting spells that arced beams of light over her. “Would you each burn an herb?” He picked up two stalks with a conical bit at the end, glittering with magic. “Stand here – and here. Just the smoke.” He lit the plants and blew them out. Voldemort and Harry lifted the smoky herbs high, and Bhattacharya cast bright lights into the plumes of smoke.

It happened gradually – most of the light dissipated, but some stayed. Harry didn’t recognize the pattern, but it glowed in gold threads. Voldemort’s brow was furrowed, as little as he knew about this sort of magic. The doctor murmured and continued casting.

“A good, healthy pregnancy,” he said at last. It’d been what they’d heard for the past few months anyway, but Harry’s chest still loosened in relief. “Would you like to know the gender?”

“Yes. Please.” Voldemort said it before Harry could.

“Girls. Twins.” And he would’ve said more, but then Harry was stepping in, pulling Voldemort to him, laughing and kissing him. Twin girls. Their magic burned with love.

Bhattacharya was casting something else into the lingering smoke, and then the golden strands solidified. “There,” he pointed, “and there. Heartbeats.” The tiny pulses in the smoke were the most amazing thing Harry had ever seen.

There were more tests then, ones for health and stability. “Twins,” Miraz said, running a hand over her stomach. “I should have known, by how weighted down I feel all the time. My mother said I was a big baby too, though, so….” A wave of her hand.

“Are you sure you don’t want to live with us?” Harry said, though it’d been Voldemort to insist on it the first time. “We would treat you like a goddess.”

She laughed, waving him off. “I’m quite fine here.”

“Can we come see you?”

“Yes. If you’d like.”
Harry wanted to touch her stomach, to touch his children (daughters!) underneath. He clung to Voldemort instead. Bhattacharya wrote out a scroll of the test results and scheduled another appointment in a month. And then Miraz was up, hugging Harry and then Voldemort. At his mild bewilderment, she clicked her tongue. “I must do it now, while I can still reach.” She saw them both out herself, and left.

But when they were alone, Voldemort stopped them before the floo. “We should go out.”

“Yes.” Harry was still a bit breathless. “We should. Can we take my friends out to tell them? Or is it too early?”

Voldemort considered. “It’s not too early,” he said. “If they can keep it out of the papers.”

“Of course they can. I’ll get a reservation for tonight, then. Hey,” he said with a smile, stepping in to kiss him. “I’m so, so happy.”

“As am I.”

He popped into Ron and Hermione’s first – they always left their floo open to him. “Ron? Hermione?” he called into the house.

“Hi, Harry,” called back Ginny’s voice. He followed it.

“Harry?” cried another, younger voice, and then he’d barely braced himself before Max threw himself into Harry’s stomach. He rolled with the motion, scooping Max up even though 7 was a bit big, and Harry was a bit out of shape.

“Hey, Maxie,” he said, holding him at face level. “Being good for Aunt Ginny?”

“No!”

It was what he said every time. Max was loud and theatrical, just like someone would expect from Ron and Hermione’s kids. Harry adored him.

“No?” He pretended to be horrified. “You know what we do to bad kids? We feed them to the… Snorkack!”

“No!”

Harry was carrying him down the corridor, back to his room. “What about to the… Dabberblimp?”

“No!”

“Or an entire swarm of nargles? Like… this!” He skittered his fingers like a swarm down Max’s arm and then into his belly, making him shriek and pitch. Just inside his room, he dropped Max on his bed.

Ginny was in here, finger-painting with Luna. “Someday you won’t treat the Dabberblimp so lightly,” Luna said to him as she dipped her fingers in aquamarine paint. “They can be quite dangerous.”

“It’s got teeth all down its back,” Max agreed from his spot on the bed. “So it could eat you from either side.”
Harry grinned at Max. “Then you’d better start being good, yeah?”

“No!”

He took a seat on the floor beside Ginny. “I didn’t know you’d be babysitting,” he said. “Are they out, or…?”

“Just asleep,” Ginny said. “Portie too, though that can’t last much longer. Don’t worry,” she added at Harry’s look. “Of course they’ve got silencing spells up.”

“You think they’d come out to dinner tonight?”

“Probably, yeah. No kids?”

“Ah. No. I got a reservation at Lantern’s Light. You might need to get the paint out of your hair before they let you in.”

“What?” Ginny said, reaching up. “It’s avant garde. They should appreciate it.”

“Blue paint would look better in your hair than green,” Luna said thoughtfully. “Complementary colors.”

“Can you come too, Luna?”

“Oh, how lovely. I’d love to. Will Lord Voldemort be there?”

Voldemort and Luna had a strangely deep and solid friendship, that Harry encouraged even if he didn’t understand it. They went to estate sales of the oldest and most eccentric wixies and sometimes came back with interesting artifacts. Voldemort shared everything of appraisal he’d learned at Borgin and Burke’s, and Luna told him of legends of dubious provenance. So. “Yeah, he’ll be there,” he said. “And, uh, I wanted to bring out your whole family?” he said to Ginny.

“Ooh, an occasion then,” she grinned. “Mum would watch after the kids, probably.”

“I wanna go,” Max objected, looking up from smashing two hippogriff figurines together.

“You would be so bored,” Harry said. “But I’ll take you to Gram and Grampa’s myself, if you want.” He wanted to tell Molly and Arthur about the pregnancy too, but they were usually far less inclined to spend time willingly with Voldemort than Harry’s friends. Also, childcare. He’d tell them this afternoon.

So he and Ginny floo’d with Fred and George, and Bill, and Tonks. Eventually Ron came downstairs carrying Portia (precariously, because Ron was six months pregnant and Portia was squirrelly), who shrieked when she saw Harry, and then there was a detour to look at her newest art project, which involved large pieces of glitter crawling along the page, which was honestly a bit disquieting. Anyway. Hermione was up by then, and Ginny and Luna had come down, and Max was busy trying on every outfit he wanted to show Molly and Arthur. Chaos.

When Ron heard that Harry was taking his entire family out, his expression went soft. “Mate….?”

“Shh,” Harry chided him. “It’s a secret until tonight.” Though reasonably he could only be announcing one thing, really.

Ron grinned. “What secret?” And then he went to pack bags for his kids.

Harry did go with them to the Burrow. And while Ron and Hermione were in the living room setting
up Portia’s toys, and Max had already disappeared into the house. Harry pulled Molly and Arthur into the kitchen and drew a silencing charm around the door. “We’re telling everyone tonight, but I wanted you to know first. We saw our surrogate today, and – we’re having twins. Girls.”

And then Molly pulled him into a tight hug and Arthur’s hand was clasping his shoulder and they were both so happy for him. It felt really good. He couldn’t stop smiling. “Twins,” Arthur said with a happy sigh. “You’ll never sleep again.”

“I know.”

Molly sniffled. “They’ll be in school with Leo, then.” The baby Ron was currently gestating. “You know we’d look after them anytime, just drop them off…. Will you be taking time off work?”

“Oh. He will, actually. Since the Wizengamot is only in session a couple times a week, he could work from home more than I can. And then I’ll take some days off, and… we will need childcare sometimes,” he said. “Can we talk about it more nearer to the due date? December or January,” he clarified.

Molly had faltered momentarily at the reminder that these were Voldemort’s kids as well, but she nodded. “Of course, dear. Winter babies! That’s probably best for their mother anyway, the last month is a perpetual hot flash…. Is she okay?” she added. “She’s living in…?”

“Kolkata, yeah, even though we’ve asked her a hundred times to move in. Maybe when she’s very pregnant she’ll reconsider.”

Molly still held onto him, as though she couldn’t express her happiness except in touch. “You deserve this,” she said, sniffing again. “Oh, Harry….”

Arthur peeled her off before she burst into tears. “We are so happy for you,” he said. “For both of you,” he added, stilted but determined.

It made his heart hurt, in a good way. “Thanks. Thank you.”

Voldemort was half-ready when Harry returned home. “Mm, you smell good,” he murmured as he came up behind the sofa, pressing his nose to the dip of Voldemort’s neck to inhale his cologne. “Everyone will meet us there. Oh, Arthur and Molly aren’t coming – they’re looking after the kids – but I told them, alone. They were really… good.”

“Good,” Voldemort echoed, amused.

“Yeah. Molly said she’d look after them, and honestly we’ll have to ask her to sometimes. I haven’t figured out how to pay her for it yet, though.” He flung himself on the sofa opposite. “Might have to ask Fleur to help with the bank heist, secretly depositing gold in their vault.”

“Shall I petition to get Arthur a raise, instead?”

“No, because I think that’d be corruption.” He was scrubbing fingerpaint off his knuckles – how the hell, he hadn’t gone anywhere near Max’s paints. “Bill and Fleur are coming, by the way. So’s Tonks. The twins said they’d have to see.”

“Thank you.”

It helped when everyone was just pre-warned like this. But Voldemort could be elegant and
charismatic and nearly natural in mixed company when he wanted to be, so Harry didn’t always worry anymore. “I need to shower,” he said, rubbing at more paint. “Would you let Moira out before we go?”

“Yes. Moira?” he called into the house. A clatter of claws that usually meant a leap from somewhere high, then a flurry of wings as the dog soared in.

“Hey, good girl,” Harry said, patting her head on the way out. He went to get ready.

They floo’d in to the Leaky Cauldron and walked up Diagon Alley. But Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes was nearer this way than the restaurant, so Harry slowed outside the neon storefront. “Let’s see who we pick up. It’ll be fine,” he added, from the dubious way Voldemort was looking at the shop.

“Really, you’re overdue to see it. Tell them their magic is clever, it’s all they want to hear.”

“What will the papers say,” Voldemort sighed as he followed Harry in.

The door’s bell chimed, and there was a flurry of motion deeper into the shop. “Sorry, we’re just closing – “ one of the twins called from behind a shelf.

“It’s just us,” Harry called back. “Should I lock the door behind us?”

“Yeah, cheers!”

And Harry did, and brought Voldemort into the crowded and overwhelming interior of the shop. “Skiving Snackboxes, to skip class,” he narrated as they went. “Trick wands. Their sweets are probably the best, they gave this toffee to Dudley once….”

“Harry,” George admonished, rounding a corner to find them. “We give our own tours.”

“Hi, George,” Harry said, for Voldemort’s sake. They’d had a couple Christmases together, but it typically took longer than that to tell them apart.

“Or am I?”

“Your freckles are completely different, I’ve been able to tell you apart since third year…. Voldemort hasn’t been in here before, though, and uh, it’s a lot to explain at once.”

George clicked. “No time now, I’m afraid. Come to the backroom, we’re just trying something.” He turned to usher them back; Harry took Voldemort’s hand before following.

The backroom was already crowded – Ginny and Luna, Tonks, and Lee were gathered around a workspace as Fred heated a solution. No, it was – what was it? There seemed to be distorted image floating across the surface.

“We got a secondhand Pensieve last year,” George said easily as Harry slid in beside Ginny. Voldemort hung just behind him, his back against the wall, but really no one particularly reacted to his presence. “It had such potential for pranks already. A mysterious liquid that people willingly shoved their face into? It’s hilarious enough on its own, how they look when they’re inside – but putting patterned ink or rapid-growth moss spores in the solution? We had a lot of options.”

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“We’re retooling our daydream potions with what we know now,” Fred added. “But – we thought we could also improve on the medium. In case, if the Wizengamot ever tires of having their wigs fall into the Pensieves during a trial – “ He picked up a large glowing loop and dabbed it into the dish of memories, “they might watch like this instead.” Lifting the loop to his mouth, he blew a diaphanous bubble.
The memory shimmered on the surface, expanding until Harry could see it clearly – the day the twins had left Hogwarts, raining down chaos on Umbridge. He was grinning as he watched. And when the bubble had reached all the space it could afford in the narrow workshop, it hovered in midair, looping the memory.

“The final form will expand to fit the audience, like a regular Pensieve,” George said. “We haven’t worked out how to keep it from popping, though. Especially if anyone’s wearing hatpins.”

“Was that Dolores Umbridge?” Voldemort asked from behind Harry. He was amused, even if it might be too subtle for anyone but Harry to hear in his tone.

George didn’t even blink. “Yeah. Isn’t she awful?” he sighed. “That day never gets old, not in the year of working on this memory.”

“Sometimes we’d use the one of turning Ron’s teddy into a spider,” Fred added. “For variety. Until Ron threatened to Obliviate us.”

“You gave him a crippling phobia, you know,” Harry said.

“Oh, we know,” But Fred looked to Voldemort. “How would you hold the memory solution together? Your Royal Highness Lord Slytherin.”

Voldemort ignored the last bit, as always. “Did you try ginkgo berries?”

“Seeds, juices, concentrate.”

A frown. “Erumpet nails?”

“Diced and powdered.”

“Then you’ll likely need an enchantment on the witnesses.” He reached for parchment, then stopped himself. “We should go,” he said. “I’ll explain it over dinner.”

“Right. Brilliant.”

And then they were casting preservation charms over their work, shelving components, and ushering everyone out. They continued down Diagon Alley.

Ginny and Tonks walked arm in arm before them, and Luna had slipped beside Voldemort, shaking back her sleeves to show him a brilliant gauntlet she was inexplicably wearing. So the twins fell in step with Harry at the rear. “What’s the great news?” Fred asked, prodding Harry’s ribs.

“Uh. Officially, it’s my birthday next week and we’re celebrating early. I already asked the restaurant for a cake.”

“Have you?” George said with interest. “I think I’ve got some very special candles somewhere….” He was patting down his pockets.

“Absolutely not.”

“Aw, they’re only Quotie trick candles. They’re cute. Dad loves ‘em.”

Harry smiled. “Maybe for my actual birthday,” he compromised. “Not this decoy.”

“Shall we scoop the place just to smoke out journos?” George offered. “You really should make reservations under a fake name, you know.”
He snorted. “I’ve tried. But eventually they worked out that I was Roonil Wazlib, and it was too embarrassing to explain why it was funny. Anyway.” He waved it off. “It’s fine. Everyone will find out eventually, but I wanted you all to hear first. Here.”

They turned down an ivy-lined street, and Harry slipped back beside Voldemort as he transfigured his wand into his staff, moving carefully over the uneven cobblestones. “Alright?” Harry murmured in Parseltongue.

“Of course.”

It was Harry’s constant worry whenever he brought Voldemort together with his friends – even though it was fine, some of them had found common ground and others just politely disregarded Voldemort. This was the first time, in Harry’s memory, that Fred and George had had anything to do with Voldemort. And – it was nice, really.

Voldemort ran his thumb down the back of Harry’s neck. “This will be perfect,” he promised, still in Parseltongue. “I’d give you nothing less.”

So Harry smiled up at him. “I know. Thank you.” He led them into the restaurant, to find everyone else waiting.

As soon as they were seated, Voldemort dropped about a half dozen privacy spells on top of the restaurant’s own. Then he leaned over to Luna, with Fred and George on her other side, and returned to the problem of a reconstructed Pensieve. Harry tried to listen, but beside him Ron was saying he’d forgotten what it felt like to be among adults alone, and Ginny was laughing at him, and Hermione said too cleverly that perhaps Harry would sympathize too one day. He shushed her.

They were well into drinks and starters (fried mango, dandelion fritters, bruschetta with goat cheese and honeysuckle – wixie cuisine had developed rapidly in the past decade to meet the demands of the new non-magical market) when George said loudly, “So what’s the great news, Harry?”

Harry fake-scowled. “Maybe I was going to announce it in a really artistic way. Maybe I’ve got it written on the cake.” He looked to Voldemort, who made a gesture that he should do it. “Fine.” He sat up, setting down his drink. “So we saw our surrogate this morning – ”

“I knew it,” Hermione interrupted.

“Finally,” Ginny agreed, and then people were shouting congratulations and toasting him, and Harry looked hopelessly at the chaos he loved so much.

“You didn’t even let me say it properly,” he objected over the din, and everyone nearly settled down. “So we saw the surrogate this morning, and – she’s about four months along. With twin girls.”

And the table erupted again, as loud and enthusiastic as the first time, and Bill was flagging down the waiter for more drinks and Ginny is slapping him across the back and Fred is fishing for a cigar as though he just keeps them in his robes now and Fleur is laughing, saying something in mellifluous French to Voldemort, and Harry is so so happy. When the noise died down a bit, he said, “They’re due in winter. December or January.”

“Oh,” Ron said. “They’ll be best friends with Leo, then. I’ll make sure he doesn’t come out before September,” he added, pressing both hands to his stomach. (Wizards gave birth through their navels, apparently. Harry hadn’t been allowed to watch Ron’s last two births because everyone said he’d faint, and he resented that but also he hadn’t fought to see it either.)

“You’ve known, then,” Hermione said.
It wasn’t an accusation, but Harry sighed anyway. “Since May,” he said. “There were so many times it didn’t take. Parselmouth pregnancies….” He made a vague gesture. He’d begged not to hear any details of the failed implantations or the miscarriages, as his heart couldn’t take it. So his friends hadn’t known of these either.

Hermione’s face softened anyway. “It’s been a lot,” she said. “I’m so happy for you. For both of you,” she amended, looking past Harry to Voldemort.

“Thank you, Ms. Granger.”

“You already told Arthur and Molly, then,” she went on, looking back to Harry. “That’s why you came to drop Max and Portie off.”

“My parents knew first?” Ron said, as though he’d been betrayed.

“Yeah. What did you think I’d said to your mum to make her cry?”

“I dunno, she just does that sometimes. Ow,” he objected when Hermione batted his arm for callousness. “She does, though.”

“Still.”

More drinks, and real food to soak it up. At some point Harry slid beside Fred and Angelina to talk about Quidditch (Angelina was still captain of the club Harry and Ginny played in, and they were getting trounced this season through no fault of their own), and Ron and Hermione were telling George about Portia (nobody could figure out where she’d learned the word bobotuber but she pronounced it flawlessly); and when Harry glanced back at Voldemort, he was listening to something Bill was saying about the difference between East Asian and South Asian curses. Bill’s arm was around Fleur’s shoulders, and Tonks was behind her, drunkenly braiding her silky hair, and it was all so… normal. Harry lost track of what Angelina was saying entirely for a second, so when she pointedly said, “Right, Potter?” he had to snap back.

“Right.”

“That’s that, then, next game you’ll be the human snitch and whoever tackles you off your broom gets the points,” Angelina said, and Harry grinned at her.

“That sounds fun as hell, though,” Fred objected.

“You.” Angelina pointed a finger at him. “This is why I don’t let you on my team.”

Finally Harry slid back over to his spot beside Voldemort, dropping a piece of bloodberry-glazed ham on his plate. “Good?”

“Is what good?”

“Dunno. All of it. Cheers,” he said when Voldemort handed him a forkful of ebony-scented potatoes. “Did you solve the pensieve for Fred and George?”

“Did I solve it? No. But they have new possibilities now.”

“Brilliant. Thanks.” He ate the potatoes, earthy and sweet, and handed back his fork. “Mm, those are good. Hey, I think I’m going to Hogwarts this week. I want to tell Hagrid in person. D’you want to come? Not for Hagrid,” he clarified, because that relationship may never work, “but for the castle. Anything.”
“Only if Minerva needs my assistance.”

Voldemort’s relationship with Hogwarts was common knowledge by now, and at times he’d made himself quite useful in re-enchanting it. Being of founder’s blood carried quite a lot of social weight anyway, making Voldemort… not quite a hero or celebrity or royalty, but something akin to it. He’d turned down a position on the school board but sometimes advised them. So. “I’ll write her first,” Harry said. “And ask what she needs.”

“Thank you.”

“’Kay.” He looked around the table. “I asked for a cake. Because it’s my birthday,” he added with a charming smile.

“Oh, is it?”

“A decoy. Though I haven’t seen any journos here.”

“Of course you haven’t. There were only two, and I saw them out an hour ago.”

Sometimes Harry thought he should be more disapproving when Voldemort intimidated people, but really he couldn’t bring himself to care. “Cheers,” he said. And after stealing one last bite of potatoes, he moved to sit with Ron and Hermione.

“— And Nico’s so quiet, Neville says Portie bring him out of his shell,” Ron was saying to Angelina and the twins, “but last time, Portie said she made him pretend to be a gnome the entire time, and I’m really not sure it’s helping.”

A twitch of George’s mouth. “Maybe next time Portie can be the gnome,” he said. “Hey, send Neville to us? Those enchanted animal masks may be just what Nico needs. Elephant?” he suggested to Fred.

“Lion, surely.”

“Neville’s husband was a Hufflepuff,” Hermione objected.

Fred made a face. “We haven’t gotten around to a badger mask just yet.”

“You should, though. There’s this video, I’ll show you later….”

“Have you got magical animals too?” Harry asked. They must be new, he hadn’t seen them.

“Sure, yeah. Hippogriffs, erumpets. We’re thinking of doing a basilisk. Hey,” Fred said, pointing a fork in his direction. “Whatever your kids want from us, they get. We haven’t got anything safe for babies, but as soon as they’re 3 or so, the shop’s as good as theirs.”

“Don’t listen to him,” Hermione implored. “Those fucking enchanted cymbals, I still hear them in my sleep sometimes – and we just found another vanishing frog in the freezer last week – “

“In the freezer,” George marveled. “How’d it hold up?”

“Pretty well, but that’s not the point.”

“We’re just saying,” Fred said, flashing Harry a brilliant smile, “it might be too much to expect your kids don’t get into trouble. We’d only like to provide a safe outlet.”

“Besides,” George added, “we’ve got to teach them all the perks and pitfalls of being twins.”
“Switching places – “

“Being one another’s alibi – “

“Finishing each other’s thoughts – “

Harry smothered his laughter by burying his face in his hands. “I am not prepared for this,” he said.

Ron patted his shoulder. “Nobody ever is,” he assured him.

The rest of that year was all consumed by the pregnancy, in one way or another. They’d both come home from work, nap, and then get back up to ready the nursery or babyproof the rest of the house for a few hours. They bought toys and clothes and books. They were both rather opposed to buying matching outfits, but then Harry worried about how to dress both of them appropriately. “We have no idea what sort of people they’re going to be,” he said in one notable meltdown in the middle of Primark. “Is one of them going to prefer ducks to – what the fuck are these – strawberries?” He held up both onesies on himself.

Voldemort’s mouth twitched. “Best get both. Just in case.”

“What if they both hate ducks and strawberries?”

“Then they grow up to resent us, I suppose.”

Harry groaned and dropped both onesies in their basket.

Ron and Hermione’s third child, a boy named Leopold, was born in October. And then Harry was over at their house a lot, looking after the baby or the older two, or cooking dinner or cleaning up or just providing Ron and Hermione with some adult conversation for a bit. He asked Portia, now 4 years old and very opinionated, what it was like to be a girl, and didn’t get much in the way of useful answers. He asked Hermione, age 29 and also very opinionated, what it was like to be a girl, and learned quite a lot, but nothing applicable to newborns. He promised he’d come shopping with them for menstrual products in about a decade, and he’d learn how to do their hair, especially if it was curly, and he’d tell them that gender norms were shit and all the best people in his life were women (“And Ron,” Hermione conceded with a thoughtful frown. “Women and Ron,” Harry agreed), and that he’d read A is for Activist to them every night before bed. Sometimes Luna or Neville or any of the Weasleys would be over too, and they swore they’d come by the Slytherin estate too when the twins were born, to make sure Harry got a few hours of sleep every night. It somehow came as a surprise to them when he explained Voldemort would be staying home more often, that his job was far more flexible than Harry’s. In any case, they’d love the help.

And it made his friends like Voldemort more, or trust him more, or something. When Harry mentioned it to Voldemort one night over dinner, he frowned. “The implication that someone must be a good person just because they are a parent is quite terrible.”

“I know,” Harry sighed. “But it makes my life so much better if they like you, so….” He gestured menacingly with his knife.

“I will not disabuse them of their terrible beliefs.”

“Thank you. Wanker.”
By December, they had two weeks of meals and six weeks of formula stashed in a separate freezer. They both kept bags packed, and the floo open for messages. Miraz was fine, either she’d write or her partner would, so they always had news. She wrote that she felt like a beached whale so it was all par for the course. She wrote then that she didn’t want them in the room for most of the birth, maybe just at the end, and that suited Harry fine. “Is there blood?” he’d asked Ron once, more out of curiosity than squeamishness. “With Quotie births there’s a lot of blood and shit. What?” he said at Ron’s look. “They showed us this film in school….”

“Oh. There’s some. And amniotic fluid and, like, goo? I dunno, the healers cast cleaning spells as they go.”

“Huh.” They were having lunch in the Ministry canteen, just a few days before the Christmas holiday. “Voldemort wants them to be born on his birthday, so everyone forgets about his, but I told him I’d just use it as an excuse for a massive party for all of them.”

Ron grinned. “Just leave your house open for a week, we’ll come and go as we’d like.”

That was pretty much how Christmas already went – Harry and Voldemort had had everyone over for a few years now, when the Weasleys’ extended family had definitively outgrown the Burrow and nobody else had a home large enough. Most of the Order would drop by, and many of their friends, and some Ministry employees who needed to be on good terms with Voldemort. Harry had always insisted that a proper Christmas was chaos, and Voldemort made that happen for him – that Harry spent time with the Weasleys while Voldemort tended to cooking and cleaning and corralling the animals away. They were hosting again this year (“unless the twins are born first,” Molly insisted on his behalf, but really Harry would have loved to show off his babies at Christmas), and the house was nearly ready.

The babies didn’t come before Christmas. They passed Voldemort’s birthday as well (celebrated by a day trip into Geneva and then a night of Harry tying Voldemort up and making him come thrice), no babies. Miraz said January would be the real, serious due date, so.

And so it was. The 6th of January, when they were both still off on Christmas holiday, their floo whooshed open. “Harry?” Miraz’s boyfriend called into the house. “Voldemort?”

And Harry was running down the stairs, still in the sweats he slept in. “Suman? Is she alright?”

“Yes, she’s fine, they’re all fine. But it’s time.”

Oh thank god. “Kay. Vol?” he called into the house behind him.

Their connection tugged – Voldemort had been outside, and let himself in now, his cheeks flushed from the cold. “Ready to go?” Harry asked.

“Ah.” He appeared more composed than Harry felt, anyway. “Suman. It’s all going well?”

“Yes. She’s just been admitted.”

“She still doesn’t want us in the room?”

“No, she doesn’t.”

“A nod. “We’ll be in within the hour. Wish her well.”
“I will.” And Suman stepped back into the floo, and when he was gone, Harry was laughing, full of nervous energy.

“Go get changed, and bring down my cloak. I’ll get our bags.”

“Where did you leave that gift bag?”

“In the dining room. I will bring it.”

“Okay.” But before he’d sprint up the stairs, he stepped in close to Voldemort, kissing him. “Hey,” he said. “I’m so excited.”

“As am I.” Another kiss, and they went.

They took the floo into the physician’s office, where a healer greeted them and made them wait. “No troubles,” she said. “She’ll ask for you when she’s ready.”

“Sure. Thank you.”

They sank into adjacent seats.

It was typical to have silencing charms around medical rooms, for confidentiality. They waited. Harry paced and Voldemort did too, as collected as he usually was. They split a chocolate bar, and Harry chewed his nails, and finally Voldemort pulled a book from his bag. “Let me read to you.”

It was perfect, it always settled and distracted them both. The book was Agatha Christie, something Harry had picked up recently for them to read together. (Voldemort had said it was too modern for his tastes and Harry told him to stop being a pretentious twit.) Voldemort read and Harry listened, his fist pressed to his mouth so he might covertly suck his thumb. Their heartbeat slowed.

And some stretch of time later, the exam room door creaked open and Harry’s heart leapt into his mouth. The primary physician motioned them up. “They’re all doing well. We’ve just cleaned up. Come in.”

Harry thought he was already crying before he even saw them. Miraz was in bed, a glowing purple starburst pattern on her stomach where the babies had been delivered. She held one child, and a healer held the other. “It was perfect,” Miraz promised them as they entered.

“They’re perfect,” Harry breathed. The healer was nearer, and he took the tiny, tiny bundle into his arms. His baby blinked up at him, brown eyes framed by dark lashes.

“She is the younger one,” the healer said to Harry. “Younger by a half hour.”

“We’ve got twins,” Harry was laughing, breathless and amazed. He looked up to see Voldemort carefully take the other twin out of Miraz’s arms.

“Thank you,” he said to her. “Thank you.”

Miraz only laughed. “I thought I’d burst, since New Year’s. You’re very welcome.”

So Harry and Voldemort drew together, holding the babies close. They weren’t identical: the older one had darker features, nearly black eyes and wisps of black hair where her younger sister had brown eyes and no hair at all. The healers were saying something to Miraz and Suman, and they were casting careful spells on her, but for a moment Harry’s entire world narrowed to their children.
To his family. “We did it,” he breathed.

“Congratulations, Daddy.” Voldemort’s tone held a mischievous lilt, making Harry snort. Maybe he couldn’t demand Voldemort call him that during sex anymore. Or maybe he could. “This one is Cybele,” Voldemort added, offering his finger to their older daughter’s tiny hand. She grasped at it.


Cybele Veronike, and Phaedra Hippolyta. Named for two mythical queens. All Greek, because Harry liked the sound of Greek names and Voldemort said Greek runes took to protective magic well. Harry swirled his finger through Cybele’s wisps of hair, making it fall over her forehead. His heart was so full.

They spent a couple hours longer there – there was surrogacy paperwork to be signed, by them and by Miraz; and there was citizenship paperwork since their daughters had been born abroad; and there were typical birth certificates. Miraz would breastfeed them both, and pump for them after. (“What else am I supposed to do with these tits?” she’d said, laughing.)

In addition to bureaucracy, there was also magic to be taken care of soon. A ritual of adoption would splice their magic with their daughters’, making it as good as genetic. If they weren’t born with Parseltongue (and of course it was too early to tell, but both of them at least seemed responsive to it, and it’d been all they’d spoken in the delivery room), they might inherit it now. The ritual of adoption would make blood magic and soul magic between them simpler. It would ideally be performed in the first month. They’d contact the priestess tomorrow.

It was late in the evening when they could go. They each got a warm embrace from Miraz. “Congratulations,” she murmured. “I’d say I’ll see you tomorrow, but I’ll probably send Suman,” she said, flashing him a grin.


“Go spend time with your babies. I’ve had them to myself for long enough.”

Both girls were asleep in carriers by now. Harry slung their bags over his shoulder, then hesitated. “The floo….”

“Is the recommended way to get home,” one of the healers said. “Apparition and portkeys can jostle your insides a lot, yeah?”

“Yeah.” But he cast a bubblehead charm around each carrier, so they wouldn’t inhale anything. He picked up Cybele, and Voldemort took Phaedra, and they let themselves out.

It was… amazing. After all this waiting – three years since looking at adoption, a decade since first discussing a family together, and nearly his entire life of wishing for a real family of his own. Voldemort let him into the floo first, and they brought their daughters home.

They spent that first night in the nursery. There was a sofa in there anyway, and they both ended up stretched along it, undressed to feel the perfectly soft babies’ skin on their chests.

Voldemort ran a hand through Harry’s hair, leaving it a mess. “I love you,” he said – tentative, because it was in English, and such things felt so much more stark in English than Parseltongue. But they needed to speak English at home for the sake of language acquisition now, so Voldemort tried it out. “I love you,” he said again. “I never thought I’d be… here.”
"Here?" Harry’s tone was teasing.

“I never thought of anything to do with domesticity before you.” He attempted to make it sound like an accusation, and failed. “I never thought I could be a father.”

Could be, not would be. Harry rolled over just enough to kiss him. “You’ll be brilliant at it.”

“You cannot let me ruin them.”

“Sweetheart. No.” Kiss. “You’ll be brilliant.” Kiss. “When have you ever not been brilliant at everything?”

A soft laugh, and Voldemort ran his fingers through Harry’s hair again. “I will get their bottles,” he said, handing Phaedra to Harry.

“Thanks.” But in the dim quiet, the way Voldemort’s magic had settled Harry’s own, the warm weight of his daughters on his chest – his breathing slowed.

When Voldemort returned, he said, “Harry, go to bed,” as he scooped Phaedra off his chest, and she whimpered.

“No – here – “ He reached for the other bottle, sitting up so he could position Cybele right. (They were both practiced with bottles and nappies, at least, from ageplay, which might have to be shelved as long as they were doing all this for real. They both expected to be too busy and exhausted for sex for a very long time, anyway.) But he’d jostled her too much awake, and now she was crying, and he couldn’t get her mouth to close around the bottle. “Hey – hey – just take it – there you go.” Beside him, Voldemort was doing much better, as usual. They slept on that sofa that night, stirring every hour or so, and Harry was so, so happy.

They had no intention of telling the press anything about their girls. They only took them to the Burrow and Ron and Hermione’s in those next few weeks, never properly in public, so they couldn’t get photos. They strengthened the estate’s outer wards so unwanted guests couldn’t get within a mile (including a half-mile up, as Voldemort consulted the laws about warding private airspace). They were both committed to giving the girls as near to a normal childhood as was possible.

But, well, every paper that had a politics section had a reporter exclusively for the Wizengamot, and when Voldemort didn’t come to the first session of the new year, they drew their own conclusions. Harry had to not read the papers for a few days, and Voldemort read them with gritted teeth, and it was all speculation but that they would write about newborns…. “Maybe it was too much to expect they could be normal,” Harry muttered, looking over Voldemort’s shoulder at a Prophet article that mined both of their family trees for potential baby names. (Oh, they were so wrong, and that was satisfying at least.)

“They will be normal.” Voldemort was setting aside the Panopticon, picking up a blanket to go give the girls a bottle. “But they’ll need to know, why the world will find them so fascinating.”

“I know.” Harry took the warmed bottles off the stove. They would both start preschool at age 2, and it may be the first time Cybele and Phaedra Gaunt-Potter were formally introduced as such. (“Gaunt-Potter. Potter-Gaunt,” Harry had dithered over the birth certificates, even though they’d discussed it before.

“My family name outranks yours exponentially. It would be a scandal to do it backwards.”
“Fuck pureblood hierarchies.”

“Not in front of our children, please.”

Harry leaned over Cybele, fast asleep in her carrier by now. In his sweetest voice he whispered to her, “Fuck pureblood hierarchies.” The slightest stir. “Good girl.”

At least he’d been able to dissuade Voldemort from giving them the surname Slytherin. That would have caused scandals, more than it was worth. So, Gaunt-Potter it was.)

They’d talked about it, what to tell the girls about them, because god knows the world would tell them if Harry and Voldemort didn’t do it first. Of course they had a couple years, but what would a 2 year old know of a war and a prophecy anyway? They’d say nothing to scare them and nothing that implied Harry and Voldemort’s relationship was anything but good.

(Harry had mentioned it once at Ron and Hermione’s, when Ginny and Neville were also over, and the four of them just looked awkward. “Think that’s a you problem, mate,” Ron had said.

“If there’s not a picture book about you yet, there will be,” Neville had added.

“God,” Harry had sighed.)

Otherwise their life unfolds as expected for babies. They survive healers’ visits and sniffles and having to brew replacement formula when Phaedra reacts badly to the sort they have. A couple weeks in, Moira is allowed into the nursery, and the way she flutters at the bars of the cribs makes Harry’s heart melt. They survive the first day when Voldemort and Harry both need to be at the Ministry and they leave the girls with Molly, who already adores them and promises they will be perfect. They survive months of sleep deprivation and the stupid fights this starts.

The adoption ritual is done in their home – it’s simpler to bring the priestess here than to get the girls into the Ministry. Voldemort sets a space with fresh flowers and focusing crystals. It is blood magic, and both girls cry when their tiny fingers are pricked, and nothing quiets them until Voldemort is murmuring in low Parseltongue, and they are immediately captivated. Their magic curls around one another’s.

They are “introduced” to Leo a few months in, though honestly it’s just a time for the trio to get together while their babies sleep in proximity to each other. The Hogwarts cohort sees one another much less often these days, and Harry regrets it. But Hermione finds out that Padma is pregnant and due in April and then they tell her that her baby has to come to their playdates when she’s up to it. Ron and Hermione’s older two spend a lot of time at friends’ houses in these months – if nothing else, they both have portkeys that deliver them right to Bill and Fleur’s cottage – because there are too many babies right now, and honestly Harry sees their point.

And because he’s their godfather, he takes Max and Portia out one afternoon, leaving Cybele and Phaedra with Voldemort. They go to an indoor playground with a magic obstacle course (and god, Harry is only 28 but desk life has taken a toll on his fitness) and then to Florian’s ice cream parlor. They don’t talk about the babies at all. They talk about how Max is writing and directing a play (“About birds,” he said. – “What about them?” – “Just about all of them,” he said, throwing his hands wide) and how Portia has three best friends at school, and she can’t decide among them. And Harry’s smiling the entire time, because he loves his godchildren like crazy but also because he can’t wait to see what sort of people Cybele and Phaedra will be, with thoughts and dreams to put into the world.

He comes home and Voldemort tells him that the day alone was fine, that the girls both had time on
the floor and soft toys and a nap, and they should probably eat soon, so they both take a bottle up. And Harry tells Voldemort about their day, how much he loves the vibrant chaos of having kids around even as he’s exhausted and already a bit sore. “They’re going to be brilliant,” he says. “And they’re going to be hilarious. Right, Q?” He holds Cybele up, she dribbles formula down her chin. “Right.” He wipes her face off with the corner of his own shirt, and it doesn’t even phase him anymore.

Voldemort watches in some amusement. “Where did you even learn all of this?”

He doesn’t mean the practical parts of taking care of a baby. That came from looking after Ron and Hermione’s kids, and the library of childcare books they now own. He means something… softer. Where did he learn patience, and good humor, and love.

He’s wondered that himself, sometimes. The Dursleys were not his model for a family. The Weasleys probably came nearest, but he only knew bits of their home life together. Ron and Hermione and Neville all seemed to struggle variously – especially with kids now old enough to deliberately try their patience. That had been educational.

He and Voldemort are both particularly aware that they’re parenting contra their own childhoods. It is going to hurt, sometimes. They’re trying not to hurt one another. “I learned it from you,” he says, honestly.

Voldemort sighs. “Harry…. “

“Really. I did. No one’s loved me like this before, either.” Voldemort is patient with him. He’s gentle and thoughtful and he tries so hard, and it’s just…. Harry is so in love with him. With their arms full of babies, they can’t kiss properly, but Harry leans in to press a kiss to Voldemort’s angular shoulder. “It was you,” he says. “It was always you.”

Chapter End Notes

There was a movement during the Unification to drop the word Muggle as patronizing, so that’s why now they say Quotidian, or Quotie for short.

Hermione makes reference to both the honey badger video, and to the children’s book A Is for Activist. Both of these were released in 2012, but those scenes are set in 2008, so – uh, AU, I guess.

Cybele is called Q at the end because her name is pronounced Koo-BELL-eh (in Greek it’s Κυβέλη, we just Anglicized it in a terrible way) and the first syllable is enough like Q that it sticks. It’s how she’ll normally be referred to throughout this series.
Crack, beautiful crack. This takes place during the previous chapter but deserved to be set apart as its own thing.

Their surrogate was three months pregnant, and Bill and Fleur had recently passed on their baby name books to Harry. He’d only been paging through them idly one evening, but when Voldemort found him on the library sofa, he joined him. “Anything you like?”

“Mm. Maybe.” He handed a book to Voldemort, then summoned parchment and a quill.

The first rule was that they couldn’t name the baby after anyone they knew. It was too fraught, and the newspapers would make too much of it as a political statement. Harry’s family tree hung framed on the wall opposite – they were all out. (Which honestly was no great loss. Fleamont, what the christ.) Any tributes to anyone who’d died was out. Neutral names only.

The second rule was no Roman names. “I don’t want people to think our kids are from that sort of family,” Harry said.

“The purebloods use Roman names because it’s among the earliest known wixie settlements. It’s historical.”

“I don’t care. They all sound insufferable anyway. And rule 3,” Harry pointed the quill at him. “No astronomy names.” He was eyeing the Black lineage on the family tree. “As we are not that sort of family either.” A sigh of acquiescence. They each flipped open their books.

“Beatrice,” Harry began.

“Bellatrix.”

“… Oh yeah, I guess.”

“Cyrus.”

“No.”

“Cyrus was a great king,” Voldemort said. “He freed all the slaves of his empire and arguably created the concept of human rights. You should love him.”

“Too much like Sirius.”

“Fine. Druscilla.”

“Sounds like a Death Eater name.”
Voldemort’s eyebrows arched. “And what does a Death Eater name sound like?”

“Like that. Just… malevolent.”

“Aurelius Rosier? She was supportive, but never properly involved.”

“No.” Taking up his quill, he penned too evil beside Druscilla. Voldemort accepted it. “What about… Chelsea?”

“A Muggle name.”

“And what’s a Muggle name sound like?” Harry inquired. He didn’t expect Voldemort to like anything too common, though. Fine. “Ezra.”

“Is a boy’s name.”

He hadn’t known that but it didn’t matter, as it was too early to know the child’s gender yet anyway. “Ezra for a boy.”

“And it’s quite Jewish. Unless we’re raising our children Jewish?”

“We’re not. You?”

“Bartholomew.”

Harry made a face. “Crouch.”

“He was named Bartemius.”

“Somehow that’s even worse. No.”

“Eris,” Voldemort offered.

“… The goddess of discord?”

“Yes.”

“That really seems to be setting us up for failure. Another self-fulfilling prophecy,” Harry said. “Don’t suggest Pandora either.”

“That is a beautiful and complex myth.”

“Yeah, well. Ask the snakes if they want the discard names. It’s not going on a baby, anyway.”

Voldemort tugged a lock of his hair in amusement. “Kermit,” he said.

Harry snorted. “There’s this frog… well, I’ll show you later. But no. Leda.”

“No. Raped by a swan.”

“Oh….”

“So we can’t name the baby Lucretia or Sabina either. What about Hippolyta?”

“What the fuck.”

Voldemort actually looked offended. “She was the queen of the Amazons. A worthy role model.”
“And then everyone calls our daughter Hippo.”

“Fine. Lazarus.”

“The dead one?”

“The resurrected one.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Harry said fondly.

“Leonidas. Leo, for your common Muggle name.”

“Ah…” He’d actually like it, but – “Ron and Hermione are naming their baby Leopold. They just mentioned it last week.” Ron was pregnant with their third child, but publicly they’d only called the baby Meatloaf up to this point, after his most persistent craving. “So Leo’s taken.”

“And how far along is it?”

“Seven months now, I think.”

“Then they’ll be in the same year.”

“Yeah,” Harry smiled. “But really, they’d better be best friends since birth. I’ll be crushed otherwise.”

“I know you would.” He flipped a page in the baby book. “Morgana.”

“No. No dark magic.”

“Is that all you know of her?”

“Isn’t that enough? Anyway, people will already – talk.” Will already accuse our children of being evil. “It was bad enough when they thought I was the heir of Slytherin, and I was twelve and just, uh, soft.”

“Not sufficiently evil,” Voldemort agreed easily.

“Yeah.”

The fingers scrubbing the back of Harry’s neck felt almost patronizing. “Margeaux?”

“Ugh,” Harry protested. “I’ve told you about Aunt Marge before. The one with the dogs? Also,” he squinted at the page, “French is ridiculous.”

“It is an elegant language, and magically complex. And that wasn’t what you had said in France last month.”

Harry copped to that with a grin. They’d only had a long weekend in Lyon, and while Harry learned enough French to say good morning to the lesbian couple who ran their bed and breakfast, and thank you to the local vendors and servers, Voldemort’s French actually got them into some historical sites of wixen France. And every time Harry would swoon, and Voldemort would make fun of him, and then they’d get back to the b&b late in the afternoon to shag before dinner. Anyway.

“Nicodemus,” Voldemort offered, flipping the page.

He smiled. They’d gone to Greece twice now, and Harry was really rather fond of it. But he shook
his head. “Neville’s son is named Nicholas,” he said. “They even call him Nico.”

“… Have you mentioned him before?” Voldemort’s brow furrowed.

“Mm, maybe not. He’s Portia’s age.” Ron and Hermione’s second child, just turning four now. “But much quieter.”

“Are there other of your friends who have procreated whom you haven’t mentioned?”

Harry poked him in the ribs. But in spite of the dismissive phrasing, it was a sincere question. Voldemort did try, even if some parts of Harry’s life would never be entirely accessible to him. “No. That’s it. Everyone’s started to talk about it, though.” Harry’s year was now twenty-eight, and had spent their twenties on – well, frivolous things, but also post-war things. It had been good for them. “Oh, and Neville and Otto adopted. No procreation on their part,” he added. Then, nodding to the book: “I do like the sound of Greek names. And they’re uncommon enough for you. Phaedrus,” he mused as it caught his eye on the page.

“Phaedra, for a girl.”

“Yeah. Maybe.” He wrote them on the parchment before him. “So that’s… one.”

“Ophelia,” Voldemort offered.

Harry sighed. “And we were doing so well.”

“It is Greek.”

“And apart from the dead teenager,” (he’d read Hamlet a few years back and quite liked it) “how many Oh feel ya jokes would she get before she snapped?”

“Not many, I’d hope.”

“The Prophet would use it as a headline the first time they caught her dating, and you know it.” He flipped through the book in his lap. “Sebastian?”

Voldemort winced. “I once had a horrific acquaintance by that name. I’d rather not talk about it.”

“…”

“…”


“Tiberius,” Voldemort said. “Ty, to you.”

“I cannot imagine a baby named Tiberius.”

“He’d grow into it.”

“And it sounds Latin, anyway.”

“It is,” Voldemort said with a sigh. “I apologize.”

“I forgive you. Violet.”

“The runes for common English names are terrible. Quite difficult to work with. Here.” He was
flipping through an appendix, finding a base shape for English names, sketching it out. “The phonemes practically overlap, it’s such an unpleasant shape.” And he had drawn a semi-circle with squiggles coming out of one end. “Do you want to name your child that?”

“When would it ever matter?” Harry asked, mystified.

“This child is going to have as many protective wards on it as I can legally justify, and perhaps a few more than that.”

Harry sighed. “Yeah, we should – worry about that. Later. Not tonight.” Voldemort was essentially accepted by now – he served as First Peer in the Wizengamot legislative chamber, and expected to become Vice Chancellor imminently; and among the tabloids, they were both written about in tones of intrigue and cheekiness instead of terror. But it was still plausible someone would try to do them harm through their children.

“The ritual of public acknowledgment will create conduits of our magic, anyway.”

He’d mentioned it before – ritual magic of adoption, to make the child theirs magically, as good as biologically but for their appearance. The surrogate parents were both Parselmouths, but if the baby wasn’t already, Voldemort thought it might inherit it from them through the ritual.

“You’re going to have to be the cool, permissive parent,” Harry said with a smile. “Because I’m going to worry over them. And if they are Parselmouths, you can’t tell them they can break into anywhere in Hogwarts with it. God, if there were another way to get into more trouble, I would’ve…."

“And your delightful map and cloak?”

“Are staying here,” Harry said firmly. “If they want to be out after curfew, they can get good at sneaking around like everyone else.” At Voldemort’s look, he shrugged. “I really can’t imagine them being great at following rules. I’m just being realistic.”

Voldemort ran his fingers through the back of Harry’s hair, immensely amused. “Veronica,” he suggested.

“Mm. Maybe. It’s not very soft.”

“No, it’s not,” he said in satisfaction. “There is a Greek version as well. Veronike. Virginia?”

“Nope. Ginny.”

“… You do know that’s not her name?”

“Yeah, but do you know how long she let me think it was? I think I was in fourth year before I heard about Ginevra. Anyway, the papers will assume, and whatever they’d write about me apparently naming our baby after my ex…."

“I suppose Guinevere is also out, then.”

“It was really never in.” He flipped a page; they were nearly to the end, with one name to show for it. “Willow?”

“Another English name.”

“Probably best not to name her for the Whomping Willow anyway. Wisteria? Winter? We could call
her Winnie. Oh.” He’d flipped to the page of X names. “Xander. Xiomara. These are heroes’ names.”

“These are names of troublemakers,” Voldemort said.

“Well.”

Voldemort flipped to the very end. “More troublemakers,” he gestured at all the plucky Z names. “Zacchaeus?”

“Is Zachary not pretentious enough?”

“Clearly not. Zenobia?”

“Zena for short?”

“If you’d like.”


“… Godzilla.”

“Is not particularly well known among wixies.”

“Then the newmage kids will tease her.” He looked down at the book, the final page. “Zora?” he offered half-heartedly.

“Mm.”

Harry dropped his head to Voldemort’s shoulder, glancing at their list of precisely one name. “Well, then we’ve got baby Phaedrus and or Phaedra waiting.”

“And or?” Voldemort said, amused.

“Could be twins.”

It was late by now, and they were slow to move. Harry pressed a kiss to Voldemort’s neck, then moved his mouth to Voldemort’s ear. In his most seductive voice he murmured, “Let’s name the baby Albus.”

Voldemort nearly shuddered. “Why.”

He made his eyes wide and innocent. “He’s been so important to us both. Albus Severus,” he amended. “Same reason.”

“Get the hell off me,” Voldemort said. And laughing, Harry stole a kiss before darting out of the library, Voldemort’s hexes exploding harmlessly behind him.
Comprehensive education now starts in the wixen world at the age of 2. Magical parents are expected to enroll their children, and parents of newmage children (they’d phased out the term Muggleborn, half because they didn’t say Muggle any longer and half because it made no sense, that they’d been born magic anyway) would be sought out and have their toddler’s peculiarities explained to them. Preschool was nominally optional, but there was quite a lot of messaging about giving children a solid foundation, and respecting the place of magic in their lives early on, and building relationships with the children who’d be their cohort for the next 16 years. Early education had opened in 2003, and now, in 2011, the estimate was that about 70% of all magical children were enrolled full- or part-time. The legislation was Voldemort’s, and what he was proudest of. So of course their daughters were going to school.

It would be good for them anyway. They were both rather quiet – though maybe that was only in contrast to Ron and Hermione’s son Leo, who was as bossy as a young Hermione; or Padma’s daughter Madhuri, who sang and danced every sentiment she could. Cybele, now called Q pretty exclusively, was blunt and active, and she spent more time with the snakes than with people. (Of course it was always with Voldemort, and he kept the venomous sort away from her, but she’d happily babble Parseltongue at them for hours.) Phaedra loved paint and glitter and lace and listening to the music Harry would put on in the sitting room, any of the local Quotidian radio stations their house could pick up.

The girls were two and half when they would start school – there was a summer session beginning in June, and Padma said Madhuri would be there too. And just as much, Harry wanted their daughters to befriend newmage kids, the ones who wouldn’t know one another, and whose parents wouldn’t know one another. When he said this to Voldemort, he got a small shrug in response. “We’ve enrolled the newmage students young enough as to avoid disparity, I believe.”

“They’ll know they’re different.”

“They are two. They have only ever known magic.” He took in Harry’s expression, sighing. “The girls will befriend a great number of students. We’ll be sure to invite the newmage parents over, sometime.”

“Thank you.”

And then what to tell their daughters themselves? “If anyone asks you about Papa and Abba,” (Harry and Voldemort respectively. ‘Abba’ had come out of baby babbles but Voldemort was quite fond of it, so it stuck) “get your teacher. Don’t talk to adults you don’t know. Be good to everyone. Try to have fun.”

They both anticipated school would be a hard time for their quiet introverts. Try to have fun was probably the best they’d do, some days. They were at an age where – well, it had been proper separation anxiety in Leo recently, but in both Q and Phaedra it was something more like territorialism, and it was exhausting and it had made play dates hard. So maybe neutral ground would
make it easier for them to make friends, or something.

So when Harry got home from work that day to hear a bloody *production* of a temper tantrum upstairs, he winced. Voldemort had worked from home and been the one to drop them off and pick them up, so Harry went to find him first.

Into the upstairs office, where Voldemort was working at one side of the desk and Phaedra was fingerpainting at the other side, with Moira snuggled into the chair beside her. Harry’s heart melted. “Hey, baby,” he said to Phaedra, kissing her forehead and giving Moira a good pat. “Hey, baby,” he said with a grin to Voldemort, circling the desk to kiss him as well. To Phaedra: “Did you like school?”

She puckered her mouth thoughtfully, shrugged, and smeared a line of orange paint down Moira’s back.

“Phae!” Before either of them would clean it up, Harry said to her very firmly, “Apologize to Moira.”


Then a look at Voldemort. “You didn’t want to… handle Q?”

“We were waiting for you.”

“Oh god, why.” This didn’t feel like the times Voldemort couldn’t handle. It wasn’t that Harry was the disciplinarian, but that there had been a few times, the most *infuriating* times, when Voldemort had abruptly excused himself before his magic ruptured. They hadn’t exactly talked about it. But this didn’t seem so charged, and their magic wasn’t tense or angry or dangerous.

But Voldemort got up, motioning Harry down the corridor. They paused outside the door, to hear crying and intermittent crashing noises. It sounded bad, and Harry’s heart hurt on his daughter’s behalf. “What happened?”

“No. Listen.”

He listened. It took a few iterations of the crashing noise to get it – Q was throwing the same thing at the wall *over and over*, and it was repaired each time.

Magic. She had magic.

They expected it – her birth parents were both wixes, and Harry and Voldemort of course, but still, anything could happen. So Harry was grinning by now, and the tantrum didn’t seem so awful anymore. He knocked, and the noises stopped. “Q? Can we come in?”

“Papa.” A sniffle. He took it as a yes.

Q’s face was tear-stained, and she was sitting in the middle of the floor, clutching a porcelain-faced doll. (Secretly Harry could see why she’d chosen that one to break, because it wasn’t at all her sort of toy.) The doll’s face was perfect.

Voldemort couldn’t always sit on the floor – his hip was a chronic pain, with good days and bad days – so instead Harry scooped Q up and they all sat on her bed. Q slumped back against Voldemort, half-burying her face into his robes, and he stroked her hair. “So school…” Harry tried inadequately.
“No. I won’t.” Sniffle.

“You’ll learn to like it, I bet. You’ll make loads of friends.”

Q gave him a distrustful look. “I don’t want friends.”

“Yes, you do. You will.”

Voldemort made a tiny noise, and said much more carefully, “Why won’t you go?”

“All of – “ A wave of her tiny hands. Sniffle. “All of it.”

Oh. That was fair. Q was overwhelmed by sensory overload easier than Phaedra was. Harry didn’t know what to do about that. And Voldemort didn’t either, by his expression. “I’m sorry, Cybele;” he murmured. “We will help. But for now – can we see what you were doing with the doll?” Q’s gaze flitted down to it, back up to Voldemort’s face.

“You won’t be in trouble,” Harry promised, trying not to smile.

Q lifted her arm and hurled the doll. The porcelain shattered against the wall, leaving a powdery scuff. Then she kept her hand out, and after a long moment – the porcelain snapped back together and the doll was levitated back into her grasp.

She wouldn’t understand any real reaction from them. She didn’t yet know that some people couldn’t do magic. But both Harry and Voldemort were smiling. “Do you know what that is, Q?” Voldemort asked her. “That is magic. You are magic. And we are so proud.”

Her face wavered, breaking into a tentative smile. “Yeah,” she said, looking down at her doll. “Magic.”

“We should celebrate tonight,” Harry offered. “Should we have dinner outside?”

“With Shasha?”

“If she wants to,” Voldemort said, and Harry shot a questioning look over Q’s head. “Shasha is the emerald tree boa. She finally consented to be named.” Q was scooting off her bed, about to run out. “You know you aren’t allowed in the cellar alone,” Voldemort said to her. So he was getting up too, moving to scoop Q to his chest. Looking to Harry: “I assume the study and the dog are both covered in paint by now.”

“I’ll get them,” Harry sighed. “But we may all need baths before dinner.”

And indeed, the study was coated in orange and fuchsia paint. “You’ve got a good eye,” Harry muttered. “And Moira – poor baby – you’re so, so patient.” He scourgified the dog again because that was just their life now. And Voldemort had hung shield charms around anything important, so Harry was mopping paint off the shields more than anything.

But Phaedra had one last cup of paint in her hand. “Papa, look.”

“Phae – please put it down – “ But Phaedra had put an expensive ink bottle in the middle of a sheet of paper, and dumped the paint over the top. It ran down the semi-circular shield and she swirled it, leaving fractal patterns along the page.

And Harry just stared. “You are a genius,” he said, forgetting to be angry. He’d ask Voldemort what other magic could make art. Or Phaedra would find them out herself. He cleaned off the shield and
lifted the ink bottle, leaving a spatter of paint with a clean circle in the center of the page. “You like that?” he said, drying the page with a spell.

“Guess!”

“It looks like a monster, with an open mouth.” He twisted the page. “Or like this, it’s a flower. What do you see?”

“Kitty!”

It was decidedly not a kitty. He grinned and handed her her artwork. “You need to wash up,” he said. “We’re eating outside tonight.”

“Moira,” Phaedra said, stretching her orange-fuchsia hands to the dog, who fluttered to her obediently. Both their daughters did better with animals than humans. He’d have to ask Hagrid to take them out to Hogwarts’s paddocks when they were a bit older, Harry thought.

And it is art that uncovers Phaedra’s own magic. A few months later, in the gap between the summer and autumn sessions, Harry and Voldemort are both home from work early, and they’re all in the sitting room – Harry’s got the radio on as he and Phaedra paint, and Voldemort is watching Q show a sleepy yellow ball python (Effie, she’s named this one, who consented to it with more enthusiasm than most snakes) all of her toys. “Eat this one,” Q said, holding out a red and gold bear.

(“Don’t try to sway her to Gryffindor,” Voldemort had said when Harry brought it home.

“It’s from Ron, take it up with him. Anyway, they’d be brilliant Gryffindors.”)

And Effie of course would not eat the bear but she put on a great display, squeezing and writhing and everyone was watching the drama –

_Bang_!

A pot of paint exploded, and Phaedra shrieked with laughter. _Pop, pop, pop!_ Three more, and it doesn’t exactly go _everywhere_ but each paint sort of arcs into a stream onto her canvas. She splashes her hand into the puddle and it goes iridescent.

Harry and Voldemort had both seen it. Phaedra was looking around by now, at both of them. “Uh-oh?”

Voldemort had his hands pressed together before his face, more delighted than he can show her. “Phaedra,” he said, “that was magic. Do you know that?”

She grinned, probably relieved she’s not in trouble, and when she pushed her dark hair off her face it left another streak of iridescent paint along her cheek. “Magic,” she agreed happily.

“Are you going to clean this up?”

“Nuh-uh.” But she picked up her sheet of paper, bringing the shimmery handprint to Voldemort. “Abba,” she said. “Magic.”

And he took it carefully, casting charms to dry and preserve it. “Thank you,” he said seriously. They would hang it in the girls’ bedroom for a very long time after that.
(Abba is Hebrew/Aramaic for daddy. Pronounced ah-ba, and definitely not like the Swedish pop band.)
Throughout everything, Voldemort personally oversees as much of the Unification as he would get away with. The educational system is his, including some curriculum standards and some hiring practices. Trade is his in part, some legislation about the regulation of consumer goods and sales tax and price equivalency. He writes laws about civil rights (which get quite snide remarks from some papers, but Voldemort has positioned himself as a non-pureblood so thoroughly these days that many people think nothing of it).

Even if he doesn’t coin the new language himself, he adopts it early in his letters to the papers and his public addresses: Muggles are now Quotidians, a fancy word to mean ordinary, which suits everyone; Quotie for short. Language of ‘blood’ was now completely identified with supremacy and bigotry; they now spoke of oldmages, mixmages, and newmages when they actually needed to make a distinction. Harry’s department, the Muggle Liaison Office, had been rebranded as the Department of Inter-World Relations as soon as he took it over in 2006.

And it probably helps a lot, that the DIWR chair and the Wizengamot standing member most affiliated with the Unification are married. It’s much more efficient. Anyway, sometimes Harry still comes to business dinners with politicians and diplomats to soften Voldemort’s presence, even years into his re-introduction into polite society. It’s fine, and Harry doesn’t have to cook those nights, so he’s happy to do it.

In 2006, when they find that the Unification has financially stabilized, Voldemort is made First Peer of the legislative chamber – 3rd in succession, just beneath the Vice Chancellor. Scrimgeour is still Minister, and he and Voldemort have approximately the same sensibilities about politics, of ripping off the bandages of conservative sentimentality, to give the world something new. The Wizengamot is not altogether pleased with this, or with their alliance at all. But in 2008, the Vice Chancellor has to abruptly resign when his son, whom he got a very nice job in the wixie stock exchange, was found to have embezzled about thirty thousand Galleons. Voldemort steps into the role of Vice Chancellor seamlessly, less because the Chancellor wants him there (it’s still Apollo Bright, a cold and severe man who’s quite indebted to pureblood tradition) and more because Voldemort is enmeshed with every bit of legislation. He said early on that he would make himself too valuable to ever discard, and it seems that he has.

Voldemort has to court Bright like he used to court Death Eaters, flattering their pureblood sentiments and the rest of it. And he has to do this quietly, because his public image is that of a revolutionary, hardly a traditionalist. When Q and Phaedra are born the following year, Harry will often find Voldemort up with one of them late at night, with a bottle and a dictation quill, for public statements that will satisfy the traditionalists and revolutionaries alike.

But in 2011, Scrimgeour comes to Voldemort first to say he intends to retire soon. And Voldemort says that’s fine, and Scrimgeour says he wasn’t asking his permission. “No,” Voldemort agrees, “but it’s fine nonetheless.”

The Minister is elected by the Wizengamot, who sequesters itself and votes on a successor until they reach a quorum. It doesn’t have to be from the top of the Wizengamot itself – really, it could be anyone at all, which is how Scrimgeour was taken out of the Aurors’ department – but it typically is. There is no way in hell Bright is giving up the Chancellorship anytime soon, doubly so when he also
hears of Scrimgeour’s retirement. So Voldemort is working at a disadvantage, campaigning as Vice Chancellor. But he cannot wait through another Minister, as they sometimes stay on for decades, so – it must be now.

He begins with Hermione.

Hermione is the youngest member of the Wizengamot, at the age of 31. She is a standing member of the judicial chamber, most often working on wrongful convictions, and Harry is so, so proud of her. She and Amelia Bones got the rest of the Death Eaters out of house arrest, and they have been generally quiet. So. Voldemort tells Harry the night before that Hermione is coming here for lunch tomorrow, while Harry is at work and can do nothing about it. They get along, tenuously, but Harry doesn’t expect Hermione’s political support. “She’ll want Amelia,” he says. “Or Griselda Marchbanks. They’re both, uh, progressive enough for her.”

“Amelia has said she’ll die as Prime Justice, she got no interest in leaving the position. Griselda doesn’t have the sort of experience the Wizengamot will vote for.” They’re making dinner together; Voldemort hands Harry broccoli to roast as he puts on the pasta sauce. “Ms. Granger and I will be fine,” he says at Harry’s still-skeptical look.

“Okay. Good luck.”

As usual, neither Voldemort nor Hermione will tell Harry what they discuss. Hermione says brightly that their twins were very well-behaved, playing nearby as they spoke, but some people may not think well of having a snake as a secondary babysitter. (“Which snake?” Harry asks. – Hermione’s face contorts. “How many snakes do you keep in the house?” – “Well, they’re not typically allowed in the house. Only on special occasions.” – “This one was green.” – “Oh. That’s Shasha.” – “Of course,” Hermione says faintly.)

There are fifty-one voting members in the Wizengamot. Voldemort has notes on all of them. The wixen world hasn’t got political parties as such, but coalitions around divisive issues: the place of tradition, the incorporation of Quotidian and newmage culture, the openness of international borders, the use of taxes. Voldemort is certain he can persuade the necessary two-thirds of the voting body that he would be best for them.

Andromeda ends up being his best ally.

There is talk that she’ll be a fine Minister as well – she appeals to the oldmage and mixmage families both, she’s drafted a lot of Unification policies, she is elegant and charismatic. “She is young,” Voldemort says quite reasonably when Harry mentions it one night. “Not yet 60. The youngest Minister ever, Ignatius Tuft, was 49 when he took office and that was only because he rode in his mother’s coattails. The average age of the Wizengamot is somewhere around 100. They will not submit to someone so young. Andromeda will wait.”

She seems to think the same herself – sometimes Harry goes to visit her and Ted, and she laughs off the hearsay. But she does know who is actually being considered – Taz Swinton, the Deputy of Justice; Abbigail Zeal, the Minister of Finance; Gawain Robards, still serving as the head of the DMLE; and for some fucking reason, Ludo Bagman, who was back in the country and apparently on the goblins’ good side again, and who served as the Minister of Sport and Game once more.

“Can I tell him?” Harry asks, pulling Q’s mouth away from a pot of violets.

Andi laughs. “He knows. He knows all of it.”
“Are you two…?”

“We work well together,” she says easily. “He knows that he’s got my vote, if he wants it.”

“Thank you.” Truthfully Harry isn’t prepared for this sort of politicking, the gives and takes. Harry is used to speaking with the Quotidian politicians, who are still so impressed by magic that they’ll agree to things with relative ease. The oldmage ways… Harry can’t handle them. But Andromeda has been invaluable to both of them, filling in old ritual and culture and decorum they, as mixmages, had never known. Voldemort can’t quite promise her any cabinet position she’d like, there are a few too many checks and balances in place, but he will give her as much as he is able.

So everything is already well underway when Scrimgeour announces his retirement publicly. Immediately Harry and the DIWR are mobbed for comments, asking if Harry endorses his husband, if it’d be a good fit, if Voldemort is well enough to take on the role (whatever that means), if it’d be too detrimental to their children (whom the press has never properly seen, but that doesn’t stop them from asking). They ask if Harry’s going to stay home as a house husband – which is one step removed from the times when they used to call him Voldemort’s catamite – or if their romance has faltered. It’s all just stupid, but any reaction on his part gets painted as “Boy Who Lives on edge. Trouble in paradise?” And so on. Harry does not have a great relationship with the press.

On the twins’ 3rd birthday, January 2012, Harry brings a bottle of wine to the bedroom when the house is quiet. (Mal Foi wine, and it’s irritating that it’s actually fucking good. They are sent a case of it each Christmas, with a card only signed Regards, Draco Malfoy and Corvus Black, the locket’s pseudonym. So, they’re still together apparently.) Voldemort is reading a thick file, something about new taxes, after he’d taken the entire day off to spend with the girls. “Hey,” Harry says softly, crawling into bed.

“How decadent.” Voldemort catches the wine bottle and casts an uncorking spell; Harry holds out both glasses. “Libertine, even, to drink in bed. And after a day of eating mostly pie.” Both girls preferred it over cake, and Harry enjoys making pies more anyway.

“Mmhmm.” He takes a swallow, kisses Voldemort with wine-soaked lips before plunging in. “Now that the girls are older… I want to talk about another baby. I know it’s hard with the election,” he added – it was scheduled for August, so the autumn sessions of the Wizengamot would start fresh. “But it’ll take a few years, so if we could start now…. ” He expects the twins will be about 5 and old enough for full-time school by the time they have another baby.

Voldemort smiles faintly. “I am only surprised you waited so long.”

“Yeah, well. Ron and Hermione’s kid is still young enough, it feels like still having a baby around.” They had a fourth kid really close to the third – Leo is now 3 like the twins, and Imogen is 1 1/2, and Ron and Hermione swear they are done but they’ve got a house of four kids under the age of 10 and it’s just a lot. And along with Imogen, Bill and Fleur had another daughter named Mireille who is the same age. Christmas is now mostly a holiday of wrangling children and screaming and spilt juice and tiny cut up pieces of ham and naptime for just about everyone partway through the day. Harry loves it.

So he goes on: “Can we ask Miraz again? If she wants. She’s been good with the girls, and I really like the idea of, ah, siblings.” Miraz was their surrogate last time. They’re still sometimes in touch, and she’s had the twins over before, even if they didn’t entirely explain who she was because she insisted she was not their mother, and they didn’t have another word.
“Yes. Ask her. If she’d like.” Voldemort drinks, thoughtful. “They will become – you will become – something of a spectacle during the campaign this year. I can’t threaten the papers with anything more, if they print anything of the girls. They might need to understand a bit more of everything soon.”

“Okay,” Harry sighs. They’d both held out for 3 as the age to start telling the girls age-appropriate explanations of everything. *Papa and Abba used to fight, about something we didn’t understand.*

“They will be fine. They’re clever.” A quirk of his mouth. “I assume Effie will hear the worst of it.” Both girls would vent to the snakes – whether for the privacy, or because their Parseltongue is more complex than their English and they could cry bigger feelings in it. While none of the snakes cared for human drama, Effie was the most patient of them, a good-natured ball python, and so she was their most frequent companion.

“We could – be together in public,” Harry offers. “If you need us to be. Nobody doesn’t believe already that you’re smart enough for it, just that….”

“I may not be soft enough,” Voldemort agrees. “Thank you. What would they want to see?”

Sometimes Harry is Voldemort’s proxy for these gentler emotions, that his empathy is still a work in progress. “Dunno. You’ve warned them off the girls so much, would anyone even show up if we took them out?”

A sigh. “One would think.”

And Harry wants all of it – he wants the girls’ privacy foremost, but he wants the world to see how good Voldemort is, how gentle and thoughtful he can be with his children. Before Harry can say this, Voldemort offers more decisively, “We’ll introduce them at the inauguration. They will have a few more months of normalcy.”

Of course Voldemort is confident he can do it alone. Harry smiles. “At the inauguration, then.”

“And would you like to write Miraz, or should I?”

“I can.” The wine has seeped into his blood by now – he’s a lightweight as they drink less frequently with the girls around – and he slumps easily against Voldemort’s side. “I’ll go out with you to campaign or whatever,” he offers. “The Galleon asked if I would endorse you again last week, did I tell you?”

“Do you?”

It is only half-teasing. Harry smiles up at him. “I knew it was all leading to this,” he says. “Eventually. You’ve been patient.” Twelve years in the Wizengamot, in relatively unglamorous roles, cooperating and answering to others and accepting leadership that he sometimes hated.

“They have all assumed the office of Minister was the carrot, that it was the basis of all my cooperation. And – I know why they believe that, but they’re wrong. I promised I would give you peace, to the best of my abilities, so long as we both live.” It had been in their wedding vows. Harry smiles to hear it again now. “And I will ensure it as Minister, or in the Wizengamot, or in any other capacity. So – you haven’t got to campaign on my behalf.”

“I want to,” Harry says. “Not, like, speeches. Let me take you out. I want them to see how happy you make me.”

“Harry….”
But he’ll hear none of it. He tips the remaining wine into Voldemort’s glass, grinning at him. “We are going to *date*.”

They are both too buzzed for this. Harry slips against the cool sheets. “Maybe while the girls are in school,” he muses, letting his eyes fall closed. “Do you want to go out to breakfast? Or we could skive off one afternoon….”

Voldemort leans in, closing his babbling mouth decisively with a kiss.

There really weren’t enough hours in the day for everything they’d do in the next half year. Harry writes to Miraz, who agrees to be their surrogate again. Voldemort courts the Wizengamot one by one. *Harry* courts the ones too soft to be swayed by Voldemort directly. They spend time with Q and Phaedra, who are becoming delightful hilarious thoughtful people in their own right. Voldemort no longer goes in to the Ministry on Saturdays, ever, because Harry insists the weekends are for families and even that may not be enough.

They begin to take the girls into the Ministry. The first time it’s an emergency – Molly was exposed to someone with dragon pox and she doesn’t want to risk it; and nobody else can take the girls on short notice. It’s a school holiday. “I’ll bring them in,” Voldemort says the night prior when they are scrambling for childcare. “And put a silencing spell around the office. We can pack the toy chest tonight, and lunch, and a change of clothing.”

“… Yeah, alright.” It’s not the worst solution. “I’ve got meetings in the morning but my afternoon’s free. Switch you at lunch?”

“Would you?”

“Yeah.”

It takes an extra three bags that morning, and at least some explanation to the girls of where they’re going and what sort of behavior will be expected of them. They are both mildly curious where their parents go during the day, so – off they go.

Harry walks his family to Voldemort’s office. They are stopped only twice, by Wizengamot members Harry doesn’t really know, but they are both *very* interested in the girls and it’s hard not to bristle. Anyway, into the Wizengamot department, which is large and golden and likely overwhelming for 3 year olds. Q is peering into the open offices, Phaedra is studying the hanging portraits. They wrangle the girls into Voldemort’s office and Harry is unpacking their bags, handing them each books and toys. “Will you be good for Abba?” Q makes a face like she’ll consider it.

“Good girl.”

And then Harry’s got to go, and he kisses Voldemort goodbye and says to the girls that he’ll be back for lunch. And as he’s walking back toward his own office, someone behind him says, “Potter! Were those your kids?”

He turns. It’s Robards, who does not appreciate snark so Harry does not ask him if he knows the best place to conceal kidnapped toddlers. “Yeah. They’re staying in his office this morning, and mine this afternoon. Babysitters….” He makes a *you know how it is* gesture, even though he’s fairly certain Robards doesn’t have kids and *doesn’t* know how it is.

Robards runs a hand through his beard. “I’ll send an Auror.”

“… Why?”
He gets a surprised look. “Because your children – your children – may need the security.”

He doesn’t tell Robards just how many protective charms Voldemort has put on the girls; strictly speaking, not all of them are legal. No dark magic, though; they both agreed on that. “If you want,” he says, “but Voldemort won’t take it well, that you think he can’t protect his own kids.”

“He can take it however he likes. Good day, Potter.”

Fine. He has a meeting with the Ministry of Finance about some failing Quotidian bank in a half hour. He straightens his robe and leaves.

The morning is tedious, but fine. He and Voldemort still keep diaries to communicate quickly as necessary, and his is quiet. Finally he cleans up a bit of his office, so the girls might play on the floor. He goes to have lunch with them.

In the Wizengamot department, he finds the girls first, because they are heralded by Fawkes’s burning glow. Fawkes isn’t properly Voldemort’s familiar, but he comes and goes from Voldemort’s Ministry office as he likes, and it’s really typical to see them together. So Q and Phaedra are in the corridor just outside Voldemort’s office, and Fawkes is perched on Q’s shoulder as she strokes his plumage. But they are both looking at the portraits. They’ve seen wixie portraits before – Andi’s got a few in her home, and the girls have been to Grimmauld Place twice and there’s some there too – but they haven’t seen so many in one place before.

Oh. The curve of the wall obscured the subject from him, but as he approaches – it’s Albus. Albus is sitting in the frame nearest to Voldemort’s office, listening to Q tell him of every snake that lives with them. “ – and Sarai is brown and goes outside, and Shasha is green and hides in trees, and Effie is yellow and sleeps under my bed – “

“Does she?” Harry asks as he approaches.

Q claps her hands over her mouth, startled, and then she’s laughing, and Harry is laughing too even though apparently they’ll have to check the bedroom for stowaway snakes now. “Papa!” Phaedra protests. “We weren’t – we weren’t – “

“Uh-huh,” he says, very unconvinced. He picks Phaedra up, swinging her against his chest to tickle her face with his beard so she’s giggling and slapping at him. “You’ve met Professor Dumbledore?” He turns to look at the portrait. “Albus….” He doesn’t see Dumbledore as often as he should, really.

“You are both raising fine young girls,” Dumbledore says lightly. “Quite charming.”

“Charming!” Harry echoes, poking Phaedra in the ribs so she squeals. “Did Professor Dumbledore tell you that he had Fawkes first? Before he gave him to Abba.”

“Oh.” Q is looking at Fawkes in awe. “Really?”

“I received him as an egg,” Dumbledore tells her. “The egg is very small, as small as a snake’s egg, but the phoenix is born as big as a chicken. Isn’t that spectacular?”

The girls almost certainly do know what spectacular means but Q’s eyes are wide as she takes this in. Harry leans down to take her hand. “They love animals,” he says to Dumbledore. “We’ve been around to Hagrid’s just a few times – he’s doing well, by the way – but I’m going to ask him for a real tour when they’re a bit older.”

“Now,” Q says, even though she doesn’t understand. “Ask now.”
“Okay,” Harry agrees. “But we’ve got to have lunch first.” Fawkes has fluttered into Voldemort’s office and he motions to follow. “Fawkes is hungry, look. We have curry, and strawberries.” And finally he gets them inside.

Voldemort is clearing off his desk. They’d been in earshot if not sight of the office the entire time. Anyway, Harry could feel the cold stickiness of Aurors’ magic around the girls; he’d ask later what sort of security spells that had entailed. He sets Phaedra down to kiss Voldemort. “Hey, love. Good morning?”

“Quite. – Hold out your hands,” he says to Phaedra, and he casts a cascade of sanitizing bubbles. She giggles and slaps her hands together. Q is next.

They’ll eat here, it would be too much of a production to eat in the canteen. So Harry is pulling food out of bags and the twins are racing to clamber into the imposing chair behind Voldemort’s desk. “I want it – “ “No, me – “ And Voldemort sighs and casts a charm, widening it enough for them both. Phaedra sprawls along it like a cat and Q clambers onto her stomach and there’s shrieking and Harry wonders if it’s loud enough to burst the silencing spells he put up behind them. But Voldemort is just – tired, and less amused by chaos, so it’s Harry who steps in. “You both need to sit down. Sit, bottoms all the way or I’ll cast a sticking spell on them. I will,” he says when Phaedra giggles. And then they are both approximately sitting. “Thank you.”

They both protest bibs by now – is 3 ½ too old? Harry has no idea – so he usually casts protective spells on their clothes instead. Curry is a common occurrence in their household because Q is adamantly vegetarian – and before she even knew the concept, the meat on the table would always begin reverting back to its animal form, sprouting feathers or fur, which was disgusting and entirely not worth the fight. So they are both learning a lot about vegetarian cooking. Hermione’s been a godsend.

Voldemort puts a spill-proof bowl and a charmed spoon in front of each of them. “You know which bits Fawkes can eat,” he says. Which bits Fawkes will eat, really. They’ve both also accepted that the animals get fed too, and portion the girls’ dishes accordingly. It’s just easier.

Voldemort and Harry both sink onto a sofa, and Harry’s rubbing the tension out of his shoulders. “I didn’t mean to run into Robards,” he offers, “but he wouldn’t not send an Auror.”

“It was fine. He only sent Tonks.”

“Only Tonks,” Harry teases. But the girls adore Tonks. She and Ginny have a flat in Sheffield, and Harry’s brought them there on weekends before. The girls haven’t got brooms yet – Harry has become more anxious in his old age – but Harry and Ginny have taken them up, one each, and with a hundred protection spells – on their own. Tonks rarely has a human face when they’re over, making them guess which animal her nose or mouth or ears belong to. So – Tonks is very popular with the twins.

Voldemort rips a piece of naan in half for Harry. “Are you still available this afternoon?”

“Mmhm. I’ve got to write letters to some important people, that’s all.”

“You should work in here. It’s simpler than moving them.”

“You wouldn’t mind?”

“No. I’ll be in meetings. One with the DMLE, then one with Magical Creatures.”

“Can I go?” Q pipes up. Neither of them had realized the girls were listening.
Voldemort smiles faintly. “It is only a meeting with humans. There won’t be any creatures present at
this one.”

“Why not?”

“That’s an excellent question. I don’t know.” Q looks dissatisfied, but goes back to feeding Fawkes a
tofu puff (about which he is really quite gracious for a mostly-carnivorous bird).

“And I intend to have tea with Emmeline Vance afterward,” Voldemort says to Harry, “but if we
need to go home, we will reschedule it.”

“No. It’s fine, I’ve got everything here.” Emmeline was another important person for Voldemort to
persuade – she didn’t sit on the Wizengamot herself but was influential in their circles anyway. Harry
only knew her from a few times with the Order; but she’d be a difficult sell. So.

When the girls have finished their curry and Fawkes is pecking at their leftovers, Voldemort pulls out
a bag of strawberries. “I’ll show you something special,” he says to them, “if you can put your hands
in your laps and keep them there.” He arranges the strawberries on a plate. “Watch.” He lifts his staff
and casts a beautiful severing charm, slicing the strawberries actually translucent.

“Ooh – “ Phaedra reaches, then pulls her hand back again with a nervous look.

“Very good,” Voldemort says. (Neither of them are particularly cautious, so it must be commended).
“It is safe now. Here.” He conjures two forks.

“I want – “ Phaedra is reaching for his staff.

“Not yet. Soon, you will be able to practice with wands.”

“I just – I just wanna hold it.”

“You may, if you do not point it at anything. Remember?” He transfigures his staff back into a slim
wand, and keeps his hand on it as her fingers grip the handle.

“I want it.”

It’s part of the new education, that children can now have training wands, ones made of magical
wood but without a core. Ollivander refuses to make them so they will have to go abroad; and while
it’s not recommended very young for fear of making children too dependent on wandwork, Harry
and Voldemort have both seen the girls trying to do magic anyway, so it’s probably time.

“Your next birthday,” Voldemort offers. “If that is alright?” he adds, with a glance in Harry’s
direction. (He is deliberate about not making unilateral parenting decisions. Harry finds it charming.)

“I think that’s alright.” Harry has come to the desk now too, eating thin slices of strawberry. “What
about you, Q? Do you want a wand?”

“And a broom.”

“Ooh, hard bargain.” Honestly he’ll probably get them both brooms too because his heart is set on
having at least one Quidditch player.

Phaedra is dissatisfied, and frowns up at Voldemort. “Why not now?”

“Because I think you’re too young.”
“But why?”

Voldemort would never say he’s the more patient parent, but in times like this, he certainly is. Harry would have already answered, *They sold all the wands already, we have to wait until next year,* and then distracted her with a sweet. But Voldemort talks to their daughters as something like equals, and he doesn’t lie to them even when it would really expedite things. “Because wands can be very dangerous,” he says instead. “What if you cut yourself like this?” He flips over a wedge of strawberry. “If you practice being careful now, we can get you a wand for your birthday.”

“But that’s not until – “

“January,” he supplies, and then holds out his long fingers to count the months until January.

And by now they’re finished and squirming in their seat. “Hands,” Voldemort says, and the twins hold out their hands, for another bubble spell. “You’re staying in here with Harry while I go out for a bit.”

“I wanna go – “ Q gestures toward the door, “and Prop – Prep – “

Harry wants to laugh at Voldemort’s barely-concealed exasperation. “Professor Dumbledore,” Harry says clearly. “He is very busy, too. He may not still be here.”

“He is,” she insists.

“Yeah?” He’s pulling the chair back, getting the girls out of the way so Voldemort can collect his notes. “Did Abba tell you who Professor Dumbledore is?”

“Not particularly,” Voldemort mutters. Even though it’s *fine,* Voldemort and Dumbledore have a somewhat functional working relationship now, if only by virtue of proximity and time. “I said he was a teacher at Hogwarts once.”

“I told them he gave you Fawkes.”

“He did,” Voldemort agrees. He’s sorting through his quills, and hands Phaedra an iridescent one that changes ink colors.

Q says happily, “An’ I told him about Fawkes, and Moira, and Hedwig, and Effie, and Shasha, and Sarai, and Nuzzle….”

(Nuzzle was the snapping turtle who lived in their pond. It was decidedly *not* a pet. When Phaedra had named it last year, Voldemort had said 2 year olds were too young to understand sarcasm, and Harry had said their kid was a prodigy then.)

“Oh,” Harry says now, looking to Voldemort. “And I happened to hear that Effie is sleeping under Q’s bed apparently – “

“No!” Q wails, throwing her hands out. “She’s not, she’s not. I was lying!”

“You were lying?” Harry pretends to be horrified.

“No – yes – I – “ She gives up, giving him such a helpless look that he laughs.

Voldemort closes a ledger smartly. “Does Effie want to be kept under your bed? – Phaedra, please,” he adds, sliding a piece of parchment to her when she begins to draw down her arms. “Or would Effie rather be outside?”
“She likes it,” Q insists.

“We will ask her tonight, and decide where she sleeps from now on. Is that alright?”

“Uh-huh.”

“And darling – ask for what you want, so we can discuss it. Alright?” he reiterates.

Q’s eyes are dark, taking this in. Then her mouth cracks into a mischievous smile. “And a broom?” she asks, all sweetness and light.

Voldemort makes a sound of surprise and pleasure. “When Harry says yes to the broom,” he says. “He is the athlete.”

The girls are squirming apart – Q wants to return to the portraits, and Phaedra is currently drawing a monster with eyes in its fingertips. They’ll both need a nap pretty soon, but Harry will figure that out later. He steps in close to Voldemort, murmuring in Parseltongue, “You’re amazing.” He has not yet tired of watching Voldemort care for their daughters. “I’m gonna keep you up late tonight.”

Voldemort’s mouth quirks; he reaches up to tug the front lock of Harry’s hair. “As you’d like.” A quick kiss for Harry, and one on each of their daughters’ foreheads. “Be good.”

Phaedra looks up from her eye-demon. “You too,” she says.

At this, Voldemort sighs. “I can only try.” He goes.

After that they bring the girls into the Ministry probably once a month – typically because of scheduling conflicts, but Voldemort also says that they must adapt to being in such an environment. They are already mature for their age (in Harry’s biased opinion), probably because Voldemort never baby-talked them and insists on real conversations, even when they’re slow or simple or half in Parseltongue because the girls don’t know the words in English yet.

This is their introduction into the public eye, anyway. The photos that show up in the papers aren’t proper photos, but the fuzzier images extracted from memories. At least until the Galleon’s Wizengamot correspondent slips past Voldemort’s open office door one day and gets a shot, the three of them at Voldemort’s desk, each with a book in front of them. Voldemort is accustomed to being in the real papers, but when the photo is reprinted in Witch Weekly with an article that nearly gushes about his parenting (so much as they can surmise, since he and Harry don’t actually talk about their private life to the papers), he is bewildered. Harry has to explain what a DILF is, and it’s the greatest moment of his life.

In the end he asks Harry to talk to the twins about it. “You were the child star,” he says dryly.

“I sure as shit wasn’t. Child stars have real bedrooms with real beds.” It’s an un-extraordinary sort of comment between them by now. “I’ll ask them, but only if you tell them what it’d mean, if you’re elected.”

“Yes.”

It is the first family meeting, as such. The sort they both assume that functional families have, but never experienced for themselves. After dinner but before bath time they sit down in the drawing room, and Harry asks how the kids at school treat them. Looks exchanged, shrugs. “They’re nice to you, right?” Harry attempts.
Moira is sitting between the girls, because she will defuse any circumstance, and Phaedra is brushing her as she says, “Uh-huh.”

“Are they ever not nice?”

The looks he gets clearly indicate he’s mucking this up. “Nobody’s in trouble,” he says, and tries again. “Look – do you know what it means to be famous?”

A pucker of Phaedra’s lips. “Uh-huh,” she says again.

“Do you, Q?”

“Like Tangerine,” Q says.

“Yes. Exactly.” Tangerine the Faerie Queene has been the book du jour in their home for at least a month now. It works. “So Abba and I are sort of famous.”

Q’s look is actually dubious. “But why?”

“We’ll tell you that later. I want to tell you now, though, that that makes you both a little famous too. Just a little,” he stresses, because they both could get overwhelmed in too much attention and too big of an idea.


“You’ve got dresses,” Harry says, amused.

“Bigger dresses, like – “ She stretches her arms out to indicate a full skirt.

But Q is distinctly unhappy, as the more introverted of the twins. It’s Voldemort who notices her tearing up first, and he’s beside her then, pulling her into his lap. He can get impatient when either of them cry because they don’t understand something, but he can explain it, and Harry’s told him that’s not the point. So now, instead, he’s murmuring, “Here. Q, here,” and he’s pushing her face to his chest as her voice breaks in a sob.

“I don’t want to.”

Harry is very, very sympathetic. “Baby – Phae, sit down for one more minute,” he says because she’s crouched as though she might start jumping on the sofa. “Phae, sit down,” and she does, giving him a nasty look. Fine. Harry scrubs at his face, feeling stupid.

“We want you both to have a normal life,” Voldemort says, and both girls’ gazes are immediately on him. It’s Parseltongue, all their difficult conversations are in Parseltongue. “But people won’t always treat you as normal. Accio newspaper,” he says (he casts verbally and properly more often these days, with a wand and all, because he says the girls will absorb it anyway), and the Galleon copy flutters over. Q catches it first, and Harry wants to make a comment about his future seeker, but it’s not the time.

Phaedra climbs into Voldemort’s lap as well, and Voldemort winces as he adjusts her off his bad knee. “Me,” Phaedra says, running her fingers over the front page photo. Q is sucking her knuckles, quiet and still teary.

“You,” Voldemort agrees. He is weighing out his words, and Harry moves to join them, all of them on the same sofa, scooping Q into his lap, stroking her dark silken hair. “Phae, listen,” he says, and she tears her eyes from the photo. “Q….” But Q is already watching him. “I am going to be Minister,
someday,” he says to them. “And then everyone will want you to be more famous. But you haven’t got to be. We won’t let anyone bother you.”

They have some idea of what it means to be Minister – they’re in the Ministry often enough, and Voldemort and Scrimgeour continue to have a good relationship, so he is around sometimes. More of their books and cartoons have royalty than republics, Harry supposes, but they understand the concept of power. So. “We will try not to let things change too much,” is all he can offer them. “Alright?”

A nod, from each of them. Then they crawl out of their laps and run off together, to discuss this privately in their 3 ½ year olds’ way.

So Harry slumps against Voldemort, running a hand along his back. “Could’ve been worse?” he offers.

Voldemort makes a dissatisfied noise. “We likely overstated it as it is. They are resilient.”

“I know. Just, there will probably be a few days of bribery.”

“That’s fine,” Voldemort sighs, and kisses Harry’s forehead before pulling them off the sofa.

It’s a strange energy in those summer months: other members of the Wizengamot are around a lot, and Voldemort has taken on some disparate pieces of legislation to curry favor, and he is quietly obsessed with how they will vote. Public opinion only matters marginally – two-thirds of the Wizengamot are district representatives, but Voldemort already knows how to directly appeal to most of them. To the public, he must only be charming and engaging and palatable enough.

Andromeda, Amelia, and Scrimgeour are around the most. Penelope Clearwater is here too, and sometimes she will bring her 5 year old, a bookworm named Eliora. The twins adore her, she tolerates them. Meanwhile Harry is the ideal campaign husband, making tea and small talk.

The election will be the first Monday of August, the 6th. Harry says that his birthday doesn’t matter but Voldemort insists that it does – Harry supposes it’s fair, since he’s been celebrating Voldemort’s birthday against his wishes essentially the entire time they’ve been together – so they make themselves unreachable for the day and spend time at a crystallin Welsh lake Voldemort knows. That night they stay out in the garden too late and it’s clear enough to begin teaching the girls the constellations, and at some point Hedwig comes in from hunting to settle on Harry’s shoulder. The girls fall asleep, he and Voldemort are left alone in the dark, and there is peace that he hadn’t recalled in months.

That Monday of the election, Voldemort is awake early, and Harry comes downstairs with him. The Wizengamot chamber is sealed until a verdict is reached, so they can’t communicate throughout the day as usual. Harry’s taken the day off work to ensure he can handle the twins the entire time. Voldemort says an election has never taken more than a day, but there are no provisions for releasing the Wizengamot overnight if it does.

“If I am elected, please have the girls ready to join us for dinner out. And if I’m not – then I’ll be out to celebrate their election instead. You may come, but the girls can’t. Would Molly be free?”

“She should be. I’ll floo her this morning.” He hands Voldemort a thermos of coffee, and lets their fingers graze. “Hey. I’m so proud of you.”
“I have not yet accomplished anything.”

“Shut up,” Harry snorts, because Voldemort is more responsible for how their world currently runs than any other single person in politics. “I’ll be proud of you regardless. See you tonight?”

“In all likelihood.”

Harry ends up taking the girls to the Burrow anyway. Molly is working in the garden, even though she’s getting older and Harry worries that she’ll ruin her knees like this. The girls pick strawberries, and Molly says if they don’t eat them all off the vine, they can make pies. So they do, strawberry and rhubarb pies with homemade ice cream, and then the twins go fall asleep in Ron’s former bedroom (their favorite; Harry thinks it’s because they want to see the ghoul but they won’t admit it) from a combination of sun and sugar.

Harry insists that Molly sit down while he cleans the kitchen. He told her upon arriving that he’d rather be fidgeting here than at home, so she allows his nervous energy to pervade her home. She boxes up a pie for him to bring home, and says it will be either congratulatory or conciliatory, anyway.

Arthur arrives home from work and is unsurprised to find Harry there. “Nothing official yet,” he says, “but we heard rumors all day. When I was leaving it seemed like Bagman was the favorite.”

Bagman. Voldemort would be furious. He puts a lot of weight on the mythos of the worthy opponent, and Bagman’s not it. Harry gives him a weak smile. “I’ll just wake the girls up, then.” To tell them they are having dinner here while Harry and Voldemort would attend an incredibly awkward state dinner.

Arthur brightens. “Where’s my girls?” he says, and he’s climbing the staircase before Harry can answer.

A minute later Harry hears his daughters’ footsteps thundering down the stairs. “No running!” he calls up, and they ignore him. They’re telling Arthur about their day, about the garden gnomes, and the pies, “and Abba’s going to be Minister,” Q finishes happily.

The adults all sort of look at each other. “Sweetheart, we don’t know if he will be yet,” Harry says carefully. She’s quite come around to the idea this past month, because she adored Voldemort and expected the world of him. It was nice, but Harry was now bracing himself for a night of disappointment from everyone.

“But we got robes.”

“You needed new robes anyway,” Harry says fairly. “Can you go pack your toys? You too, Phae. You can leave one out, we’re not going yet – “

“One each?” Q interrupts.

Harry has to smile. “One each,” he agrees, as though it is a concession, and shoos them off.

When they’re alone, Arthur hands him a beer and tells him a bit about some of the Magitech’s projects now – they’ve been commissioned by some hospitals recently, and while medicine is outside their range of expertise, they’ve got quite a lot of ideas about rehabilitative machinery and prosthetics. “I asked Mad Eye to try out some of them,” he says, “but he says he likes looking inhuman.”
So did Voldemort, really, and wasn’t that funny. Harry still sees Moody fairly often: after leaving the Aurors he was recruited by Minterpol, and he’s got the Order, and they get along so much better now that Moody isn’t directly responsible for Voldemort’s safety. Harry’s smiling at the thought of it. “He says his magic eye is his good eye, anyway,” he offers.

“Ah, but Dumbledore cast that himself. And neither of them will say how.” Arthur tips back his beer.

Harry grins. He has only fully come to appreciate in adulthood how obnoxious Dumbledore can be, even if there’s typically a good reason for it. “We’re thinking of organizing an inter-world sporting event,” he says. “But nobody can decide on the sport.”

Arthur is still considering this when Harry’s journal goes warm in his pocket. He chokes. He’s ready to talk Voldemort into not going out after the loss, that they can leave the girls here and Harry will bring home takeout and they can smashed in a way they never did since having kids. He flips the diary open:

I have won. Would you bring the girls to the Ministry by 6 p.m.? I will meet you here.

And Harry’s heart is doing funny things, and he is smiling, and he’s excited and so so happy for Voldemort. “He got it, after all,” he murmurs, though of course Arthur knows just from watching his face. “Q? Phaedra?” he calls into the house.

“I can’t move,” Phaedra calls back. “Gram’s braiding my hair.” (Molly and Arthur were Gram and Grampa to the twins, the same as Ron and Bill’s kids called them. The first time they’d run to Molly yelling “Gram!” both Harry and Molly had cried.)

Before Harry gets up, Arthur drops a hand on his shoulder. “Tell him congratulations.”

He doesn’t sound upset or hesitant or anything. The world had accepted Voldemort in this capacity, as the hyper-competent politician with stringent ideals. It glosses some of the violence of his youth. And while nobody from the Magitech division serves on the Wizengamot, Harry knows Voldemort has made some promises to them, for complex reasons. Arthur is – happy.

So Harry smiles back at him “Thanks. I’ll tell him. Ah, we’re going out with the Wizengamot, I’ve got to ask the girls if they can behave for a few hours.”

“If they’re not, they should stay over. We’re testing out this play mat for console spells….”

Harry goes to find his daughters. In the living room, Molly and Phaedra are on the sofa, putting braids on either side of her head, just above her temples. It looks really nice. “Harry, dear,” Molly says, looking up. “Leaving, then? They can stay over if you need to be with him.”

“Well. Thanks. Voldemort’s just been elected,” Harry blurts, and Molly’s eyes go wide but it’s not in a bad way either. “So he wants them to come out, too.” He sits on the sofa, turning to Q first. “Abba won,” he says to her, and she grins like she’s so, so proud of him. “Can you be on Ministry behavior if we go out to eat with them?”

(It drove Hermione batshit, that both Harry and Voldemort say they prefer the girls save their best behavior for the Ministry and then they can act out at home, when it didn’t matter. “They don’t understand context, they’re 3 – “ “And a half,” Harry had objected.)

Q thinks, and Phaedra bounce in disruption, disrupting Molly’s braids. “Dress?”

“Yeah, dress.” Dress robes, specifically – they’d had them custom-made and let the girls decide at least a few elements, because Phaedra was so excited and Q so skeptical. The nicest ones would be
for the inauguration, but this would be a presentation of their daughters tonight in its own right. “Phae, can you be on Ministry behavior? It’s okay if you say no,” he adds. “You could have dinner here instead.”

“I wanna.” She’s reaching up, running her hands over her braids.

“Cool. Q?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Okay. Good.” He goes to gather their things.

Back to their home, briefly. There’s not time for a proper bath – which is typically a job Harry and Voldemort have to handle together anyway – but he casts spells to ensure everyone’s face and hands and hair are clean. He’s not allowed to touch Phaedra’s braids, but he brushes Cybele’s shoulder length hair and unsuccessfully suggests she put a ribbon in it or something. Then dress robes, and polished shoes, and his own hair taken down and brushed to almost flatness. Finally all three of them make it into the floo.

The Ministry atrium is crowded – people coming and going, journalists, and most high level officials now mingling. It feels… celebratory. Harry makes Cybele and Phaedra hold his hands so they don’t get swept up in the crowd. Voldemort is somewhere within the building, he can feel that much in his magic, but he doesn’t seem to be here. Anyway, there are a lot of people to get through first.

“Harry!”

He recognizes the voice, and he’s smiling as he turns. Lee Jordan is here with press credentials – he writes part-time for the Quibbler, and his most successful work is a column called *Potterwatch*. Half satire of Witch Weekly’s incessant coverage of them, half actual journalism, it’s one of the only times Harry actually enjoys being interviewed.

Lee approaches. “I really need to give you a codename to shout into a crowd,” he says with a grin. “Before the hoards descend, want to give us a quote? None of this, *Oh I’m so happy for him, the future is bright* sh- stuff,” he amends, noticing the girls at Harry’s sides. “We need something authentic from you.”

“You’d rather I be unhappy?”

“If it sells papers, yeah.”

Harry is laughing. Voldemort’s given up on giving Harry a canny public persona, so he’s mostly characterized as the coarse and overly honest one between them. “We are so happy for him,” he says. “I’ve been waiting for about a decade.”

“So you’re finally going to catch up on your schmoozing, hospitality, spousely responsibilities?”

“Why start now? He’s already won.”

Lee grins back. “And do your girls want to say anything?” he asks, dropping low to hold out the mic to them. They know Lee from parties and Christmases, so it’s fine. Phaedra prods at the mic and tape recorder, blowing air into it to hear feedback. Lee leans in toward it. “How are you going to celebrate?”
Q’s gaze flicks to Harry momentarily, then back to Lee. She says, far too innocently, “Abba is going to bring us a broom.”

Harry knows his surprised laughter sounds as good as acquiescence. “Who told you that?” he says, and Q gives him a toothy smile and doesn’t answer.

Lee holds the mic back up to Harry. “Would you like to attempt to justify depriving your daughters of quidditch?” he asks. As an aside: “I announced all your Papa’s games at Hogwarts. From his first year! You don’t think they’ve inherited your freakish innate talent?” he asks. “Got Voldemort’s side for that?”

“He’s fine on a broom too. And,” Harry sighs, “we were going to get them brooms for their next birthday, but since I’m being extorted….”

“The dark side of fame,” Lee intones into his mic. But then he’s looking past Harry’s head, and Harry looks too at how the crowd is moving. “It seems our Minister-Elect has arrived.”

“I should be there.” He’s wondering if he can apparate just across the room, but he’d probably land on someone important. Anyway, he doesn’t apparate with the girls if he can help it. He hasn’t figure out how to genteelly throw elbows yet, though. “See you later?”

“Yeah. Will I see you at Ginny’s party this weekend?” Lee asks the girls more than Harry.

“Uh-huh,” Phaedra mumbles, because the girls don’t really like parties but they love Ginny, so it’s a net positive.

“Cool. See you soon, babes.” He picks up his levitating tape deck and circles back into the crowd.

People get out of his way as he brings Cybele and Phaedra toward the front, which is gratifying and also strange. At least now they’d be famous for something legitimate, not merely a spectacle and scandal people never tired of. He’s not tall enough to see over the crowd, so he follows the pressure in his soul instead.

And then the last of the crowd parts, and Voldemort is there, speaking to the reporters. Scrimgeour is beside him, and Amelia and the other highest-ranking people of the Wizengamot and Minister’s Cabinet. They all look professional if not properly happy. And somehow, Harry can’t believe this isn’t more of a scandal or an outrage. Voldemort has been – respectable for going on a decade, and sometimes Harry is still amazed.

He’s caught in his thoughts for a moment too long and Q takes the opportunity to pull her hand out of his. “Abba!” And she’s darting up to him, faster than Harry can catch her. And then Phaedra, jealous, peels Harry’s hand off hers too and Harry can only mouth Sorry to Voldemort as he looks away from the journalists to find both girls rushing to him.

They throw themselves at him, hugging his legs, and Harry melts even as he’s trying to get near enough to restore order. “These are our daughters,” Voldemort says, catching their hands and pulling them into place on either side. “This is Cybele, and this is Phaedra.”

The girls’ eyes go wide at the rapid shutters of cameras, and then Harry has to get up there before they react badly in front of everyone. “Excuse me – thank you – “ And then he can finally reach Voldemort, slipping in beside him. “I am so, so proud of you,” he says in an undertone because he’d like to kiss him but it’s not the time.

Voldemort’s gaze is soft on him, before he motions. “And this is my husband,” he tells the journalists.
“Say something for us, Potter!”

What is there to say? “I’m so proud.” Harry repeats. And while he’s got one hand on Q’s shoulder, he lifts the other to touch Voldemort’s arm, making magic flare between them. “And I’m so excited for everything he can offer mage Britain.” It’s an unpolished statement, but it’s true, anyway.

Voldemort has more to say but Harry has to get Q and Phaedra out of the way, because they’re both rather uneasy with all the photos, and that’s fair, Harry hadn’t warned them. So they retreat to a quiet-ish corner behind a pillar, and Harry’s casting strands of magic between their fingers for them to pluck at, and secretly he’s hoping Voldemort finishes up soon.

And then there’s a noise beside them, and Hermione is sweeping up her robes to take a seat on the column too. “Hi, Cybele. Hi, Phaedra. How do you feel about this?”

Q lets her hands fall, strands of magic disintegrating. “Good,” she says, though she sounds uncertain.

“Phaedra?”

“Good,” she echoes, plucking at a sparkling strand of magic between her forefinger and her thumb. “We’re famous now.”

“… Yeah, you sort of are,” Hermione says, with a glance at Harry.

“Are you coming out with us?” Harry asks, since Hermione doesn’t seem to be heading home.

“Yes, and so is Ron. He’s just dropping the kids off with Bill now.”

“How was it?” Harry asks tentatively, because Hermione had been in the voting session too.

She lifts her hand, drops it. “There was dissent,” she says carefully. “All the anticipated candidates were in there, not just Voldemort, and – it was brutal. Questioning by opposed members was brutal. We had all left our wands outside – it’s a fine tradition, apparently things are always contentious – but we nearly had fistfights anyway. People definitely threw coffee mugs and ashtrays. So, ah – Oh, Q, don’t,” Hermione adds, when she starts weaving bits of magic into Phaedra’s braids in a way that would’ve looked cool if not responsible. “Here – have you seen my Patronus before? Only you can’t go far from here. Look. Expecto patronum.” And Hermione’s otter blossoms from her wand and both girls squeak, charmed by its backflips and chattering.

“Thank you,” Harry says, similarly delighted.

Hermione smiles. “Mine and Ron’s both, real child-pleasers. I don’t expect they’d find yours so adorable.”

_We should take them to see a real thestral someday_, Harry nearly says, before realizing why it’s terrible. He’d like his daughters to not see a thestral for a very long time. “You can go this far,” he says to them, and draws a circle ten feet out. The girls scamper.

Hermione begins again. “So there were fights, and interrogations, and it was all quite stressful, but Madam Bones said it was no worse than the others. And – we talked about the war, a bit. Mostly in the questioning of Robards and Swinton. About – Azkaban.”

(The widespread abuse of prisoners, especially Death Eaters, had broken a couple years ago when a group of former Death Eaters had filed a lawsuit. Voldemort had broken his typical silence regarding the Death Eaters to affirm their complaints, and while he hadn’t shared his own abuse, it was an open secret now. So the Minister of Justice had resigned, new practices were put into place at Azkaban, a
new lower security prison was proposed, and the Death Eaters had their house arrest sentences shortened or rescinded entirely. It’d been a hard year, and both Harry and Voldemort spent too much time with feelings they’d buried since Voldemort’s year in Azkaban, and it was just… hard. But there were more positive outcomes for it than negative, anyway.)

“They’re both guilty,” Harry mutters – they’d both stood by to watch the abuse themselves, at times. “What could they possibly say?”

Hermione’s smile is sad. “I wish I could tell you it was a moral dealbreaker, but I can’t. More of questions were about how the lawsuit was handled, and what they’d do for the Ministry of Justice now. But it was never going to be Robards, not after a decade of an Auror already. And – someone asked Voldemort what he’d do when Death Eaters were in prominent positions again. They will be,” she insists at Harry’s look. “Power in our world is too narrowly distributed.”

“What’d he say?”

“He, ah, showed us his runes.” Runes that encircled his wrists, Imperio’ing him against any insurrections. “And said he couldn’t keep them and take a professional vow, but they were welcome to write all of it into the Minister’s vow instead. Oh,” she says, when a terrier Patronus darts up to her, then back into the crowd. “Wait for Ron, he’ll want to hear all this too.”

“Uncle Ron,” Q says from her spot on the floor, reaching for the dog. A wag of its tail, and it’s gone.

And Ron emerges a minute later. “Hey, look who it is,” he says happily, letting his legs be hugged by Q and Phaedra. “You’ve met Hermione’s otter? I keep telling her it should have a name but she’s never picked one out. What do you think?” And when he’s been released, he joins Harry and Hermione. “Hey, babe.” A kiss on Hermione’s cheek. “Uh, Voldemort says he’ll try to get everyone out within twenty minutes,” he adds, looking to Harry.

“Cheers. Ah, maybe I should be with him while he’s talking to the press.”

“What, like you’re some pretty face?”

“Am I not?” he says, mock-offended. “Anyway, Hermione was telling me about today.”

So Hermione catches Ron up. He blinks when she tells him about the runes. “Still? But that was….”

The armistice was a long time ago. Fourteen years ago. Sometimes it felt like people had forgotten. Hermione grimaces. “There weren’t many questions about the war – wars,” she corrects herself, properly. Some people accused him of being too revolutionary,” she says with a thin laugh.

“Well, he is,” Harry says.

“And not reactionary,” she adds. “And – well, it went on that way for awhile. And then Amos Diggory got up.”

Oh. In his head Harry has a secret list of people who should probably never forgive Voldemort, and Amos is definitely on that list. “What’d he say?” he asks with trepidation.

“He said Voldemort had never _atoned_,” she pronounces the word precisely. “And there was this mess about it all, and that’s when Ludo pitched himself as the politic choice as the only one of them really outside the war. He and Amos had worked it out beforehand, I believe, and….” She pinched the bridge of her nose. “It was effective.”

“That’s what I’d heard from Arthur – I took the girls over this afternoon,” he says to Ron. “I’d
expected him to lose then. But – *Bagman*?”

She shushes him, but there’s no one listening. “Well, yes. Some people thought we needed a unifying presence, and he’s charismatic, genial. Apolitical and not so contentious.”

“Should ask Lockhart if he’s up for the job too,” Ron mutters.

Hermione pinks. “For awhile it sounded just like that. And, well, I’m sympathetic to people who want to be happy, but….” A frustrated gesture. “Happy supports the status quo. It’s antithetical to actually getting anything done.”

Harry smiles. If nothing else, Hermione and Voldemort agreed on this, that it was the responsibility of politicians to always reimagine what their world might look like. *Happiness* is of rather low value to them both. “And then what?”

“Then – well, he apologized to Amos.”

“Oh,” Harry says, surprised. “Really?”

“Mnhm. And Amos didn’t seem to want to acknowledge it, and then some others said it wasn’t sincere, and – it was awkward,” she says with a sigh. “It felt like dredging up fights of years ago. And then there was a schism between the ones who still cared about Voldemort’s – war,” (clearly she’d wanted a word like *murder* or *terrorism* here), “and those who said only his Ministry work should be considered relevant to the position. Then there was an argument about whether he’d make citizens feel more or less safe, and then… then we were all talking about it as though it’d really happen. And then we held the final vote, and nobody had even reached a *majority* in any prior round, but he got just over the two-thirds mark. And then we elected him,” she finishes with a tired smile. “Merlin, this day’s already felt a century long. I need a nap.”

Hermione does not nap, she says it is terrible sleep hygiene, so this is rather serious. Ron nudges her. “Just slip me a bit of your hair, I’ll Polyjuice as you for the night,” he offers, as though he says it all the time, and Hermione smiles at him.

And then there’s movement in the atrium. Ron cranes his neck. “People are going,” he says. “And everyone’s – taking photos, looks like?”

Harry sighs. “I should probably be there. See you at dinner?”

“Yeah,” Ron agrees. “Should we take the girls with us?”

“Oh. No, thanks, they should probably be there too. We did bring them out deliberately. Hey, Q? Phaedra?” He’s getting up, and Hermione is pulling her otter toward herself, and the girls have to stop. “Here, Abba’s almost ready. Let’s go meet him.” He pins on their cloaks with only a bit of trouble, and they wave goodbye to Ron and Hermione, and then they weave across the atrium.

Voldemort is just stepping away from an arranged photo of all the top Ministry members, from the Wizengamot and Minister’s cabinet. He looks up as they reach him. “Alright?” Harry murmurs because the magic between them is slack and exhausted.

“One of your family,” a lingering journalist says, seeing the opportunity before him. “Please?” he adds tentatively when Voldemort’s scarlet gaze falls on him.

“We might as well,” Harry says to Voldemort, “because Q already gave a quote to Lee.”

He looks down at her in surprise. “And what did you say, Cybele?”
She claps her hands over her mouth to stifle a giggle, glances at Phaedra, and then they’re both laughing. “She thinks we are getting them brooms to celebrate,” Harry provides.

“Are we?” He looks to Phaedra. “And a broom for you as well, or do you have other demands?”

“A broom,” she agrees. “Like Fawkes.” (Phaedra loves Fawkes and could spend hours petting him, until Harry or Voldemort pull her away. Of course she’s inspired by him.)

“Two brooms,” Voldemort agrees. “We will go to Diagon Alley this weekend. Sunday is six days away, and then you’ll have brooms.” The girls beam at him. “Will you stand still for a photo now?”

The journalist has been hovering awkwardly, even as his camera snaps candids of its own accord from around the room. So Harry and Voldemort shuffle the girls before them, and Harry’s got one hand on Phaedra’s shoulder and his other on Voldemort’s back, and he smiles and there’s another flurry of camera shutters.

The restaurant where they’re eating is adjacent to the Ministry building, and entirely rented out in anticipation of the election. Harry and Voldemort end up in step with Andromeda, with Ted and Tonks both joining her. And while Voldemort and Andromeda are talking about constructing his cabinet, Harry and Tonks walk with the girls between them. “Hey, can you come early for Gin’s birthday party?” Tonks asks him, flipping her aquamarine hair off her face. “Charlie was supposed to, but now he’s saying he’s got a new clutch that he can’t be away from for so long….”

“Sure, yeah. If you don’t mind these two being underfoot at least part of the time.” He swings Cybele and Phaedra’s hands upward playfully. “And Voldemort will probably come pick them up partway through.”

“Oh. I suppose he wouldn’t be coming, then?”

Harry blinks. “Probably not.” He is gratified, every time his friends let Voldemort into their lives. “I dunno how the next couple weeks will be anyway,” he adds with a smile. “But we’ll be there.”

“Cool. Brill.”

The restaurant is a traditional English place, and it’s decorated in dark woods and floral prints and heavy drapes. When Harry and Voldemort take political contacts out, Harry has begged to go to more interesting restaurants, but they end up at uninteresting restaurants like this too often instead. (“And I’m so tired of the French place. And the Italian place. There’s a new pho restaurant just opened, can we take them there?” – “Do you know how old the minister of art and architecture is? It’s already a hazard to his patriotism that he’s eating food from the continent. Pho would kill him.”)

The wixie world was adapting to a lot, but not all at the same pace.

Inside, Harry draws close to Voldemort. “You should eat with whoever’s the most politic, we haven’t got to….”

“Please stay.”

“Really?” Coaxing the girls through dinner would be a distraction if not an embarrassment, in a time when Voldemort is so precariously poised among the wixen rich and powerful. It didn’t seem….

Voldemort takes Cybele and Phaedra’s hands decisively, bringing them to the largest table. The rest fall in around him – Scrimgeour, Bones, Swinton, Bright, and the dozen top cabinet members. But the girls are to Voldemort’s immediate left, and Harry brackets them, and for a moment they’re both ignoring the politicians in order to get the girls seated, with booster cushions, and napkins in laps and hands charmed clean. Harry’s looking around: not all the reporters had gone, or maybe some of them
are here as guests of the Ministry. Anyway, there’d be photos in the papers tomorrow.

Before he sits, Harry leans in toward Voldemort. “Can I drink?” he murmurs in Parseltongue, because even if the papers characterize him as indifferent to What People Will Think, he’s really not.

“You should, if you’d like,” Voldemort agrees, also in Parseltongue. “There will be toasts. You’d like their maple ale, or their champagne whiskey.”

“Thanks, love.” He doesn’t realize he’s switched to English until the glance from the Minister of Transportation – but really, he and Voldemort are incredibly affectionate in public. It comes with the magnetism of their magic. Harry sits, pulling a menu toward himself.

There are toasts: to Voldemort, to the Wizengamot, to all the other nominees and their valiant fight today, to progress, to peace. Everyone is watching Voldemort, more than they typically do, and he basks in it. He is charismatic if not properly friendly, he is effortlessly elegant, he is solid. Harry is so in love with him like this.

So Harry takes on the girls so Voldemort can talk – Phaedra is playing with a puzzle block and Q has got an animal picture book, and they both have sparkling glasses of fruit juice with undulating straws, and now that the toasting is over and everyone’s fallen into quieter conversation, the girls can handle the current amount of stimulation again. Harry takes a careful swallow of the burnt maple ale. It is good.

Voldemort is talking to Bright and Scrimgeour and the Secretary of Trade about how inter-world commerce is currently regulated, that the Quotidian Secretary of Trade has sponsored a new consumer protections bill in conflict with their own. “But Harry has always had a good relationship with Helene” (the current Quotidian Secretary of Trade) “so I will send him along for your negotiations.”

Harry isn’t himself a negotiator. He doesn’t care for all the traditional gestures and the doublespeak it all entails. But Harry defuses tense circumstances, more often than not. And in this, the media characterization of him as overly sincere is to his advantage – nobody expects malice out of Harry Potter. Really, they could publish as many stories off him as a sweet hapless boy as they’d like, it made his job easier.

Before Harry could agree to this, Bright gives him an unpleasant smirk. “Shall he be on your cabinet?” he asks Voldemort.

“No,” Harry says first, “I don’t want to be. I’m happy with what IWR has become.”

“What a good answer,” Bright says, and his tone is still unpleasant. He and Voldemort have led the Wizengamot together for six years, and Voldemort swears they have come to have a functional relationship, but Harry cannot see how, because Bright is awful.

But then Q, always sensitive to conflict, looks up with wet eyes. Voldemort sees it too, and since he’s sitting beside her, he pulls her easily into his lap. “Q, here. We are fine.” And most of the table is indifferent, but Amelia gives Bright a look like he’s the arsehole, so that’s gratifying.

Still stroking Q’s hair, Voldemort says evenly, “The IWR seems to do better with more autonomy, and that is what I’ll give it. Perhaps a Secretary of Quotidian Affairs will be necessary in the future, but Giselle” (the Secretary of Foreign Affairs) “and the IWR have done quite well without one. Don’t you agree, Apollo?”

Bright’s expression doesn’t flicker. “It hardly matters if I agree,” he says, “until we confirm your
cabinet.”

“Precisely.” He’s reaching for the book Q had been looking at, propping her up in his lap. The conversation moves on, Scrimgeour and Robards and the Secretary of Defense discussing new DMLE co-training with the Quotidian military, and Voldemort sits back, eyes bright as he takes it in.

Their food comes, and more drinks, and Harry and Voldemort are again distracted by getting the girls to eat. Voldemort charms their utensils spillproof, and Harry casts shield charms over their clothes anyway, and they each take up a knife to cut everything into appropriate sizes. The girls are full on juice, Harry can already tell, and he’s not going to force them to eat because being sick in public would ruin an otherwise low-drama night. “Here, sweetheart.” He hands Phaedra a spoonful of potatoes. “Just try, okay? It’s okay if you don’t finish.”

“Okay,” she mutters, even if she’s not happy about it. She must want a broom more than Harry realized.

A voice from across the table: “Are you a pacifist now, as well?”

Ludo Bagman – he’s still a cabinet member, the Secretary of Sport and Game, though Harry can’t imagine he’ll stay on under Voldemort now. He’s looking to Voldemort. “Pardon?” Voldemort says, honestly taken aback.

Bagman nods to his plate – a walnut pesto, and Harry thinks it should be unextraordinary, but apparently not. “That.”

Voldemort gives him a look like he’s embarrassed for Bagman, now. “I am not,” he assures him. “But Cybele is, and I suppose we’ve all fallen out of the habit of meat.”

Harry hadn’t been thinking about it, but he’s right – they’ve got pesto and summer squash and mushrooms and wild rice and stuffed shells, and none of the sausage or ham or beef flanks of the rest of the table. He shrugs at Voldemort. “I wasn’t thinking about it,” he says, even knowing it will now be the subject of a few fluff articles. Voldemort will have to add ‘requests for recipes’ to his list of journalistic inquiries he will not deign to acknowledge.

It’s awkward having all the candidates at the same table. Bagman’s sniping at Voldemort and Swinton’s trying to ignore him. Robards and Zeal, the Secretary of Finance, are at least behaving like adults. But still. It’s going to be a massive regime change when Voldemort is sworn in later this month. Harry wonders if there will be protest resignations. Moody would have, if he hadn’t left to work for Minterpol a decade earlier. There must be others. Harry can only hope this doesn’t reflect badly on Voldemort, but.

He eats every spoonful of food that he offers to Phaedra and she doesn’t want, so really he’s eaten about half her dinner by the end of the night. Cybele fared about the same. Harry gathers them both up at some point, taking them to the toilets, and when he’s returned to the table, Voldemort says, “I got you coffee.”

Harry grins. “Cheers.” It’s innocent-seeming, but could really only mean some interesting sex that night. He expects Voldemort wants something properly submissive, to purge the day – and, well, Harry can do that for him.

They linger over drinks and coffee, and Q falls asleep in Voldemort’s lap and Phaedra is curled up against the back of her chair, and it’s rather nice that the conversation goes a bit quieter then. And finally, when Q has mumbled something in Parseltongue against Voldemort’s neck, he reaches for her cloak. “We really must go.”
And it’s a long time getting out anyway – everyone wants to be the final one to congratulate Voldemort, so Harry hoists Phaedra against his chest as well, and goes to say goodbye to Ron and Hermione, and Andromeda and Ted and Tonks, at a table he would have far preferred to be in the company of instead. “They’ve been quiet,” Andromeda says, looking to Phaedra and then back to Voldemort with Q.

“Yeah,” Harry says, running a hand over Phaedra’s braids. She stirs. “I didn’t expect it, really. But we promised them brooms if they got through this week, so.”

“Oh,” Ron’s eyes light up. “Leo’s wanted one, too. The older two never did,” he shrugs. “Dance lessons for them instead. But Leo’s got all the brawn of a Keeper.”

“Or a beater,” Tonks adds, with an amused glance. “Have you tried putting a bat in his hand yet?”

“God, no. He’s too good to be the hired muscle.” He looks back to Harry. “Could we teach them together?”

“Yeah. I’d like that.”

“Brill.”

Hermione moans quietly behind her hands. “They can’t even always hold themselves up when they walk, how shall they balance on a broom?”

“I got a broom for my first birthday,” Harry volunteers. “From Sirius.”

“I’m quite sure those aren’t on the market anymore. We care about child safety more these days.”

He laughs. “Voldemort’s said he’ll cast a shield charm in a net. They’ll be fine. There’s magnetism charms on those brooms, anyway.” He’d been watching Voldemort in his peripheral vision, and sees him at last move for the door. “And that’s my cue. See you at Ginny’s?”


They apparated from the street and got the girls into bed directly, with charms to brush their teeth and wash their faces. Baths could wait until tomorrow. Effie the lazy yellow ball python is already waiting in Cybele’s bed, and Voldemort says she may stay as long as she doesn’t disturb the girls’ sleep. They set child-minding spells to alert them to anything wrong, and charm on the nightlight spell, and leave the door open a crack. And then – alone. At last.

Harry is kissing Voldemort’s neck as they move toward their bedroom. “Minister,” he purrs, teasing. “What would you like me to do to you?”

“Anything you’d like.” Voldemort closes the door behind them, warding it just in case.

“Careful.” Kiss. “I might take you up on that.” Kiss. With teeth, leaving faint marks on his pale throat.

And when Harry pushes Voldemort to the bed, he is loose and his eyes glitter. “I don’t give a shit how powerful you’ll ever be,” Harry says. His tone is rough but his touch is soft, pulling off Voldemort’s robes and drawing his hands behind him, making his collarbone protrude. “Not as long as I can do this. Suck,” he instructs, pressing two fingers into Voldemort’s mouth. He does. He’s on his side now, the best position for his injured leg, and Harry pushes his upper knee forward,
spreading him.

Then a charm as he withdraws his fingers, replacing them with an iron bit that presses his tongue down. “You need to cry for me, sweetheart,” he murmurs. When Voldemort makes a doubtful noise, Harry pushes his wet fingers into his arse rather roughly, twisting deep inside him. “Yes, you do.” He charms his fingertips hot and cold by turns inside him, playing at him until Voldemort gasps around the bit. “There you go.” He lowers himself now, opening his fly without undressing because they like it like this, one of them still looking official and put together. “Good boy,” he murmurs, as he shifts his body, holding Voldemort down with his weight. As he slips forward, entering him, he pulls Voldemort’s head back, pressing teasing kisses around the edges of his mouth, around the bit. And when Voldemort’s eyes flutter closed, too taken with the sensation, Harry peels back his Occlumency. And at the crash of their minds on one another, they both gasp, then sink into the sensation like a warm bath. Parseltongue slips past his lips like water: “There you go, sweetheart.”
When Voldemort Becomes a Meme (Late 2012)

Chapter Notes

Crack. Utter crack. Also an exercise in worldbuilding humor, in which I found that
dying is easy but comedy is hard. I apologize for all of this.

The wixen world was a bit uneven in what it picked up in the cultural exchange of the Unification.
Biros yes, notebook paper no (and some enterprising manufacturers had begun selling ‘parchment
grade ballpoint pens’ in response). The music trends influenced each other a bit, and the more
modern wixie acts were sometimes asked to do guest tracks on Quotie albums. Wixen fashions didn’t
change but Quoties’ did, mimicking styles of robes without actually wearing robes – loose skirts or
wide sleeves or some of the ornate décor at the hems. (“Don’t let them copy the embroidery that is
actually protective runes,” Voldemort muttered once, when Harry showed him photos. – “What’s
wrong with protecting them?” – “I will not be responsible for designing their future military
uniforms.”) The Quoties thought Quidditch was absurd, but rugby already had a wixie fanbase, and
some people were trying to improve on other sports by playing on brooms or hippogriff-back.

Technology was hardest for wixes to adopt because it was changing rapidly, even by Quotidian
standards. Magic-internet (not a separate thing, just wixie-created pages on the regular internet) had
been a thing since the mid-1990s apparently. Xenophilius Lovegood had maintained an online
version of the Quibbler since 1996. (Which had irritated the fuck out of the International
Confederation of Wizards when it had been brought to their attention, but when Xeno pointed out at
his own trial that not even fellow wixes found the Quibbler credible, they let it go.) The wixie-run
pages were only as clunky and awkward as the rest of the early internet, and it was all expected to be
equally fake, so really mage internet got away with far more than one might expect.

The Statute had been lifted in 1999, but it wasn’t until about 2008 that 1) the magitech department
worked out how to reliably get electronics to function around magic, 2) enough wixies could be
persuaded to put the tech-safe wards in their homes, 3) they could be persuaded that any of these
electronics were a good investment and not a fad, and 4) there was enough content interesting to
them to be worth it. Even then it was a very specialized interest, disregarded and disdained by the
older generations. What really made it properly catch on, was Harry.

Voldemort had been elected Minister in August 2012, and somehow it made them wildly more
famous. Harry hadn’t recalled the previous Ministers garnering much attention on the street –
certainly Fudge could come and go as he pleased, and Scrimgeour was only really approached in the
times of greater distress, when the papers wanted to put confidence-inspiring photos of the steely ex-
Auror on their front page. But Harry and Voldemort, being them, had to contend with paparazzi at
least a few times a week, if not everytime they left the house. It was exhausting.

But Harry carried a mobile for work – the Quotidians were sometimes good sports about owl-based
communication, but anything more prompt probably required email or text or a phone call. And he’d
be on it often enough in public – that there were photos, and then it looks like a Thing, that it was a
trend. Harry was far from the only member of the Ministry who carried a mobile – really anyone
who ever communicated with Quoties needed one – he was just the most visible.

Voldemort, predictably, refused the technology. He would owl or floo with Penelope Clearwater, who’d send off messages on his behalf as necessary.

But it was just a perfect storm when Voldemort become Minister just as wixie internet was really finding its ground. Young wixes, some encouraged by images of Harry, often had phones now. Quotie internet was vibrant and omnipresent by 2012. Information moved at a dizzying rate, and old wixies and old Quoties all penned the same editorials that young people’s attention spans were eroding. But by late 2012 wixen internet had its own sort of culture, and in that environment… Voldemort became a meme.

Harry had found out quite by accident. He’d been looking up quidditch videos to show Ginny, how Portree’s offensive formation was going to get their seeker killed someday. But then, while clicking around a forum a bit more – there was a photo. A wixen photo of Voldemort, one of the times he’d brought the girls into work. He’d been holding Q while she was flailing, and hit him rather hard in the face. The text imposed on it read, *Oh shit, not again.*

Harry stared, then a moment later he was choking on laughter. Ginny glanced over. “Hm?” And he had to share it, it was too bizarre and too funny and too wonderful.

So he handed her his phone. “Oh yeah,” she said. “That one’s old, but it’s good. You haven’t seen it before?”

“There are more?”

“Oh, Harry.” She handed him back his phone. “I want to just watch you during this discovery. However – I’ve got to get back to work.” This was the only day of the week their lunches synced, so they’d been eating together in the Ministry canteen. “But you’ve got to tell me what you find. Fred and George will be so happy.”

“Why, do they make these things?”

“They’ve always said they won’t self-incriminate. But they’ll be careful not to use Christmas photos or anything. Dead giveaway.”

Harry’s fist was pressed to his mouth, before he attracted attention. “This is….”

“Wonderful,” Ginny said firmly. “It’s fantastic. Send me your favorites, I want to hear everything.”

So Harry didn’t get much work done that afternoon. It wasn’t just Voldemort who got turned into a meme, of course – wixen society was the size of a small village, so anyone of any prominence could be made into an inside joke. (One of the first memes Harry found read, *Mad Eye Moody is watching you masturbate*, and he found this both hilarious and deeply unsettling.) There were a lot of Harry himself – they weren’t so different from how he got satirized in the papers, as self-deprecating and a bit oblivious. *This is why Harry isn’t a Ravenclaw,* was something of a refrain, and it was fine, really. He’d long since made peace with his public persona.

But everything about Voldemort. The first meme Harry saved read *Maybe Voldemort’s face is flat because he ran into the wrong platform.* He would go to hell for laughing. Voldemort could never know.

Others were in a similar vein, about his snake-like visage. A photo of them outside Honeyduke’s had
the text, *They’ve clearly never even tasted a mouse*. And some had no text at all, but just served as reaction gifs, of annoyance or incredulity or boredom typically, as Voldemort’s face was more impassive than most people’s, and that looked negative to outsiders.

And there were some that were so ephemeral, they’d be nonsense when the context was lost in a few years. *Voldemort is going to buy us a broom* became a meme immediately after the election, from a quote the Quibbler got from Q. There’d once been a foreboding portrait in the background of one photo, looking unpleasantly at Voldemort, and that got edited into a lot of them now. Some were song lyrics, some were film quote, and some he couldn’t place at all.

It was Harry’s turn to pick up the girls from Molly that afternoon, so it was with great reluctance that he put his phone away to go be a responsible father.

It came back out again when he was cooking dinner – just for him and the girls, as Voldemort was having a business dinner with diplomats. So when he’d charmed a salad to shred and toss itself, and falafel was frying on the stovetop, he was back to this new world.

Wixes more or less used the same sites Quoties did. (Though they did get .mage domains, but there was little of value there.) There were even Quotie lists of best wixie accounts to follow on Instagram and Twitter. Harry squinted at the screennames, wondering if he knew any of them, if Fred and George or Lee or Angelina were creating these things. Some of them seemed incredibly like their humor.

He had just found a series of edits of Voldemort in short skirts, with quite nice legs – but still, *why* – when the wards of the back door chimed, and Voldemort came in. “Hi,” Harry said, slipping his phone back into his pocket. “How was it?”

“Irritating,” Voldemort said with perfect honesty. “I’ll have to go to Poland overnight next month. I’m sorry.”

Harry made a face. “I’m sorry,” he said. “But would you help with baths in a bit?”

“Yes. They’re quiet,” he added, glancing toward the stairs.

“I’m sure it means nothing good.” He ran a soothing hand along Voldemort’s back as they fell into step.

He should have told Voldemort about his newfound memes. *Look at this ridiculous part of the internet*. But he didn’t, because he wouldn’t be able to explain it. And then it became a proper secret. Harry kept his phone away from Voldemort anyway, because he found them distasteful and distracting, but now Harry had especial reason to do so. He and Ginny took the girls to Diagon Alley that following weekend, because they needed some quidditch gear and Ginny was more up to date on that sort of thing than Harry was. But before that, they paused outside Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes. “Are they old enough?” Ginny asked, one hand on the door.

Harry looked down at Q and Phaedra, whose eyes were wide just at the façade. They could only handle limited time with the Weasley family, who were all extroverts to Q and Phaedra’s introversion. “You know Fred and George,” he said to them, kneeling to their height. “This is their shop. Do you want to look inside?”

“Uh-huh,” Phaedra said, and Q gave a small nod, and so Harry took each of their hands to bring them in.

“Our favorite sister’s dulcet tones?” Fred said, coming out from around the counter. Harry ducked too – the bird was mechanical, swinging on a fixed track, and it looked like it’d burst into a cloud of feathers if it hit anything. Fred’s grin got wider when he saw Harry enter with the girls. “We have been waiting for years for you two to come,” he addressed them very seriously. He took off his hat in a twirl, and produced a rabbit out of it for each of them.

“Oh.” Q took the rabbit first, cradling it against her chest. When Phaedra didn’t, Fred dropped the other rabbit back in his hat, re-placed it on his head, and winked at her.

“But the bunny – “

“What bunny?” He lifted his hat again, to prove there was nothing beneath. And Harry quietly reflected in a way he hadn’t before that growing up magic must be a mindfuck, before kids are old enough to discern fantasy from reality anyway. Maybe this was why so many wixes were ridiculous, they lacked common sense because cause and effect never worked the same for them. “Hey, Q, you can hold it while we’re in here, but it can’t come home with us, alright?”

She looked down at it with sad eyes. “But….”

“We live with snakes,” he reminded her. “A lot of snakes. The rabbit will be happier here.” And much safer.

“… Okay.”

When Harry fell in step beside Fred, he muttered, “Do you hand baby animals to every kid who comes in?”

“We try to, yeah. George?” he called into the backroom.

George came out, sleeves rolled up and his arms cover in a pink film up to his elbows. “Gross,” Ginny remarked, ducking out of the way when he reached to pat her cheek.

“Our other favorite twins are here,” Fred said.

“Oh!” He stepped in, looking down past Harry. “I apologize,” he said to the girls in a quite refined way. He pulled out his wand to clean up, then offered his hand to Phaedra. “And you hang onto Babbitty,” he told Q, rabbit still at her chest. “She likes that.”

“Okay,” Q agreed, looking pleased.

So they walked the store, showing Q and Phaedra some of the more child-friendly items. Harry tried to veto all the most obnoxious ones, but he had the distinct sense that they’d get slipped things in the moments he was looking away. At some point Babbitty got placed back in Fred’s hat, so Q could play with a tube of glitter that exploded and contracted and exploded again. And thank god Harry wouldn’t have to talk her out of bringing the rabbit home, anyway.

They ended up behind the counter, as George showed the girls a really fantastic set of story-telling dice. Meanwhile Ginny said to Fred too casually, “Harry only just found all the memes.”

His smile went wide. “Have you? Which ones are your favorites?”

“This is absurd,” Harry muttered even as he was pulling out his phone. (Normally he wouldn’t in
front of his children, as he didn’t want to be a bad example, but they had an entire shadowbox story in front of them and were quite immersed in it.) “There’s the one where he’s a stingray, and the one where’s he’s Grumpy Cat, and the one where he’s that actress....” (The first two were self-explanatory, the last one because he’d worn a robe in a similar print to a Quotidian starlet’s dress in the same week, and so it inspired a lot of edits.) He was flipping through his photos now. “Also,” he said, pointing a finger at Fred, “I will not believe you aren’t making these yourself.”

“Harry,” Fred said soothingly. “If we were we wouldn’t just post it anonymously. We’d hand deliver them to Voldemort’s office, since he’ll never see them otherwise. Or have you told him?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“No, I haven’t.”

“Maybe a photo album, then, for Christmas? We hadn’t decided what to get him yet, anyway.”

Harry made a face. “He wouldn’t be angry. He’d just be awkward.”

“You husband is bad at people?” Fred asked, pretending to be shocked. And that was itself a motif, that Voldemort was socially awkward and uninterested in social graces. Harry… could see their point, really.

“It’s not just ones about him,” Harry said. He’d saved ones about Amelia Bones as the only good person in the entire Wizengamot, fighting a hopeless Hufflepuff fight of kindness. There were ones about Dumbledore – which wasn’t so unlikely, as his portrait was still something of a political presence, but still – as deliberately obscure and infuriating. Lockhart had been revealed as a fraud by a Quibbler exposé awhile back, and there were memes of literally unbelievable adventures of his. Have I ever told you about the time I won the Triwizard Tournament? read one macro of his face, which Harry saved promptly. Wixen film and telly were in their infancy, but there were ones about the actors and actresses, even if having this sort of celebrity was fairly new to the wixie world. There were some Quidditch players, including Krum (his typical glowering made fantastic reaction gifs), but the internet’s favorite was this sad goth young man who played for Australia. (We should pity the Snitch because we all struggle when we’re trapped, read one ‘sad Quidditch poetry’ meme.)

It was weird and it was happening rapidly and Harry needed to talk about it. He pushed his phone toward Fred. “Don’t tell me you didn’t make this.” It was a photo of him and Voldemort from when Harry was younger, probably within a year of their marriage, and the lyrics to Teenage Dream written on top. Hilarious, yes. But still.

Fred grinned at it. “You wouldn’t even want to know,” he said. “Would you?”

“I would,” he insisted.

Fred slapped his back. “Make something for us, Harry. It’s cathartic.”

“Maybe.”

“That’s my boy.” He stepped away, whistling a flawless rendition of Teenage Dream.

Fred and George couldn’t leave, but Harry and Ginny took the girls out to lunch, since their time in WWW had run long. Harry had a hard time convincing Q to put away the story dice, and Phaedra to put away a toy of potted plants that bloomed a number of things, except flowers. They had both been enamored of Fred and George before, but they were especially so now. So. Lunch, Quidditch gear, then Ginny had to get home because she and Tonks were having dinner with Ted and Andromeda,
but she promised to come flying with the girls sometime. They exited back through the Leaky Cauldron, said hi to Tom, and then took the floo home.

Everyone ended up in Harry’s bed for a nap, because going out took more out of him than it used to. And that’s where Voldemort found them when he got home that afternoon. He was already peeling off his robes when Harry stirred, moving so he might also fall in bed beside them. “How picturesque,” Voldemort remarked.

“You know, it is.” He reached for his phone, holding it high to capture them both with their sleeping daughters in the frame. “Smile.”

When he’s taken the photo, both girls wake slowly, then quickly, when they realize Voldemort has arrived home. “Abba!” Phaedra is crawling into his lap, Q is pulling herself out of bed. “We’ve got to show you everything – “

“Please not everything,” Harry interrupted Q. “Since we’ve already put it all away. You can each take out one toy, alright?” He didn’t get an answer. “Alright?” But Q was out the door and Phaedra darting after her. Harry sighed. “Fred and George practically gave them their entire stock.”

“Did it go well?” He knew as well as Harry did that the girls could get overwhelmed in places like that.

“Yeah, it did, actually. I dunno why, maybe they’ve just grown out of it.”

A faint smile on Voldemort’s lips. “Enough exposure to the Weasleys should desensitize them, I think.” He turned to look at Harry properly. “I received a note this morning, that Miraz should like to see us again.”

Their surrogate, and the twins’ biological mother. They’d told her early this year that they wanted another child, but Harry had expected it would take longer than this to get pregnant. “Is this too soon?” he asked. Voldemort had only been Minister for about three months yet.

“No. If she is in fact pregnant. Could you leave work early on Tuesday to see her?”

“Yeah, sure.” He pressed a kiss to Voldemort’s neck.

So Miraz was pregnant. Only about six weeks, earlier than they’d found out last time. “But you are so important now, Minister,” she said, flashing Voldemort a smile, “I thought you’d need more time to plan around it.” The baby would be due next summer. Already Harry’s heart was full.

One of the fantastic effects of the proliferation of mage-internet was the access to knowledge they didn’t have before. Potions and charms and recipes. There were tutorials for brewing and casting on youtube now. Harry had gotten good at household charms, and some of them had been handed down from Molly, but some had been looked up frantically when Phaedra got Helious Glow-Pods tangled in her hair and screamed at the idea of cutting them out. So.

Voldemort was ambivalent about all this – he too believed in access to knowledge, but the first time Penelope had told him of instructions for some dark and illegal curses online, he’d said they needed to convene a regulatory body for all electronic information. Harry was involved insofar as some
pages were written to lure Quotidians to do harmful things ("snorting chlorine powder will temporarily let you do magic!") and it was all just… a lot, at the beginning of Voldemort’s term.

Voldemort did, strangely, endorse dating sites. They really did need to infuse their population with new Quotidian blood, and Voldemort was already passing laws to incentivize intermarriage, so when someone told him many young Quoties found each other online now, he said wixies should be involved in such things too. The rate of intermarriage had been on the rise since the Unification anyway, but Voldemort was making it a priority. So the office of communications began a campaign to advertise online dating to younger wixes.

But the stupider parts of the internet were Harry’s alone. He began hearing Voldemort say things that would go brilliantly on a meme. (“Why can’t your doll just apparate?” he’d asked Q as she was balancing Flying Friedwulfa on a toy broomstick, and Harry had to get out so he could laugh himself sick elsewhere. And yes, Voldemort took time to play with the girls in the evenings, dolls or otherwise, because Harry said he’d divorce him if he didn’t. Neither of them were good at playing with toys, but Q and Phaedra were very patient, giving them remedial tasks during playtime.) *Shit My Dark Lord Husband Says* would no doubt be a hit, but a little less anonymous than Harry would like, so he held all these hilarious moments in his heart.

Finally, it happened. Voldemort had brought Harry lunch in his office one day when they were both free for an hour. When they’d sat down at a transfigured table (because really, they’d never get a moment’s peace if they went down the canteen, it was easier to eat in private), Harry said, “We should go on holiday after Christmas.”

“Where should we go?”

“Dunno. We should ask the girls, since it’d be their birthday. Assuming they don’t mind being away and not having a party until after.” They would be turning 4 in January, and their social lives were becoming important to them.

Voldemort’s lips were pursed. “Italy?” he suggested. “They can see historic mage Rome and Pompeii.”

Harry choked on his tortellini. “They will not possibly care about historic sites,” he promised. Even though the girls were more inclined to traditional magic than Harry was – they’d burn fruit offerings with Voldemort on Samhain while Harry watched, and pick flowers for the equinox altars, and help collect virgin rainwater during storms – they were also *children*. “Some place they can see animals,” he said. “And maybe a show? A show with animals?” he mused.

Voldemort ate as he thought. “They’ve seen all the beasts Hogwarts has to offer,” he said – which they had, Harry spent some weekends with Hagrid and he’d introduced them all. “There’s a mooncalf reserve in Nova Scotia. They’d like the sphinxes of Egypt, though I don’t know that the sphinxes would appreciate being a tourist attraction. There are the hippocampus herds of Greece, though January is far too cold to swim with them. Oh, and there are always dragons, I suppose. They’d quite like the Parselmouth dragons.”

Harry blinked at him. “The Parselmouth dragons?”

“Well, yes. Most dragons understand Parseltongue. A few speak it.”

“You’re *joking*,” he groaned. “Goddammit. What about Hungarian Horntails?”

“Oh, Harry,” Voldemort said, though he was amused. “If I’d known then, I certainly would have told Barty to have you sweet-talk your dragon. Then again, if I’d known then that you were a
Parselmouth, and consequently a Horcrux, then – well, everything would have gone quite differently.”

“Ugh.” He scrubbed his face. “The girls would like that, anyway. I’ll ask Charlie. Have you got a favorite dragon?”

“No, but I’m sure they do. Shall I find out?”


But when Voldemort had left and Harry was alone in his office with the entire hilarious conversation still in his head, he pulled out his mobile. There was a popular-enough photo of the four of them, Q and Phaedra in the center and Voldemort and Harry on either side as they walked down a road of Diagon Alley. It was a good photo. Anyway, carefully Harry typed the caption *Let’s take a family holiday to ancient mage Pompeii.* Perfect.

But it couldn’t last much longer. A few weeks later, Harry had come home early and gone to take a nap, as Voldemort was picking the girls up from Molly. He’d fallen asleep looking at his phone, but when he woke up some time later, it was no longer in his hand. Voldemort was propped against his pillows, looking thorough it with surprising ease. “Who taught you that?” Harry said, still groggy, as he reached to take it back.

Voldemort pulled it out of reach, then held something up. “Why do you have this?” he said. “It is offensive.”

And Harry was sure he’d found the memes of himself, but no, he was holding up one of Harry. Specifically a photo of him speaking to the mayor of London – which had been fairly low stakes, actually, just an opening of the first mixed church in England. But the caption beneath him read, *I’m down for anything, you know?*

It was the same caricature as he saw in papers, that he was low-key and informal to a fault. “What?” he said, sitting up so he could pull the phone away from Voldemort. “That’s hilarious. I suppose you saw the ones about you too, as well, then? How long have you been home, anyway?”

“Not long. The girls refused to nap at Molly’s, so they’re asleep until dinner.”

“Great. Thank you.”

“And… who makes these? Do you?” He took in Harry’s expression. “Of course I knew they existed. Someone asked me to sign one last week. I did not realize you were a collector, though.”

“Did you sign it?” Harry asked, fascinated.

“No. I didn’t want it to become a commodity.”

“Huh.” He looked back down at his screen. “Some are rude. Sorry. The internet is stupid, you’re better off not touching it.”

Voldemort waved him off. “They’re really doing nothing new. Satire is a healthy part of any political system.”

Harry blinked, then began flipping through his photos. “Do you like this one?” he asked, holding
“Like it for what?”

Harry shrugged. “Dunno. Sometimes I think my face is a weird shape when a photo is from the wrong angle.” But the photo he’d held up was an imposing-looking one of Voldemort – he wasn’t angry, but not everyone would be able to tell. It was at some meeting from shortly after the election. Harry liked it, anyway.

So he scooted closer to Voldemort, as he opened the editor. “What did you just say? Satire is a healthy part of any political system,” he typed out. “There.” He held it up with a cheeky grin.

“You are ridiculous.” He watched over Harry’s shoulder as he opened up shitposting.mage to post the meme. “I will figure out which ones are yours.”

“Mm. Figure out which ones are Fred and George’s first. They refuse to tell me. Fred said he was making you a photo album of them for Christmas.”

“Tell him to save the paper. Just….” Voldemort ran a hand down his face. “I have never felt so old before,” he lamented. “I need a moment alone.”

Harry grinned, pressing a kiss to his jawline. “Right. I’ll start dinner, then. Here.” He tossed his phone on the bed for Voldemort’s perusal. A sound of choked laughter. He left.
They don’t tell Q and Phaedra about the new pregnancy until after the new year and their 4th birthday. They both worry about the girls’ reactions – they are close as twins can be, and introverted, and need a certain sort of balance in their home. Harry questioned Ron and Hermione about how to tell them – their oldest two are the same age apart, four years, so their son Max was old enough to have Feelings about Portia’s birth. He asked Bill and Fleur, whose two daughters are nine years apart (wixes were fertile for longer since their lifespans were also so much longer, so this wasn’t unusual). He asked Molly and Arthur, who acted even more like parents to him now than they’d been when he was a child.

He and Voldemort stay up late, talking about it. “It needs to be you,” Voldemort said seriously. “I don’t always understand….” How quickly the girls’ moods can shift. Harry found this funny because Voldemort himself was naturally volatile, though these days he’s trying really hard not to be. But both girls cry easily, which alarms Voldemort, so it probably should be Harry.

He ran a hand across Voldemort’s shoulders. “Okay,” he said. “Should we ask them if they want to come find out the gender?”

Voldemort grimaced. “We should ask Miraz the same.”

“Oh. Yeah. I’ll write to her?”

“Yes, please. And if she agrees – then we should. It may help.”

“They’re resilient,” Harry said. “Maybe they’ll love the idea. As soon as it’s got hair I’ll let Phae charm it whatever color she wants.” The girls had gotten training wands for their 4th birthday – magical wood but no cores, so it could do a limited amount of magic, but Phaedra had learned to charm her hair color first and she did it for them both almost every day. Some papers had written that it made them look like delinquents, going about with turquoise or magenta hair, and those papers weren’t getting any quotes from either Harry or Voldemort until they retracted their terrible opinions. Anyway.

Harry wrote Miraz. She wrote back that she’d like to see them for real, and could they go out to lunch before the appointment? This sounded fantastic. The girls liked seeing her, they liked seeing bits of Kolkata. He wrote back that they would.

The appointment was about a week off. Voldemort and Harry had started making lists of what they’d need to buy – they still had all the nursery furniture, and enough linens, but they needed new bottles, new nappies, new toys. They had more late nights.

They’d planned to tell the girls a few days before, but as it turned out there was no need. One afternoon, when Harry and Voldemort had gone together to pick them up from preschool, their teacher approached them discreetly. “They’ve both been, ah, cranky today,” she said, with a glance toward them as they gathered their things from the cloak closet. “Maybe you should find out if everything’s alright?”

“They were fine last night,” Voldemort said, a bit flatly. “What happened today?”
“Nothing, sir.” Her eyes had gone a bit wide, and Harry internally sighed. “Nothing I know of. We haven’t changed anything in their routine….”

“Thanks,” Harry said, smiling brighter to make up for Voldemort. “We’ll talk to them. I hope they weren’t too much trouble for you today.”

“Oh no…” But she trailed off as Harry and Voldemort stepped past her to collect their daughters.

“She wasn’t accusing you,” Harry muttered in Parseltongue. “Don’t be a dick.”

“Was that not an accusation?”

“No. It wasn’t. Hey, sweetie.” He got to Q first, bending to pin her cloak beneath her chin. “Good day in school?”

She looked back with dark and defiant eyes. “No.”

“Alright. That’s alright. Phae, come here, baby.” He held out his arms as Voldemort brought her over. He got a reproachful look in return. Keeping his tone light to delay the tantrums just long enough to get home – “We’ll talk about it at home, okay? I’m sorry you had a hard day. Here. Hands for the floo.” He took one, Voldemort took the other, and they left.

Q pulled her hand away the very moment they reached their floo. “I won’t,” she said severely, tugging her cloak over her head and dropping her backpack at her feet. “We won’t.” And when Voldemort brought Phaedra through the floo a moment later, she immediately burst into tears.

It was bad, it was all just bad, everyone was upset and their tempers played off each other as stray magic crackled in the air. “You both need to go to your room. Both of you,” Voldemort said evenly. “And you can come talk to us only when you’re ready. Please.”

Phaedra was still sobbing, so Q had to shout even louder over her. “I! Don’t! Want! A! Baby!” And grabbing a ceramic bowl off the coffee table, she pitched it at Voldemort. It exploded into dust in midair – maybe his magic, maybe hers – and Q then burst into tears as well.

Fuck. They’d never heard the girls out of bed after bedtime, so they’d gotten lax about silencing spells. Harry melted with guilt and sadness amidst all the frustration. “Okay,” he said, stepping in between Q and Voldemort because they both had the same temper. “Let’s talk about it later. Not now. Everyone needs to lie down. Here – “

He tried stepping in to pick Q up, hoping Voldemort would get Phaedra. But Q raised her tiny fists and Harry only just caught them before they smashed into his stomach. “We do not hit,” he said severely, and then scooped her up, holding tight against her thrashing.

He definitely got hit in the face a few times, his glasses knocked askew, before he reached the twins’ bedroom. Behind them, Voldemort held Phaedra, who was sobbing into his chest. Everyone was exhausted.

“Just for awhile,” Harry said, setting Q on her bed and pressing his hand to the scratch she’d given him. “Effie?” The ball python reluctantly poked her head out from under Q’s bed. “Why don’t you tell Effie first,” he said to Q. “She doesn’t know what’s going on.”

“I don’t care. I don’t want – I don’t want – “

“Look.” Pulling out his wand, he charmed the image of a clock above their door. “When the hand get to the end of the purple part, you can come talk to us. You too, Phae,” he added, and Phaedra
curled in on herself.

But somehow they both managed to get out, and Voldemort put a lot of child-minding spells on the door so they couldn’t do anything impulsive, and then they retreated into Voldemort’s study. Falling onto a sofa, they collapsed against each other.

“Our greatest fuck-up yet,” Harry muttered into Voldemort’s shoulder as he cast more silencing charms around the door.

“Is it?”

“Yeah. Definitely.” He scrubbed at his face. “Alright. So.”

They had at least a half hour to strategize – that was how long Harry had put on the timer, expecting they’d have burned themselves out by then. Q’s tantrums came hot and fast, Phaedra’s were more of a slow build, and maybe they should’ve been separated so they didn’t fuel each other’s misery, but – whatever. It seemed that they’d found this out together, and so Harry and Voldemort would need to find out what other mischief they’d accomplished behind their backs. Not tonight, though.

The sounds of tantrums had receded by the time the half hour was up, but their bedroom door hadn’t opened. Moira had wandered into the study earlier, curious about all the commotion and stray magic, and Harry held her in his lap now. He rose, carrying her in the doorway, listening. Quiet. “We should go,” he murmured.

“You said they should come to us.”

“Well, yeah, but it’s late. Maybe they’ve fallen asleep, that’d be brilliant. Here.” He moved to listen outside their bedroom. It was silent.

Voldemort was behind him when he knocked. “Can we come in?” Nothing. He peeled back the wards and entered.

Immediately there was a force at his hips, as Phaedra threw herself at him. “Papa – I didn’t mean to –” And she was sobbing.

“Sweetie – “ Oh. He actually surveyed the room, to find the glass all shattered in its panes. “The windows? No, you know there can be accidents. Did you get cut? Either of you.” A shake of her head. “If you could please hold Moira, we can fix it.”

She held up her hands and Harry set the dog into them. He found his wand in his back pocket. Casting it properly: “Reparo.” The glass melded itself back together.

Voldemort had stepped past him, sitting on the floor now beside Q, who was lying half-under her bed, Effie still beside her. Q was silent, not looking at either of them. Harry sat beside Voldemort on the plush rug. “Phae, come here please.” She fairly threw herself onto the floor, Moira fluttering to safety a few feet off the ground.

Harry rubbed his fingers through his beard. “We were going to tell you today or tomorrow. We’re going to visit Aunt Miraz this weekend, and we wanted you both to come too.” (Miraz was ‘Aunt’ because she insisted she wasn’t ‘Mum.’ They knew that she’d given birth to them, they just didn’t know that that usually made someone a parent. Neither Harry nor Voldemort were inclined to tell them, they’d find out eventually.) “Would you like to see her?”

“Yeah,” Phaedra said, wiping off her face. “And gulab?”
Gulab jamun, sweet dumplings sold on the streets near Miraz’s home. “Sure,” he agreed. “Q?”

Q glared from her spot under the bed. “She’s already got a baby.”

Harry blinked, surprised at this conclusion. “Yeah, she does,” he agreed. “She’s pregnant right now.” (Neither of them were much for the precious language of tummies and so on.) “The baby’s about this big.” And he cupped his hands, how big a three month fetus should be. “Its birthday will be in the summer. Just like Imogen’s, right?” The youngest daughter of Ron and Hermione, a year and a half younger than the twins, so they weren’t exactly close right now, but they’d been to Imogen’s birthday party every June. “And then you’ll both be older sisters.”

“Don’t wanna be sisters,” Q muttered.

Harry suppressed a smile. “Well, you already are, to each other,” he pointed out. “And you like that. Leo’s a big brother, and he’s happy. So are Portia and Max.” Ron and Hermione’s was the only big household they knew – Neville’s son was an only child, and so was Padma’s daughter. “Remember Peter Pan? Wendy’s got younger brothers. And, ah – “ He fished for more cultural references.

“And Cypress the hippogriff, and Evangelina, and Stryker the stoat.” Voldemort spoke for the first time. He read the girls more books than Harry did – or Harry would come listen with them – and these were some of their current favorites. “When we go to the library next, we will look for more.”

Q crawled out a bit farther, grasping Voldemort’s sleeve and looking at him with wide eyes. “Abba, I don’t wanna.”

“What don’t you want?” he asked. “If you don’t want to see Miraz this weekend, then we could leave you with Gram or Leo or Madhuri. Really,” he said at her look.

“No,” Phaedra interrupted, startled. “We’re together. We go together.”

“Then could you both decide if you’re coming with us. You haven’t got to. But when the baby is born, you need to be good and you need to love it. Imagine how bad it would feel, to live somewhere that didn’t want you.”

Oh. Harry hadn’t been prepared for that sucker punch. He looked away momentarily, rubbing Moira’s ears since she’d come to lie down between him and Phaedra. Phaedra, watching him, gave him a very tentative smile.

Q’s small hand still clutched at Voldemort’s sleeve. “But – But we – “ She stuttered in English and Parseltongue, unable to find the words she needed.

“Cybele. Sit up, please.” Voldemort waited until she had crawled out from beneath the bed. “Neither of you have to accept it – to feel good about it,” he revised his phrasing deliberately, since they may not know accept yet, “tonight. You do have to behave in public as always, and you especially have to be good with Miraz if you will come see her. But otherwise – there is quite a lot of time before the baby is born. You’ll probably be out of school first. So you may take a longer time to become used to the idea. Alright?”

It was a relief, Harry saw it on Q’s face. They had months, at least. “Alright,” she said, ducking her head.

“Phaedra?”

She was petting Moira, whom she’d pulled into her lap, and only looked up briefly. “Alright,” she echoed.
“Good.” He stretched out his legs and found his wand, transfiguring it into a staff so he may stand. And Harry was up too then, pulling his hands up.

“Love you, babies,” Harry said as he steadied Voldemort. “I’m starving. Can we make pizzas for dinner?”

It really was a testament to how upset they both were, that this didn’t get a resounding yes. Anyway, Harry looped his arm around Voldemort, and they went downstairs together.

Voldemort cast thorough silencing spells around them when they reached the kitchen, before he said, “If they come with us, let me cast a cheering charm on them.”

Harry scrubbed his face. Light magic was generally safe for children, he just felt like it was manipulative. “Maybe,” he conceded. “Could you tell them first?”

“Mm.” He was taking down flour and cornmeal and yeast, so they were in fact making pizzas. Harry pulled out vegetables for the marinara. “Or a calming draught?”

“Tell them,” Harry said firmly. “They may even like the idea.” Magic made childrearing incredibly easier – they used Scourgify and Tergeo more than all their other magic combined, they put childminding charms on the bedroom at night, and silencing spells were for any number of moments of privacy. But still, it couldn’t bypass the hard parts of parenting. And Voldemort was aware it would be – well, psychopathic, to forego the emotional bits with magic. Harry didn’t even let him put up silencing spells when one of the girls was having a tantrum in their room. But this all was a lot at once, and Miraz deserved not to deal with the twins’ anger, and it might help them process feelings in a slightly more methodical way. So. Maybe.

On Saturday Harry was awoken by the girls crawling over him, shaking him awake. “Papa! Papa!” Phaedra was bouncing beside him as Q forced something into his hand. “We made this for you!”

It was, wisely, a potion put in a jar instead of a glass, so they couldn’t spill it across the sheets. “Abba showed you how?” He sat up. “And what does this potion do?”

“Guess!”

It was clearly a Tincture of Well-Being, and really it was fine. The girls were both in higher spirits than they’d been all week, and it was a relief more than anything. “Mm.” Opening it, he got a surprising scent of berries, amidst the potion’s typical peppermint and virgin rainwater. “Smells like strawberry.”

“It’s my invention, I told Abba to.” Phaedra bounced beside him in excitement.

He took a swallow. They should probably bring the rest along. “I think it makes you… happy!” And he grabbed Phaedra, tickling her sensitive sides, as she shrieked and giggled, and Q ran out the door yelling, “He got it, he got it!” Chaos, but good chaos. They’d be alright.

So when he’d gotten dressed and brushed his teeth and trimmed his beard, everyone else was already in the kitchen eating. The twins were in a stage of just not sleeping, that they were up before five every morning, and Voldemort was usually up first, so the potion was probably as much a distraction as anything else. When Harry came in, he squeezed Voldemort from behind, pressing a kiss to the back of his neck, as he stirred a skillet of eggs. “Thanks, babe.”

“Was that alright?” Voldemort asked, because Harry had been ambivalent about giving the girls a
potion all week.

“Yeah. The strawberry was a nice touch.”

“Phaedra’s idea. It’s inert in that potion, anyway.”

Harry squeezed him again, then reached around for the spatula. “Let me finish up. Go read the papers.”

So they see Miraz and her partner Suman. The girls eat gulab jamun and fresh cherimoya from a street vendor as they walk the few blocks between Miraz’s home and the healer’s. The girls are newly fascinated with the idea of pregnancy – Angelina was seven months pregnant at Christmas and it was really the first time they’d seen anyone they’d known pregnant, so now they want to touch Miraz and listen to her belly, and she’s really more gracious about it than she’s got to be. “Be careful,” Harry begged. “And not with sticky hands, oh my god, come here – “

But they are gentle, and when Q pulls her hands away she looks up with skepticism. “We were in there?”

“Yeah, you were,” Miraz agrees.

“Both of us?”

“Yeah.”

“But how did we fit?”

She laughs. “Sometimes it felt like you didn’t,” she says. With her hand on the door: “Ready?”

It’s a girl. Another girl – only one this time, thank god. Harry feels almost prepared for girls, by now. He kisses Voldemort hard and then they scoop up the twins into hugs. And the twins… it’s clearly still a lot for them, but they’re excited as well, and having another sister will be less of an adjustment than a boy would be, and Harry tells them they can teach the baby everything they know. They make it home with no real drama, and both the girls need naps, then Harry and Voldemort slip off to celebrate on their own.

In the next few months, they adapt to the idea of another child. The twins come along to pick out the new bedding and toys and clothing. Fred and Angelina’s baby is born at the end of February, a boy named Julian, and when they’ve brought him over to the Burrow or to Ron and Hermione’s while the girls have been there, Harry lets them look as long as they’re so careful and quiet. Julian himself is already loud and boisterous, just a couple months old, and it makes Q and Phaedra… better. They have begun to think of themselves as responsible, seeing just how small and helpless a baby is, even if neither of them really agree when some other well-meaning adult has asked, “Don’t you think he’s cute?” So. They all grow into the idea.

Their daughter is born on the summer solstice. Aurelia Faustine. (Voldemort didn’t tell Harry that it was a Roman name until after he’d already fallen in love with it, so now they were the sort of elite wixie family with imposing Latin names. Anyway.) And she was sweet and vibrant and louder than the twins, even from birth. She was born with a mop of curly hair that Harry couldn’t stop playing with. She was perfect.
When Suman had come to tell them, they’d had to drop the twins off with Ron and Hermione first. “Be good,” Harry begged them as he handed their bags to Ron. “I don’t think we’ll be gone overnight, but…."

“Would you really deprive us of a sleepover?” Ron asked, then slid in close. “Just take the night alone, mate, really. Congratulations.”

Harry grinned at him and ducked back into the floo. And they did end up spending that night alone – they bring Aurelia back home late in the evening, and end up sleeping on the nursery on the sofa beside her crib. Late that night, when Harry is propped up just enough to give Aurelia a bottle, Voldemort slides against his side and runs his fingers through Harry’s hair. “Her hair’s just like yours,” he murmurs, half-into Harry’s neck, and Harry laughs.

And the next day they bring Q and Phaedra home. Their last time out, they’d each been allowed to get one toy for themselves and one for Aurelia, and they bring these into the nursery now. When Aurelia is awake and quiet, Voldemort and Harry lift the twins to look at her. “Congratulations, big sister,” Harry says to each of them, arranging their toys on a shelf above the crib for now. And they spend a lot of that day in the nursery, too. And Harry’s heart is full. He’s just got an infinite capacity for loving his family, and Voldemort’s… got more than he believes, anyway. He’ll figure that out eventually.
Aurelia would be 5 weeks old for Harry’s 33rd birthday, and he was being forced to have a party.

He’d been ambivalent about it – he was really getting too old for anyone to care about his birthday, he’d said. And these past few months had all been consumed with the baby, and his friends were just available less often than they’d once been. Adult life was taking over.

But then Voldemort threatened to throw Harry a surprise party if Harry didn’t plan something himself. And that was a distressing possibility, so. A party.

He invited everyone – his Hogwarts cohort, all the Weasleys, most of the Order, parents of Q and Phaedra’s friends, some Ministry colleagues of his and of Voldemort’s. It was never meant to be a big thing, but he kept thinking of people he wanted to see, and it’d been a long time since a lot of them had seen each other, and since about half his peers had mobiles now he didn’t even have to send out thirty owls. So.

Q and Phaedra were excited since Harry had invited all their friends, and because they liked seeing Harry’s friends too (Harry had tried to impose calling them all Aunt and Uncle, but that had fallen away and now they were just friendly adults in the twins’ lives). Harry suspected as well that it was because it was one of the first times they’d done anything decidedly not about the baby. “None of Aura’s friends are coming,” Phaedra had said one day, peering into the crib. (Aurelia was a challenge for 4 year olds, so she’d become Aura to them. Harry liked it.)

He grinned at her. “Who are Aura’s friends?”

“She hasn’t got any.”

Brutal. Hilarious. He loved having kids. “Julian will come, I think.” Fred and Angelina’s son, now 5 months old. “We’ll put them to sleep beside each other. That’s as good as being friends, right?”

“No.”

“Then I guess you’ll have to be her friend instead.” He scooped her up. “Leo’s coming, and his dad says he’s got a surprise for all of you.” God knows what Ron had planned, but it had better be good.
“And Madhuri, and Astrid, and Imani will be there. And what will you all be doing during the party?”

“Playing outside or in the drawing room.”

“And what aren’t you going to do?”

“Go to the pond.”

“And what else?”

“Or look at the snakes.”

“Not even one snake?”

“None of the snakes,” she promised solemnly, then wriggled to be let down. A squeeze, and he complied. He’d need to remind Q about the no-snake rule again, he thought.

His actual birthday was a Wednesday, so they were having the party the Sunday before. The guest list was somewhere above fifty people, including children. They scoured the house and childproofed anything that wasn’t already. They renewed all the protective wards. They were mostly cooking themselves but for a few fancy baked goods they’d ordered (Padma worked in a restaurant these days and offered them anything at cost), so they bought ingredients and alcohol and child-friendly foods. Voldemort went to go negotiate with the snakes – if they all stayed away from the party, he would bring them quail eggs, apparently the most delicious sort. There was general acquiescence.

On the day of the party, everyone was awake early. Harry and Voldemort were putting together dishes, Phaedra was charming her hair different colors for different potential outfits, and Q was mourning that the snakes would have to be locked away for one afternoon. She sat on the cellar steps just outside the kitchen, so Harry could hear her explaining to a python named Sarai that Abba and Papa said humans couldn’t be friends with snakes. “I didn’t say that!” he called in amusement from the other side of the kitchen. In response, Q shut the cellar door firmly.

Shortly before the party’s real start time, there was a flurry of Weasleys all coming through the floo at once to help with preparations – Molly and Arthur, Ron and Hermione with their kids, Bill and Fleur with their kids. And for awhile it was chaos as Harry got hugs and kisses and slaps on the back, and then the kids were exiled from the kitchen unless they were going to help (they weren’t), and then Molly looked around at every countertop covered in food. “What do you need, dear?”

Harry tried to say, but Voldemort knew more of the logistics of all the food, and ended up directing its preparation. This happened every Christmas anyway – arguably Christmas was more tense, since Molly insisted on making many of her own dishes even now that Harry and Voldemort hosted – so Harry quietly cored pineapple nearby but otherwise didn’t mediate.

“Krum is coming later, with George,” Ron offered as he assembled shish kebabs beside Harry. “They went to a game last night – a Quotie game called rugby?” he offered tentatively, as though Harry might not know it.

He grinned. “Rugby, yeah.”

“So he stayed over with them. He’s been here – a week and a half? It’s been great, the kids love him and he can almost wear them out. Hey, bring your twins over to go flying sometime, he’ll be around for at least another few weeks. Off season, you know.”

Ron and Hermione had cultivated a beautiful friendship with Krum in adulthood. Fleur invited him
to all her parties, and then Hermione did too, and Ron still glowed whenever he was around. Harry had the suspicion that the three of them were shagging, but he’d never be able to ask. So. “Yeah, I think I will bring them by,” he agreed. “It’s a bit hard to get out of the house now, though.”

“Right. Baby. You look good. Like you slept last night.”

He made a dubious noise, then laughed. “She’s asleep now, but we’ll bring her down. She likes people, she’d probably have a great time.”

“You need to socialize them! Hermione said not to talk about them like that though, as though they’re dogs.”

“What?” Hermione slid in beside Ron; she’d been talking to Voldemort about something Wizengamot-related and Harry thought they’d just agreed to a meeting next week. Neither of them knew how to have fun.

“That babies don’t need to be socialized like dogs.”

“Just when you say it like that….”

“Dogs are so great, though. The babies should be flattered.”

She smiled at him, picking up a skewer to help make kebabs. “Happy birthday, Harry,” she said. “How’s Aurelia? And how is everyone else?”

“Mm. Good, you know? The twins are mostly good. And it’ll be easier when they’re in school full time next year. How’re you?”

She laughed, a little tired. “With Max home from Hogwarts again, the house feels very, very full. And it’s so….” She made a vague gesture. “He’s a different person each time. How did our parents do it?” she mused. “My parents never even considered boarding school for me before. So – we are adjusting.”

“He’s happy though,” Ron added. “He’s got no idea he’s breaking our hearts. Hey, Leo said Q and Phaedra have got wands now?”

“Yeah. They’re definitely not allowed out of the house, so I hope they’ve only told him and not shown him. Actually, we should’ve locked those away for today….” He looked back to see if he could ask Voldemort to go, but Voldemort and Fleur were currently assembling a cheese platter. Well.

“No, it’s fine,” Ron waved off his concern. “We just didn’t know if it’s worth it, this young? Portie’s got one, she got it for her 8th birthday, but Leo already causes chaos, so….”

He grinned. Q and Phaedra were not the best examples for this – they were decidedly heirs of Slytherin, and ancestral magic swirled around them both here and at Hogwarts. It would be more dangerous to not give them an outlet for their magic. “It’s sort of chaotic,” he said. “But we like it. They can only have them while we’re watching. They only think magic is for fun, so it’s funny, some of the stuff they want to use it for.” Q was currently into transfiguring parts of her dolls into other things – her favorite doll currently had a flowerpot for a face and spatulas for arms, and Harry couldn’t replicate this insane genius if he tried. Phaedra mostly used hers for art, animating clay and paint and glitter into moving landscapes. It was fantastic. “So, you should. There was this article in Pastel’s a few months back about explaining magic to kids, I’ll find it for you….”

Hermione’s lips were pursed. “I’d like to,” she said to Ron. “He’d like the stimulation.”
“Now who talks about kids like they’re dogs?” Ron said.

She shushed him with a smile. “And it’d be good to start him early. He’s always trying to take Portia’s wand, she’s going to figure out a way to hex him with it someday, really….”

“Cool. Yeah. Our home was getting predictable, anyway.”

Then, both the rush of the floo and the chime of the front door. Harry set down his chef’s knife and went to go meet his guests.

Lisa and Daphne and Luna and Pansy had all come in through the front, and it took Harry a moment to process. Luna had asked if she could bring a date, and Harry had only been quietly fascinated when he’d agreed, since Luna hadn’t mentioned dating anyone as long as he’d known her. But now she stood with Pansy Parkinson, in coordinating yellow and violet outfits. It was… amazing.

“Hi,” he said. “Come in, we’re just bringing everything outside now – drinks can go in the coolers – Hi, Luna,” he said when she hugged him warmly.

“Another journey around the sun,” she mused. “The Quotidian’s Christ died at 33, it’s a very special number for them.”

“Oh my god, Lovegood, why do you say things like that,” Pansy said, exasperated. “My canapes are melting.”

“Into the kitchen – that way, yeah – there’s space in the extra icebox, make Voldemort move things if there’s not. Take Luna with you,” he said at the flicker of emotion across Pansy’s face at that. “I’ve got to see who’s just come through the floo.”

Padma and Hannah, each with one of the girls’ newmage friends and their parents. The gaggle of kids had already run in, swallowing Madhuri, Astrid, and Imani into their giggling shrieking mass. “Hi, come in, I’ll show you around in a bit, it’s a lot to take in at all at once,” he was saying to the Quotie mums. “Everyone’s going out to the courtyard, that way….”

“Happy birthday,” Padma said, handing him a glittering bag.

“Oh, Padma – thanks, you really didn’t have to. We picked up the cake this morning, your pastry chef is a genius.” He was walking them out toward the back door. “All the kids are staying inside now, to contain them for a little longer. They’re…. He listened, and in a moment they heard that sort of happy screaming of playing children. “They’re in the drawing room.”

She pushed her hair off her face, smiling. “Do I look worried?” she said lightly. “Parvati says happy birthday, and sorry she’s missed it. She had to move in with our great aunt and uncle in Pune, they’re getting quite old. She says she’s learning to cook there, at least. Finally!” She took the beer Hannah offered her. “Cheers.” Then the floo sounded again and Padma gave him a little pat on the shoulder to dismiss him.

The group currently sorting themselves out before the floo was even weirder than Luna and Pansy had been: Neville with his husband Otto and their son Nico; Hagrid; and Remus with a very pouty Snape on his arm. “There’s the birthday boy,” Hagrid thundered, scooping him into a hug. Over Hagrid’s shoulder, Harry grinned at the rest of them.

“Hey, Nico,” he said, as Hagrid set him down, “everyone else is in the drawing room, that way.” He pointed. “There’s this big train set, I think you’d like it.” Nico was shy and always had a book with him, and the first time he’d come over, Harry had pointed out all the quiet corners in the house, in case he needed to recharge.
“Say thank you,” Neville prompted, before pushing him in that direction. He was turning back to Snape: “So you’ve got to make the biting moss comfortable before you try to prune it, otherwise the discharge curdles.”

Right. So they’d come together, not merely at the same time. Harry couldn’t help but stare, and Remus grinned at him. “I didn’t believe it either. Still don’t.” He was lifting a bag of drinks out of Snape’s hands. “But they both worked overnight shifts at St. Mungo’s all last year, and Neville’s very persistent and Severus can’t drink alone, so.” He gestured.

Snape glared, at Harry and Remus both. “We are professionals, and we interact in a professional capacity.”

“Uh-huh,” Neville said, somehow now only amused by him. He grew plants for the research and medicine wing of St. Mungo’s, and he was happy there. Harry didn’t know exactly what Snape did these days – a freelance potioneer of some sort, who worked on contract for St. Mungo’s sometimes – but the important thing was that he would never work with children again.

Stepping out into the courtyard with them, Harry poured a whiskey soda, and dithered at whether to bring Voldemort anything. He must still be in the kitchen, since he was nowhere outside. Pansy and Daphne were talking to Luna nearby, otherwise he might’ve asked her. He went in.

The kitchen was nearly empty, too, though – Arthur was in there, pouring juice cups for Imogen and Mireille. “Be very careful,” he said to them as he snapped on the lids. “And the doggie doesn’t want any.”

Harry was quite sure Moira would want a cup of juice if one was offered, but he held his tongue. “Have you seen Voldemort?” he asked when Arthur looked up.

“Upstairs. A, ah, koala came to fetch him?”

Harry laughed. Some of their child-minding spells had physical manifestations, and Voldemort would always cast them as snakes because he was that fucking predictable. But Harry had begged him to change it just for today, and Voldemort had made it into the softest, sweetest animal he knew. “Cheers,” Harry said, and moved to go upstairs.

The nursery was dimly lit, out of the way of direct sunlight. Voldemort was just finishing a changing, and a bottle sat nearby. Aurelia was gurgling, and gurgled louder when Harry approached. “Hey, sweetheart. Sweethearts,” he corrected, playing his fingers along the back of Voldemort’s neck. “Is everything adequate?”

“More than. Here, switch you.” He handed Voldemort his drink and took up the bottle, settling with Aurelia onto the sofa. “Remus brought Snape,” he said. “And Hagrid.”

“I’m sure Severus is miserable.”

“Yeah, he is. Apparently he drinks with Neville now though, so they’ll be alright.” He dabbed at Aurelia’s mouth with her bib. “Can you just – say hi to him?”

A quirk of Voldemort’s lips. “We’ll have quite a bit more to say than that.” At Harry’s alarm, he softened. “I expected Lupin would tell you, even if Severus wouldn’t. He’s just accepted a position in the Department of Mysteries.”

“Oh,” Harry said, surprised. “Good. That’s really good. They’ve had a rough time, with jobs and all.” The laws about werewolves moved more slowly than just about any other legislation – even
with Amelia Bones advocating for them, and Voldemort refusing to support new discriminatory laws when he’d been Vice Chancellor. Now, almost a year into his time as Minister, Voldemort could change things but not unilaterally.

Aurelia’s bottle was finished; Harry put her over his shoulder to burp her. “Could you get that sling? The red one – yeah, cheers. I’ll take her with me, she’ll be awake for awhile anyway. Oh, have you met Astrid’s and Imani’s mums? They haven’t been here before. And Luna brought Pansy….”

“We were introduced.”

“Good.” He fastened the sling firmly over his shoulder, so Aurelia sat warm against his chest. “I didn’t know that’s who she was bringing, honestly. Luna’s so nice.”

“There’s no accounting for taste, I suppose,” Voldemort said dryly. He handed Harry back his glass, and they returned downstairs.

There was quite a lot of noise in the entryway – Harry saw the crowd of orange when he turned the corner. George and Lee, Fred and Angelina with their baby Julian, and Krum. Behind them, just getting in, were Ginny and Tonks with Ted and Andromeda. The typical loud reunion of Weasleys was always chaotic and joyous; Harry grinned as he descended the stairs.

“Harry!” George threw his arms wide. “Is that your kid?”

“This one? I just found her.” He hoisted Aurelia out of the sling so she could look at the crowd. “Can you say hi, Aurelia? Look, this is Julian.” He motioned to the baby in Fred’s arms. “You don’t know it yet, but you two are going to be best friends. And you’ve got to ask him where that very dapper bowtie came from.”

Fred grinned, flicking the miniature bowtie, printed with hippogriffs. “Mine, actually. I think Mum sewed it then. She’ll sew you one too, if you want. But for now….” He was patting down his pockets. “George, have you got…?”

“Yeah. We brought them for the twins, but they would be even more wonderful on babies. Here.” He’d pulled out a handful of hair bows. “How about this one.” Stepping in close, he pinned a green bow into Aurelia’s dark curls.

“Thanks?”

“You’ll see, in a few minutes. And you look like a feisty one, yeah?” he said to Aurelia directly. “Make us proud.”

Deeper into the house, the echo of Moody’s gait and Kingsley’s tone. “Oh yeah, I brought the Order,” Tonks said blithely. “Mad Eye had something to ask Molly, he wouldn’t tell me what…..”

“All information is on a need-to-know basis,” Moody grumbled as he entered. Kingsley was behind him, and Hestia Jones, whom Harry had gotten to know more from Tonks’s and Bill’s parties. He grinned at them. “Potter, all your kids glow here, did you know?”

He glanced down at his definitely-not-glowing baby. “Yeah?”

“Hereditary magic.” Voldemort had been watching quietly from the bottom of the stairs; everyone looked back at him. “The ritual of adoption knits them all into Slytherin’s bloodline. We had it done for Aurelia only last week.”

Moody had only implied before that he could see magic in some way. His false eye returned to
Aurelia. “Sounds like a lot of trouble for Hogwarts,” he said.

“With Harry as their father, they seem destined for such trouble.”

Some people found this funny. Tonks grinned; so did Angelina and the twins. Moody looked as unamused with Voldemort as always, however.

Before he could say anything, though, Aurelia hiccupped, and it came out as a duck’s quack.

Hilarity. The group exploded in laughter, and Harry covered Aurelia’s ears to protect her from the noise, but after a moment of contemplation she gurgled happily too – which came out as another quack, and it was just –

“Phenomenal,” Lee said, wiping his eyes. “Perfect timing, babe.”

Harry unclipped the bow from her hair, turning it over. “How do you do these things?” he marveled.

“Also, if you’re giving these to the kids, you’d better put a soundproofing charm up behind you. And they’re getting lost as soon as the girls fall asleep tonight.”

George tsked. “We’ve found that our Dodging Drummer Boy only psychologically damages 60% of parents exposed to it.” He had an entire bag of hair bows, waiting to drive them all spare. “Anyway, what Ron brought is worse.”


“Zey aren’t dangerous.”

“Oh my god,” but he was still smiling. “Okay. Here you go Aura, you can be a duck tonight.”

“Or would she rather be a dog? Or an erumpet? Or a mooncalf?”

“What sort of noise does a mooncalf make?”

“Ask your daughter,” George said, trading his green bow for a silver-blue one.

They moved toward the courtyard. By now everyone else had arrived – Dean and Justin were talking to Neville and his husband, and Oliver was with Bill, and Penelope was just handing her daughter a plate of fresh fruit. The open firepit was hot, ready for cooking. Fawkes sat perched in a plum tree nearby, waiting for food or entertainment.

Krum went to join Ron and Hermione at a high top table, and Fred and George were slapping Hagrid across the back, and Kingsley squeezed Harry’s shoulder with a “happy birthday” before going to assist Padma and Hannah at the firepit. And Voldemort was stepping in toward Penelope and her daughter: “Penelope,” he greeted her. “Eliora, this is my husband, Harry.”

The 5 year old barely made eye contact. “Happy birthday,” she said dutifully.

“Everyone’s inside,” Harry offered to her. “Let me show you where.” And he brought her inside so he could check on the gaggle of kids in the drawing room. Surprisingly nobody was crying and nobody was hurt. “Alright?” he addressed the room at large from the doorway. They ignored him.

Phaedra and Q were crowded over a sheet of parchment and some paint when Harry approached. “Hey girls, Uncle George brought a surprise for everyone. Could you bring it back here?”

“You can’t see this,” Phaedra insisted.
“Okay, I won’t look.”

“No – Q – “ She cast Q a pleading look, and she got up from her place on the floor to find George.

“Thank you, baby,” Harry said as she went, though silently he was enthralled at watching the relationship between the twins.

“I’m not a baby,” Q said. “Aura is.”

“Yeah, she is.” By the feel of it, Aura had fallen asleep in the sling, and Harry kept one hand on her warm form as he charmed juice and crackers out of the rug, and refilled cups of water, and renewed the shield charms under all the paint. (From a distance, of course, since he couldn’t look.) When Q came back, she looked mischievous and gleeful; Harry assumed George had showed her what the bows did. “Got it, Papa.”

“Thank you, sweetheart.”

“You can go now,,” she said, taking his hand to push him out.

He desperately wanted to watch the chaos that would ensue, but fine. “I’m going, I’m going. Can you be ready for real food in an hour?”

“Uh-huh.” And she struggled to pull the heavy door shut behind him. Harry obliged.

Out in the courtyard, Harry glanced around for Voldemort – with Bill and Fleur, on the edge of a large group of mostly Weasleys and partners. Fine. Harry swerved to join a group of his cohort, listening to Dean tell a story animatedly. He grabbed a butterbeer and went to sit beside Neville.

“… So she wanted an entire back piece of the constellations as they moved, and you’d think that’d be a simple enough charm but it was a bloody nightmare. Harry,” he said as he sat. “When do I finally get to ink you?”

Dean was a tattoo artist, and a really bloody good one. “Dunno,” he said. “What would look good?”

“On you? Anything.”

“I’ve told him to get a Hungarian Horntail for – god, decades,” Ginny said.

“I’ve got a lot less to prove now than I did when I was 16. Thank Merlin.”

“Dragons are fun, if overdone,” Dean agreed. “I had this massive guy come in last week – that type, he had fire and thorns down his arms. And he wanted the meanest looking dragon I could make. I gave him a Fireball, but apparently it’s afraid of fire? I know. Anyway, now it’s hiding in his thorns and it won’t come out.”

“What do you do for it?” Hannah asked, fascinated.

Dean shrugged. “Might have to put a wall around the flames, but he says that will look stupid. I told him the dragon would live quite happily on his arse instead of his chest, but that’s apparently not good enough either.” He flipped his hair out of his face. “Maybe I’ll draw in some cat toys for it. Dragons love cat toys.”

“And my dirigible plum tree is bearing fruit for the first time,” Neville said brightly. “Look.” Handing his drink to his husband, he pulled up one side of his shirt, revealing along his ribs a young tree with plums gently floating off its branches. At the base, faeries swirled above a circle of
mushrooms. “Two years ago, we did it as a sapling.” He grinned at Dean and dropped the hem of his shirt. “It’s brilliant.”

“That was the first seasonal plant I ever did. You didn’t know you were an experiment,” Dean said lightly.

“Brilliant,” Neville repeated.

It was nice, hearing about how everyone was doing. Even the friends he saw regularly were often in the context of childcare or work. He scooted over on the bench as Ron and Hermione approached. “Voldemort says you’ve got to roast your own kebabs because he refuses,” Hermione informed him as she sat.

Harry laughed at her tone. “He says letting them get that charred is carcinogenic, so no, he doesn’t approve.” He looked over at the fire – it’d still be awhile. “Everyone’s alright?”

“Perfect.”

“Good.” He bounced Aurelia against his chest and she grumbled in her sleep. Ron patted her mess of curls peeking over the top.

Daphne and Pansy were sitting together, as though for defense, but Pansy also had her other arm around Luna, who was speaking now: “Since Dad’s retired he told me I should make bold editorial choices. That’s why we’re putting a piece of music in each issue, to give exposure to little-known artists. Last week’s was from the Sherpa he stayed with in Nepal, they’ve got this instrument like a lute that’s quite beautiful.”

“Max loved it,” Ron agreed. “We keep trying to get him an instrument – Hermione was really good at piano when she was young,” (“I am still good,” Hermione objected with mock-offense), “and Portie’s got her trumpet now. But Max says he only wants to dance.”

“Teach him the traditional dances,” Luna said, “before they are lost to modernization.”

“… Maybe.”

Her gaze lingered on Ron and Hermione for a moment too long, then she picked back up: “It’s a bit complex to put longer videos in print, so it’s out of our budget for now. But we will print more fiction! Pansy has even agreed to write for us,” she beamed at her.

Pansy shushed her. “I write under a penname for a reason,” she chided. “My image as an idle pureblood must be preserved.”

“I don’t know why you’re not more proud of it,” Luna said sadly. “Everything you write is so delicate and complex.”

“And so sensual – ow,” Daphne yelped, her mischief interrupted by a couple whip hexes against her forearm.

“So sensual?”

“Greengrass is a useless gossip,” Pansy said, glaring at her. “Pay no mind.”

But of course nobody would let it go now. “You write romance novels, then,” Hermione said, sizing her up. She was delighted. “There’s really quite a small number of romance novelists for wixies. Unless you write for Quotidiens?” she added, raising her eyebrows.
“No, I don’t write for Quoties. I don’t write at all. I’m a – fuck, what’s the most boring job? I analyze… numbers. For the Ministry.” But even so, Pansy wasn’t wholly hating this, both smirking and blushing. She threw back her gin and tonic and took Luna’s strawberry vodka. “As punishment,” she informed Luna.

“No, Pansy Parkinson, if you’re the one who writes those awful books about Harry for Fred and George, I will curse you.”

“Why? They’re well-written.”

“No, they’re not!”

Pansy looked delighted. “And which of them have you read, then?”

“Well, they’re all the same, aren’t they? Anyway, I read what I like. My mother-in-law adores romance novels, and it brings us closer together.”

Pansy shot a look at Molly, now cooking over the fire. “Yeah, of course she does. But I don’t write those,” she relented when Ron and Hermione and Ginny all glared. “They won’t tell me who does. I’ve still got my suspicions they do it themselves.”

(Harry had long since reluctantly accepted his place as a sex symbol – he accepted it better than Voldemort, anyway – but if he ever found out that Fred and George were personally writing the erotica they sold featuring Hadrian Parker and the Dark Lord, he would beg to be Obliviated.)

“You aren’t the one who writes about wixie-Quotidian relationships,” Hermione said slowly.

“Oh, but I like those,” Hannah interrupted. “They’re sweet.”

“Precisely. Do you write the historical fiction about Merlin? Because those are very poorly researched – “

“It’s porn, Granger, get off it. Anyway, this is excruciating. I write as Magdalena Moss, and you haven’t read my books because I only write about lesbians.” She stretched back, kicking her legs out to survey the group. “Happy? Also you are in trouble,” a finger in Daphne’s direction, “and you are in trouble.” One in Luna’s. The way Luna smiled, Harry suspected she might not think of being in trouble as such a bad thing.

Hermione was a bit flushed. “I’m not so great a prude as you think.”

“Oh, we know that. We all knew that when you and your husband brought along your quidditch boytoy to this nice family-friendly event.”

Harry looked back into the crowd for Krum – and saw him talking to Voldemort, what the christ, as they both assembled food around the firepit. He’d ask later.

Surprisingly, Hermione smiled. “Yeah,” she said, “we did.” She didn’t break eye contact with Pansy as she swallowed her drink. “Alright with you?”

“Granger, you’re impossible.” But Pansy sat back, tangling her fingers in Luna’s long hair. And Ron’s ears were red, but he was also fighting to keep a shit-eating grin off his face. When Harry nudged his ankle and mouthed Nice, Ron grinned back.

A moment of silence, broken by Fred hollering, “Are you joking?”
Harry was on his feet before he’d figured out what had happened. There was the large group of people near the firepit, including Voldemort, and Harry at first thought Fred was shouting at him, but no, it seemed to be directed at Penelope. He was running up, anyway.

“Since when has Percy had a baby?” Fred demanded. “Did you know about this?” he asked, looking to Molly.

“Fred, really – yes, and he’d meant to tell you soon –”

“Merlin – Are there kids around?” he muttered to George.

“Well, yours.”

Fred glanced down at Julian in his arms. “Merlin’s leaky cock this is absurd,” he swore anyway. “Here, hold my baby.” He pressed Julian into Angelina’s arms. “Can I use your floo?” he asked perfunctorily as he strode past Harry and Voldemort.

People followed, mostly in morbid curiosity. Aurelia had woken up when Harry had jumped up, and she was fussing against his chest now. “Good baby, what a very good baby you are,” Harry was babbling as he rocked her. “Vol, the fire –”

“Yes,” and he cast a flame-freezing charm on the firepit before they followed Fred inside.

The whoosh of the floo, and he was gone. Penelope, apparently the catalyst for this, stood with Angelina, he mouth agape. “I reached out to anyone who might remotely agree to look after Eliora,” she said, “after I’d exhausted my parents. Having such a huge family, I just assumed he’d….”

Angelina shushed her and patted her shoulder with the hand not holding Julian.

Molly came in, Arthur holding her hand. Ron and Bill and their wives trailed her, and apparently most of the non-Weasleys had wisely decided to stay outside after all.

The floo, again, in a shockingly short time later. And Fred dragged Percy out by the front of his robes onto the carpet. Behind him, a pretty Korean woman holding a bundle of blankets to her chest examined the room with surprising grace. “Who is this?” Fred demanded, using the hand still clutching Percy’s robes to gesture to his family.

Percy glared, wrenching his robes away. “My wife,” he said acidly, “and our new daughter. If you could be a bit quieter before you wake her up again.”

Fred dropped his voice to just above a whisper. “We didn’t even know you were married.”

Percy was flustered, and angry, and Harry thought he hadn’t even noticed Voldemort at the edge of the room yet, or else he would’ve been obsequious and a bit scared too. Harry thought about pushing Voldemort out of the room, but he could only watch in fascination.

Percy’s wife stepped into the fray then, more capable than her husband at the moment. “I’m Audrey,” she said, extending a hand, “and this is Lucy. You must be one of the twins.”

“Yeah, I am, and that’s my baby,” Fred said, gesturing backwards to Angelina holding Julian. “Were we going to find out at the first day of preschool? Oh, also Harry’s got a new kid, too,” he said, “but I’m sure you knew that already.”

“The entire country knows that,” Percy muttered. (This was true, the papers had been more vigilant at getting photos of Aurelia than they had been about Q and Phaedra – but, well, they had to leave
the house more these days, to get the twins to preschool now if nothing else.) But when he’d looked up to Harry, he noticed Voldemort as well. “Er. Hello, Minister.”

“Percy,” Voldemort returned.

“This is stupid,” Fred pronounced, not yet finished with Percy. “Did you think you were going to do this alone?”

“We are perfectly capable of raising a child, we’re taking equal amounts of parental leave – “

“We don’t want you to do it alone, you stupid, stupid bloody git,” Fred said over him.

“As punishment you’ve got to stay,” George agreed, “and introduce us properly to your wife and kid. Mum, make him stay,” he said, looking back to Molly.

Molly had been quiet, leaning into Arthur’s touch. “I’d like to hold my grandchild,” she said, stepping forward.

Audrey handed her her sleeping child tentatively. “Be careful, she kicks if she wakes up.” She nestled her into Molly’s arms.

And then it was time for Harry and Voldemort to go. Harry caught his sleeve, pulling him backwards, because this was decidedly not their moment.

Ginny was just coming in. “Where is my family?”

“Uh, that way,” Harry pointed. “Percy’s here. You’ve missed the worst of it.”

She gave him a dubious look. “Have I?” But she followed his direction.

Harry and Voldemort ended up in the kitchen, warming a bottle for Aurelia. Voldemort was better at bottle feeding than Harry was, so he handed her off and slumped onto a stool to wait. They were both quiet, listening for an explosion in the other room, but there was, uncharacteristically, no more shouting from the Weasleys.

“She is an Unspeakable,” Voldemort offered. “She works on fate and chance. They got married in Seoul the Christmas before last.”

“Oh,” Harry said. He’d finished his last beer and was now just toying with the empty bottle.

“I would have kept Penelope from saying anything, if I’d known she wasn’t aware of just how estranged they are.”

“They dated in school, Percy and Penelope. I dunno how long.”

“Did they? I suppose it could have been vindictive, then, but she’s typically not.”

“No. I don’t know.” They’d lapsed into Parseltongue immediately when they were alone – a bad habit, they’d have to be more deliberate about speaking English around Aurelia – and her eyes were wide as she took in the sounds. “Do you know what we’re saying?” Harry cooed in Parseltongue.

“My smart little snake babies, don’t feel pressured to get into Slytherin though – “

“Harry,” Voldemort said, exasperated, when Aurelia spat out the bottle to gurgle at him.

“You’ve got to eat everything,” he continued, still speaking nonsense to her, “so you can be strong. You want to be a chaser? Or maybe even a keeper, if your shoulders get wide enough. I’ll stop, I’ll
stop,” he promised at Voldemort’s look. “There.” Aurelia’s mouth closed around the bottle again.

And a minute later, there were footsteps on the tile, and Harry looked up to see Audrey there. “Could I have somewhere to feed her?”

“Sure, yeah. I’m taking Aurelia upstairs now anyway, let me give you a bedroom.” Harry held his arms out for Aurelia, conjuring a towel to burp her. “Could you see if someone’s restarted the fire yet?” he said to Voldemort.

“Of course.” He stood. “Ms. Jin, welcome. I wish it were not under duress.”

Her smile was wry. “As do I. Thank you, Minister.” And so Voldemort left and Audrey followed Harry upstairs.

So they were staying. Good. On the stairs, Harry nodded to the bundle of blankets in her arms. “How old?”

“How old?”

“Two weeks. It’s been – a lot,” she said with a small smile. “But good.”

“Hi, Lucy,” Harry said, peering into the bundle. No hair yet, but her eyelashes and eyebrows looked dark reddish. “This is Aurelia, she’s 5 weeks. Come over sometime?” he said, and he meant it. “Just for, you know, human contact. Or when everyone else is tired of hearing about babies. It can get lonely.” The politics of being friends with other parents was very unsubtle – their kids would be in the same schools together for sixteen years as long as they lived in Britain – but he also just wanted to help. It still hurt Molly, at least, that Percy had separated himself, and Harry could not bear to see Molly hurt. “Here.” He opened a spare room for her. “And everyone’s out in the courtyard afterward.”

“Thank you.”

He put Aurelia down and set the minding spells around her room. And when he got downstairs, the parents were herding their children out of the drawing room, toward the courtyard to eat. “Hello!” Victoire chirruped, as Harry moved past to get the twins.

“Hi, Victoire. Having fun?”

“It’s real!” she shouted to Max, across the room. “Say something else,” she begged Harry.

It took him a long moment – Victoire had said that in pretty good Parseltongue, and Harry had reflexively responded in kind. Deeper into the room, he could hear the kids murmuring hello with varying degrees of success, which must be fucking terrifying for everyone else, approaching the drawing room to find it full of hissing children. He wanted to die laughing.

He went in properly, revealing about as great a mess as expected. Paint and glitter hovered a quarter inch off the carpet, suspended in the shield charms they’d put down. The animal bows were mostly scattered on the tables and the chairs. Voldemort was already in here, actually, charming paint out of Moira’s feathers. Q and Phaedra were still braiding the hair of Penelope’s daughter (poorly, but with enthusiasm) and so Harry let them be for the moment. He evanesco’d the stray paint and went to sit with Voldemort. “Hey, good girl.” Moira’s tail thumped against Voldemort’s ribs. “Did they paint you? Green looks very good on you, but they probably shouldn’t have.”

Her tail wagged harder. Then – well, she tried to bark, but it came out as a sound that must be a magical animal, because Harry didn’t recognize the low braying. And she looked so pleased with herself when Harry laughed. “Here – where’d they put that – “ He found the bow in the curls of her chest, and took it off. “There you go.”
Voldemort got the last of the paint out of her wings. “Go outside and someone will feed you,” he told her. When he let her go, she ran off presumably to do just that.

“Our children are teaching everyone Parseltongue,” Harry said, looking over at them.

“Yes. And Victoire has taught them French in return.”

“Did she? That’s amazing. Hey, girls?” Q looked up, Phaedra did not. “Q, bring Phaedra here. We’re going to eat.”

Slowly, distracted and laughing and fidgeting with the art supplies still left out, the twins approached. “Bonjour,” Phaedra said slyly, then lost herself to giggles.

“Bonjour,” Harry said, scooping her into a hug. “That’s very good. Abba can teach you more.”

Phaedra looked to Voldemort with interest. “Bonsoir, in the evening,” he offered. “You can say it tonight.”

“Bonsoir,” she repeated, and she was giggling again.

Q was playing with a handful of animal bows. “We can keep them?”

Please god no. The quiet ones maybe. “Let’s ask the twins if you can each keep one,” Harry stressed. Q was unimpressed, and reluctantly took Voldemort’s hand so they could go outside together.

Tables of food had been brought out, pasta and grilled vegetables and salads and fresh fruit and shish kebabs of halloumi and mock duck. People milled with plates and sat at round tables set in the grass. Remus, patient and good, tended the fire, with Severus reluctantly by his side.

They ended up eating separately – the girls at the kids’ table, and then Voldemort wanted to speak to Moody about things that didn’t concern Harry. “Be so, so good,” Harry pled – even though it would be fine, Moody handled Voldemort better now that he wasn’t directly responsible for him, and Voldemort promised not to antagonize him or anyone else unnecessarily (“And what would count as necessary antagonizing?” Harry had asked, unconvinced), and they had things to talk about.

Bill and Oliver flanked Percy, who looked resigned to his fate but not in a bad way. Harry skipped that table, instead taking a seat beside Lisa and Daphne. Ron was sponging off Imogen’s face before he’d let her go; Krum was telling a story to Hermione and George and Lee; Ginny, Tonks, and Hestia were recounting the patches on Tonks’s jean jacket. Padma smiled across the table at him.

“The kids speak Parseltongue now.”

“Yeah. It’s just hello, it might sound like dark magic but it’s not,” he assured her.

A shrug. “I wasn’t worried, really. Madhuri was thrilled. I’m sure it won’t be the last time we hear it.”

“Well personally I was terrified,” Ron said in a chipper way. “The way they were all saying it at once, I thought some old magic of this place had finally seeped into their tiny, precious souls. Right?” he addressed Imogen.

Her soft 3 year old face blinked back at him. “Uh-huh.”

“Go sit with Mireille,” Ron said, looking back toward Fleur. Imogen ran off. He exhaled deeply. “Four is enough. If I want to nurture anything else, I’ll ask Neville for a plant,” he said with mischief.
as Neville and his husband joined them.

“What sort of plant do you want, Ron?” Neville said easily. “I’ve got sassy ones and shy ones and ones that shit in your shoes like a cat if you ignore them.”

“You’ve got plants that shit?”

“Well, they produce solid metabolic waste. Might as well call it shit. Here, hon.” He handed Otto his plate and took his drink in return. “And I don’t know how you and Hermione have done it. Nico’s a pretty good kid and he still consumes our entire life.”

“He’s been really impervious to Portia’s troublemaking, yeah.”

“Ron,” Hermione scolded, just catching up to their conversation.

“What? Merlin, she turned the bannister to jelly yesterday. She won’t say if it was an accident or on purpose, and I don’t know which I’d prefer.”

“On purpose, I think,” George said thoughtfully.

Ron made a face. “You would. Hey, the toys I brought will be a bigger hit than those bows.”

“Is everything a competition with you?” George sighed in mock-sadness. “What is it, then?”

“Something that’s going to need a lot of outdoor space. And some good hiding spots.”

Harry clicked his tongue. “How about we send the kids back inside and we play ourselves? That sounds brill.”

Ron grinned back at him. “When the kids are all down for a nap... then it’s round two.”

Harry would put up some additional barriers. The land behind their home was vast – there was a town about five miles out, but nothing closer – and they’d need to keep the kids away from the pond, and the forest, and the snakes. Still. Harry wanted to play whatever game Ron had devised.

Max, Ron and Hermione’s oldest, had wandered over on his way back from getting a drink. “What’re you talking about?” he asked, slipping into a chair beside Padma.

“How good you’d look if we dyed your hair yellow,” Lee said promptly. “Where’s your Puff pride?”

(Max had been sorted into Hufflepuff last year; Victoire had been sorted into Ravenclaw. Ron and Bill both had tiny crises that they wouldn’t be raising another Gryffindor family.)

Max grinned back, shoving his hand into his bushy hair. “I will if you will,” he said, apparently his typical response to Lee. “Can I see your phone?” he asked Padma.

“You don’t like my music?” she said, sliding it over easily. Harry had asked her for fun background music, she’d put on saucy instrumentals with horns and drums. Max was now looking through her library, brow knitted in thought.

“How was this year at Hogwarts?” Padma asked, looking over his shoulder. “Learning a lot?”

“Sort of.”

“Max!” Hermione said, horrified. “Yes, you did.”
He looked up at his mother and shrugged. “I like charms,” he said. “And flying. And transfiguration, even though it’s hard.”

“Who teaches transfiguration now?” Harry asked. Professor McGonagall had been Headmistress for over a decade now – Snape had resigned happily after Harry’s eighth year – and the transfiguration position had been filled with a couple different post-docs since. Britain was still sorting out its higher education. Anyway, the school board had written Voldemort for his opinion on the position once, and that’d been the last Harry had heard of it.

“Professor Bulstrode. She’s very strict. But the day we transfigured hermit crabs, she let us paint their shells afterward.”

Harry blinked. “That’s very good of her.”

Across the table, Daphne laughed at him. “You didn’t know?” she asked Harry. “Millie was always brilliant at transfiguration. And Slughorn gave her the head of house position right off, said he values his sleep more these days.” She shot a mischievous glance at Hermione. “Ask your mum about the time she got stuck as Professor Bulstrode’s cat,” she told Max.

“Really?” Max said, eyes wide.

Hermione flushed. “If you get into half the trouble we get into, I will ground you indefinitely,” she told him.

“But when did you get stuck as a cat?”

“How did she even find out?” Hermione asked Daphne instead, more fascinated than angry. “Madam Pomfrey entirely didn’t believe me when I said it was a backfired charm, but she never properly asked what happened either.”

“I’ll tell you how we found out if you tell us what you were doing. Pansy!” Daphne leaned back in her chair, gesturing to the other table. “Granger is finally going to confess.”

“Am I, though?”

“I told you all about my lesbian erotica,” Pansy said, dropping into a seat and pulling Luna onto her lap like it wasn’t a big deal. (Luna smiled happily at Harry, who of course had to smile back.) “So we’re learning a lot about each other today, aren’t we?”

The Slytherins liked antagonizing Hermione the most. Which wasn’t entirely fair, but they both clearly loved how riled she would get. “It’s not even Hermione’s story to tell,” Harry offered, redirecting their attention. “It’s mine. And Malfoy should hear it, too.”

Lisa lifted her brows. “He’s been incommunicado all summer. Probably on holiday. Could we pass along this revelation later?”

Apart from their annual Christmas case of wine, Harry hadn’t heard from Malfoy since eighth year. It was almost long enough to begin to miss him. “… Yeah, you should. So.” He scrubbed his face in both hands and took a drink. “Ginny, you should go,” he said, struck by her presence.

“Just tell the bloody cat story – whoops, sorry Max, don’t take after Auntie Ginny,” she said. He grinned at her.

“So that was the year the Chamber was opened,” Harry began carefully.
He only told them that bit of it, the Polyjuice potion over Christmas. It’s enough. Daphne had her face buried in her hands, crying from laughing, when he’d concluded. “You thought Draco was the heir?” she choked out, wiping at her eyeliner. “That poor boy still needed the house elves to wipe his arse for him when he was 12. He would’ve been hopeless.”

“Well. He talked like it. Like he knew who was, at least.”

“That’s just the way he is. Was,” she corrected with a frown. “Not so much, anymore.”

Of course not, he didn’t have his father’s name to throw around anymore. But he couldn’t let the party dwell on that. “Now you tell us how you knew about Hermione.”

“Detention,” Pansy shrugged. “Sorting student records in the hospital wing a few years later. She definitely knew it was Polyjuice, by the way, no need to coax a confession out of you.”

“You read my hospital records?”

“Calm down, that was the only interesting thing in them.”

“Oh my god.”

“What did it feel like?” Viktor asked with interest. “When I was a shark, everything was prey. It was a – distracting feeling.”

“You know, I don’t know.” She thought with a smile. “I was panicked the entire time, so I don’t think I was a very good cat.”

“As though we didn’t catch you napping in the sun whenever you could,” Ron said.

“Once, you caught me once, and I regret nothing.”

Max had set Padma’s mobile aside, to look in wonder at Hermione. “But that’s so… wicked.”

“You mother is extremely wicked,” Ron said gravely, putting his arm around Hermione’s shoulders. “And don’t ever let me hear you imply otherwise again.”

“Dork,” Max muttered, and took his cuffing with a grin.

“But Polyjuice,” Pansy marveled. “As a second year. God, you would’ve gotten into so much trouble. Did McGonagall know you were like this?”

Hermione hummed, pleased with herself. “Maybe a bit. But she said I was a good influence on these two.” She lifted her chin in Ron and Harry’s direction. “I think she still doesn’t know the full extent of it. Next time she’s in the Ministry, I’ll take her out for a drink.”

“We always thought it would be you, to stay at Hogwarts,” Luna said serenely. “You never seemed to want to leave school.” (This was true, Hermione felt she’d missed her chance at higher education because she’d wanted to be in the Ministry for the early days of the Unification. She was at peace with it by now.) “Or Neville,” Luna added, looking to him. “But Millicent Bulstrode never seemed to like children enough to want to work with them. She pushed me out of the owlery once,” she said, off-handed.

The entire table choked. “Were you okay?” Ginny asked, horrified.

“Oh yes. My skirts were very voluminous that day, and there was an updraft. I landed on a balcony directly below.”
“Still -- ! Let me hit her for you. Just once.”

“That’s very kind of you, but it’s not necessary. Anyway, people change. It was a very long time ago.”

Luna was too good for this world, Harry thought in a daze, picking up his drink again. God, *Millicent.*

And it was weird, discussing all their 12 year old adventures with an actual 12 year old sitting at the table. He was so *small,* and Harry was sure he himself had been smaller at that age. It was a feeling he’d grappled with newly with his children – when the twins were 15 months, he couldn’t help but wonder who could *possibly* look into their soft faces and cast a killing curse. Or there was a night – the twins had just turned 2, and Phae was awake sobbing in terror at a loud thunderstorm overhead. As Harry pulled her into bed between himself and Voldemort, setting Moira in her arms, he had a sudden flash of memory of himself around the same age, also crying in a thunderstorm, and Petunia hissing through the cupboard door to *shut up, you’ll wake Dudley.* In that moment he could say for certain that they had never, ever loved him, to be able to be so cruel. He wouldn’t be able to neglect his girls – or *anyone* actually – in that way. It was at least slightly liberating, to know for certain that his childhood had been fucked up and that he deserved to be angry and horrified by them.

These feelings would probably intensify with time, as the girls reached school age and the ages in which Dumbledore put Harry repeatedly at risk. But he’d keep it from them, and he’d only divulged tiny pieces of these feelings to Voldemort, late at night when their magic was entangled. But now – now he looked away from Max, who was grinning a kid’s smile. They were *so* young.

But Max must have felt Harry’s rather tipsy gaze on him. He raised his chin. “Here, Uncle Harry. Your favorite.” And he scrolled through Padma’s phone for a moment, and then Nirvana’s bass reverberated in the outdoor sound system. (Harry put on Nirvana a lot because it was Hermione’s favorite, actually, but it was all the same.) And then he snatched a honeycomb cake off the edge of Ron’s plate, and scooted off.

“When we were being really bad,” George offered to the table, “Mum would say we’d be cursed with kids just like ourselves.”

“Nah,” Ron said fondly, watching Max fall into a giggling fit as he rejoined Victoire. “These ones are *much* weirder.”

They ate, and ate more, and drank the sparkling mixed drinks that sat in ice-cold jugs in the shade. Harry thought all the sun might be going to his head. He watched Phaedra scoop Moira up and bring her over to Hagrid (Moira fluttering to compensate for how Phaedra wasn’t yet big enough to completely hold her), and Hagrid pulled them both into his lap, running one finger down Moira’s back. It was perfect.

He then looked for Voldemort – he’d been previously sitting at the table that Harry still thought of as “the adults,” even though he was nearly bloody 33 himself. But – Voldemort had been speaking to Moody and Andromeda, and now he wasn’t. Aurelia should still be asleep. Maybe he’d just grown weary of the sun.

When enough of the kids were up and causing trouble again, Ron caught Harry’s eye. “Cast some barriers?” he asked.

“Yeah, sure.” Harry got up and so did Hermione, walking to the open space behind the courtyard. “The wards are all pretty far out,” he said, finding a strand and tugging it so the matrix became visible. “We’ll put up something closer.”
And so they strung up glowing purple barriers, and dotted the field with trees and boulders and bits of wall for hiding spots. Ron was still fighting back a pleased expression as they walked back to the courtyard, and then he pulled a heavy DMLE-branded sack from a pocket. “Uh,” Harry said. Not even Hermione seemed to know what it was.

“Alright, I need all kids in front of me. Max, get Imogen. Phaedra, put down the dog for a sec. Leo, get your fingers out of your nose, for the love of Circe.” The kids scrambled, in twos and threes, to see what the game was. Ron was commonly considered to be the coolest of the adults, a title he cherished and protected vigorously.

“Good. See this?” Reaching into his bag, he pulled out… a squirtgun, cast in aluminum instead of plastics. “What do you think this does?” And when the kids all wibbled at him, he pointed it at Harry and squeezed the trigger. He was hit in the chest with a stream of silver potion.

The kids laughed, but then Imani went, “Oooh.” And Harry looked down to see everywhere the potion had hit going greyscale. It was fascinating.

“There’s others,” Ron said, watching their reactions. “A different potion in each squirtgun. Who wants one?”

Ron nearly got trampled, and there were only just enough adults to herd the kids into the enclosed space. “No wands, no hitting, no biting, no scratching, no kicking,” Ron rattled off, holding the bag high. “Big kids be careful with the little ones. Be loving to each other. Here.” He held out squirtguns to Q and Portia, nearest to the front. When all the kids had one, he gave them ten seconds to run for cover. Then he lifted the charm on them, and it was madness, a dozen streams of potions firing at once. Most of the adults now gathered at the edge of the barrier, watching the chaos.

The effects of the potions seemed to only last a couple minutes. There was one that made the victim sparkle, and one that worked like a tickling curse, and one that made a crust of tiny gems appear where it hit. They all cheered on the kids, as enthusiastic spectators.

Harry watched with joy as Q ducked behind a tree like a champ, clambering up it to take shots from a strategic angle. When Portia ran beneath the tree, Q fired down on her. Wings blossomed out of Portia’s back. “Oh.” She tried to whirl around to get a good look at them, spun in a circle, and then fired back up at Q. The places the potion hit seemed to absorb light, leaving her with speckles of black holes. Q shrieked and scrambled down.

The youngest ones tired out first. Ron and Bill hovered nearby, watching their respective 3 year olds. And when Imogen flagged, dropping the squirtgun entirely, Ron was rushing to her, scooping up them both. “Let’s go in and have a glass of water,” he was saying. “You,” he added, thumping the gun into Harry’s chest as he passed, “have better acquired a weapon before I’m back out.”

Then Bill took Mireille in, and Neville’s son Nico excused himself. “Hey Nico,” Harry said, pulling him to a quieter spot, “you know where the library is? It’s unlocked right now. Just don’t touch anything dangerous, okay?”

Nico’s eyes held the glazed look of an overextended introvert. “Yeah,” he said. “I mean – thanks. Can I leave this…?”

Harry took the squirtgun from him, inwardly thrilled. “Yeah. I’ll tell your dads where you are.” Grateful, Nico scampered.

Harry watched the kids for longer – Imani and Madhuri now squirting each other repeatedly with potions that shot gems and gold, and Leo taking cover behind Max, and Q had apparently forged an
alliance with Portia, huddled together behind a boulder. Penelope’s daughter Eliora peeled off, and Q ran in to take her gun as well, and Harry was impressed and a little shocked that his daughter was such a machine.

He hadn’t seen Phaedra in awhile – she’d chosen tactical cover, obviously. Ginny stepped in beside Harry, easily taking Astrid’s gun as she ran in. “You’re going down,” she said to Harry.

“Against Aurors?” he asked. Tonks and Kingsley were both hovering nearby as well. “Yeah, I probably am.” He watched Q fire both guns at Victoire, giving her both greyscale blotches and wings at once. She shrieked and laughed and dodged away.

But soon most of the kids were done. Fleur stood nearby with cups of ice water. Imani flopped into her mother’s arms, and Max jumped out of the tree where he was hiding, and Victoire was so taken with her wings that she forgot to keep playing. Q and Leo were chasing each other, the last two out there –

Until with a shriek of laughter, Phaedra came charging out from her hiding spot, shooting silvery potions at them both. The spots it hit became see-through like a ghost, and the three of them were screaming and laughing and loud. “Tactical,” Moody said approvingly at Harry’s side, and he could only laugh too.

Ron was back outside by now, so he and Harry collected the kids and sent them inside, out of the sun. And then – it was the adults’ turn.

Ginny and Tonks each took a squirtgun, but so did Kingsley. Every Weasley child but Percy (now talking to Remus and Hagrid and looking better than he had earlier). Krum, Oliver, Dean, Daphne. Ron was pulling more squirtguns from his bag, handing one to Hannah as she kicked off her heels and one to Neville as he tied back his hair. “Ten seconds,” Ron said, holding back the charms on the guns. And everyone scrambled into place.

It was fantastic. Harry missed the adrenaline rush – he still played quidditch once or twice a month, and that was great, but it wasn’t this. He crouched between a bush and a wall, watching George and Lee circle with their backs together.

“May I join you?”

Luna wandered up. Shushing her, Harry pushed her crouching beside him. “How nice to be doing this for fun and not for survival,” she said, swinging the squirtgun’s trigger around her finger.

“…Yeah, it is.”

“Go!” Ron’s voice called across the field and the guns came alive with magic, and then everyone was shooting. Harry held his breath, waiting, until Fred ran by. Harry shot flames, which were glorious, and he jumped out from the bush before Fred could corner him. But then Krum jumped out from behind a wall, shooting them both with gilding potion, and Harry had to chase him down again.

His friends were more strategic than the kids – better at holding strategic positions, more alliances. Padma, Angelina, and Fleur had all climbed atop a boulder were defending their high ground. Bill had found his potion let people jump a few feet off the ground, so he was shooting at himself before jumping to shoot at the women. Dean had just tackled Neville, forcibly switching their guns. He too shot himself – and it must be a speed enhancing potion, because he darted off.

And Harry stayed in one spot for too long, because Hestia and Tonks swooped in on either side, trying to grab his gun. “Hey!” And he was after them, shooting a stream of fire into their backs as he
Tonks looked over her shoulder, firing a potion that turned into cobwebs – until she tripped, sprawling along the grass. “Get out!” she called to Hestia as though she was actually imperiled.

Harry reached her before she’d sorted out her limbs, and snatched her gun out of her hand. “Ha!” he said, lifting them both up in triumph, until Tonks swept his legs and he had to drop into a roll. “Ugh – fucking Aurors – “ They each scrambled away with a gun.

With each other’s guns, Harry realized when he shot a strand of cobwebs at Hannah, and she hit him with the gem potion in return. “Nice,” he said, looking down at the hundred sparkling gems down his front. Then he turned, running for a far tree.

“Potter!”

Lee jumped out at him, and obviously that was a coordinated attack, because both twins and Angelina were right behind him. “Cowards!” he gasped, breaking into a sprint, shooting over his shoulder when he felt potions hit him in the back. And one of them was the ticklish potion, and he was convulsing with laughter, and that’s when they seized him, hoisting him up by all four limbs. Angelina had grabbed his gun and bound him with cobwebs, and then he was thrashing as they carried him across the field.

“We got him!” George announced, and while Harry hadn’t known this would be the game, he agreed that he had lost it.

People ran in, shooting potions into the air or bloody at him, and he kicked, fighting the cobwebs. “You’re all bloody cowards,” he growled. “Ugh – oh my god – “ he sputtered when a new potion made his already long hair sprout out of control, falling into his face.

And then the four of them tipped him onto the grass. “This is yours,” George said. Harry was still shaking hair out of his eyes. “Wankers, I will hex you – “ Then finally he looked up to find himself lain at Voldemort’s feet, with Phaedra delightedly watching beside him. “Phae, never say that word, it’s very bad,” he said, even though honestly neither of them cared. “For Merlin’s sake.”

Voldemort cast the most delicate Diffindo, slicing through the cobweb but not otherwise helping Harry in any way. “I can see your heartbeat.”

“What?” He looked down, to see the ghost potion had hit him in the chest, and he could see through himself in shadowy layers. His heartbeat was bright in the shadows of his ribcage. It was strangely intimate. “Huh.”

“That’s my favorite, personally.” Ron picked him up off the ground. “It’s got real uses – they all do – but I think it’s just hilarious.”

“It’s revealing,” Harry said, crossing his arms over his chest. He was still convulsing with the effects of the tickling potion, and he was brushing his long hair out of his face to no avail.

“I met with Rufus last week,” Voldemort said, and Ron only slightly blanched when he reached for one of the squirtguns, but he handed it over. “He mentioned these were nearly ready.”

“Yeah. These were just the prototypes, to work out a potion’s viscosity to be shot effectively. Potions are underutilized on the street.”
“To make people translucent?” Harry said, watching as the effect slowly faded from his chest.

“Well, yeah. If you’d had anything concealed on you. Or the bright ones mark a fleeing suspect in a crowd, and obviously some are restraints or impediments. And – where’s the blackout potion?”

“Here it is,” Luna said, crawling from under the same bush where Harry had left her. She’d spent the time painting her hair with the potion, so it looked like a black hole sitting atop her head.

Ron blinked at her. “You look brilliant.” He took back her gun. “That one’s for cover in low-light areas. So.” They all went back into his DMLE bag. “But after we went to paintball a few years back, I wanted to do it with potions anyway.”

People were scrubbing neon paint and glitter and gems off their fronts, though they’d fade with time. Kingsley slapped Ron on the back, saying something lowly to him as they walked back toward the house. Ron beamed back at him. Everyone was a bit exhausted by the sun, and Harry thought he could use a nap.

He and Voldemort walked back in, alone together. “That was brilliant,” Harry said happily. His hair had gone back to normal, but he was still pushing it off his sticky face. “You didn’t see the kids, then? Q was the last out there with Max – with two guns – and then Phae charged out and shot them both. They were fantastic.”

“Unfortunately I missed it. Next time.”

“Where were you, then? I didn’t see you go.”

“With Severus.”

“Why?”

It wasn’t jealousy or accusation or anything. He and Voldemort had dealt with that a long time ago, but it was still the relationship Harry thought of as the most volatile. “We needed to discuss his work as an Unspeakable,” Voldemort said, lapsing into Parseltongue for privacy. A pause, then: “He will be working on dark magic.”

“Oh,” Harry said in surprise. “Ah, they’ll let you do that?”

“Do what?” Voldemort said, amused. “I’m not doing anything. His research will be useful to several other departments, anyway.”

“Right. Fine. But this is a party,” Harry chided, poking a finger into Voldemort’s ribs.

“What if I find it enjoyable to tell people what to do?”

“Well.”

They switched back to English upon entering the house. “Q was taking a nap, and Phaedra likely is too, now. Most of the younger ones are asleep upstairs,” Voldemort informed him.

“Mm, good. That sounds brilliant.” He heard the sound of the television from the drawing room. “I’m gonna….,” He made a vague gesture. “Could you check on Aurelia?”

“I will.”

“Thanks.” A quick kiss, and they parted again.
Maybe it looked sad or awkward from the outside, that at all their events Harry spent as much time with people as possible, and Voldemort spent as little time with people as possible. But – they were playing to both their strengths and interests. He was polite to all of Harry’s friends, and it was always his intent to de-escalate whatever conflicts arose, but it was still fairly detached. At least he and Luna were friends. That always made Harry happy.

Most everyone was in the drawing room, sprawled on sofas or on the floor. Some Quotidian rugby was on, and Arthur watched with Molly asleep on his shoulder, and Ron and Hermione and Krum were in a surprisingly cozy pile on the floor, and Ginny was weaving those leftover animal bows into Hannah’s hair, and Kingsley was talking to Neville and Otto in a corner, and Lisa and Daphne were flipping through a coffee table book of ancient wixen settlements that Voldemort had gotten as a gift once. Harry joined the group of his friends sitting on the carpet, half-watching the match. “That was brilliant,” he re-iterated to Ron, seated above him on the sofa. “When do we make it a league?”

Ron smiled at him sleepily. “You looked ridiculous.”

“I felt ridiculous.” Fred and George weren’t here so Harry couldn’t even glare at them for their tactical brilliance. “It was really nice, though. You know. Doing that for fun.”

Ron hissed air through his teeth. “Yeah. I wondered if it’d make people….” He made a vague gesture. “Especially here, with him. But no one’s had any flashbacks yet,” he said wryly.

“God. Good.” Harry wondered if that was the real reason Voldemort had excused himself, to minimize associations with the war. He could be careful in that way, even when people didn’t expect it of him.

Krum looked away from the rugby match. “Ron says your children have learned to fly already?” he asked.

“Yeah. Well, learning. But they’ve both got brooms. We have taken them out with Max before,” he said, nodding to Ron. “You’re around for the summer?”

“Yes. The season’s training begins in September.”

“Nice. Yeah, we’ll come over one weekend. Cheers.”

People came and went from the drawing room, and conversations grew slower, and soon Harry was dozing off with his head resting against Hermione’s knee.

Then some time later, he awoke to a warm weight in his lap. At first he thought it was Moira, but when he reached down he found the loose curls of Phaedra’s hair. “Hey baby,” he murmured, looking down at her. “Are you having fun?”

“Uh-huh. Can we show the snakes to Hagrid?”

He always knew it could come to this, that as many times as they’d said the snakes would be kept away today, the girls would get them out anyway. “Have you asked Abba?” he asked, because they were doing that an awful lot recently, appealing to the other one when their first answer wasn’t the right one.

“But Hagrid is your friend.”

This was true – Voldemort never accompanied them to see Hagrid. Perhaps someday, they’d explain why. “Can you keep the snakes in the cellar?” he said. “And not in the house. Bring him down or sit on the steps. And tell us if the snakes say anything is wrong.” The atmospheric spells needed
constant adjustment in the hottest parts of the summer.

“‘Kay.” She was crawling out of his lap. And while Hermione was asleep behind him and Arthur and Molly curled together on a loveseat, several of his friends had slipped off. So he got up.

He found people gradually. Upstairs first, to check that kids were still napping and didn’t need anything. Portia had joined Nico in the library, looking at a book on werewolves. The parlor held tea trays and quiet conversations. Hannah and Justin were showing the Quotidian parents magic; and Pansy, Daphne, and Lisa were idly playing a game of floating blocks as they talked; and Tonks and Moody were talking behind a silencing spell but they were both smiling as though they shared a secret. And in one corner, Fleur and Audrey were having an intense conversation about—something, something related to Fleur’s work on the stock exchange—and Bill and Percy looked on in wonder. Harry poured a large cup of tea, the steam of it lifting the last of his grogginess, and then went upstairs for Aurelia.

She would be waking up soon, as they fed her just before dinner. She needed to be changed anyway, so Harry picked her out of the crib. “Hey sweetheart—” A shriek as she awoke. “I know, I know, that was rude of me—Aurelia, oh my god, I’m trying to help,” he said when she didn’t stop, flailing tiny fists at him. More crying. Fumbling for his wand, he cast a silencing spell around the room so she wouldn’t wake any of the kids currently asleep. This had the unfortunate effect of amplifying the sounds inside the room, however. “Aurelia,” he said in exasperation, and for a moment she stopped, staring up at him. Parseltongue, he realized. Well, that was a good cheat, even if she really should be hearing English at this stage of development. “We’re going to change you, and maybe feed you, and bring you downstairs to see everyone again….” He was babbling in Parseltongue so she might forget she’d been crying before. “Look at this good baby,” he cooed, undressing her and tickling her soft belly. “A good, quiet, patient, beautiful baby who is just trying so hard to be good, there we go. Can we dress you in your bunny onesie from Aunt Luna?” Cleaning spells, changing, clothing, and another sling so Harry could also carry his tea with him.

“Alright,” he said at last, but when she heard English, her happy gurgling stopped and her face twisted in tiny agony. “Aurelia. Really. Fine, fine,” he switched to Parseltongue. ‘But only today, do you understand? Only because you’ll embarrass us in front of our friends.” He picked up his mug and brought them downstairs.

He wanted to find Voldemort before anyone else, so he followed the string that always connected their souls, and ended up at the library. Of course.

He let himself in, to find Voldemort and Luna sitting on opposite sofas, looking at books that appeared quite cursed. “Can I bring her closer?” Harry asked when Voldemort looked up. “Or are these too dark?”

A faint smile. “You may.”

Luna’s eyes glittered as she pored over the book. “Dad brought these back from Turkmenistan,” she said. “They use runes in the most fascinating ways. They approximate drawings with them, do you see?” She held up the book to show him an intricate underwater illustration, all drawn in winding and twisting runes. And when she prodded at a crab, huddled beneath a rock, it snapped its claws and retreated.

“That’s very soft, for dark magic.”

“It’s one way to curse paintings,” Luna said. “To paint the runes into the details. Most people don’t know to look for such things.”
“Huh.” He sat beside Voldemort and pulled Aurelia onto his lap to look. “She cries at English now,” he informed him.

“As she should. It’s a ghastly language.”

Harry smiled at this. “Yeah. Hey sweetheart, have you seen a fox before?” He pointed at the illustration in Voldemort’s book, though honestly it might be too complex for her eyes to focus on yet. But when his finger got close, the fox, crouched under a blackberry bush, leapt out of the frame entirely, and Aurelia shrieked with surprise at the sudden movement.

When it was time to start dinner, Harry wandered into the kitchen to find Hermione and Remus and Molly and Arthur already in here, pulling out dishes to prep. It’d be another meal over the firepit – because it was too hot to cook indoors, and it was the sort of weather to just eat fresh vegetables and cold salads anyway. They’d marinate and grill aubergine and cauliflower and mushrooms and jackfruit; there would be green salads and tabbouleh and hummus. Maybe Q’s magic wouldn’t have reverted meats back into their animal forms, but they were both so used to cooking this way now that they hadn’t discussed putting it back on the menu. So, whatever. Harry came to work beside Molly, drying and salting the aubergine slices. And because Harry thought primarily of family as the people who were as comfortable in your home as their own, he was grinning as they worked. It was such a small thing, but – he was so happy.

As they carried food outside, a group was just getting in from flying. “Have a good nap?” Ginny asked, shaking out her ponytail. “We flew past that village. And that pond! Something big lives in it.”

“Koi,” Harry said. “Fairy koi, that’s all. Oh, and there’s a snapping turtle out there too. His name is Nuzzle.”

Ginny arched her eyebrows at this. “Nuzzle,” she repeated. “Well, you’ve got enough space to keep hippogriffs if you wanted.”

“God, don’t let Q hear you say that, she’d never speak of anything else. Anyway, you don’t think the snakes would eat them?” Harry asked innocently.

“No. Harry, here,” Voldemort said, coming up beside him, lifting Aurelia off his chest so he could cook. “And the only snake capable of or interested in eating a hippogriff would be a large reticulated python, which we do not keep because they are quite temperamental. And they prefer warmer climates,” he added.

“That is horrible,” Ginny told him. A curve of his mouth, and he took Aurelia away from the fire. Harry sat beside Ginny and Tonks, and Remus was on his other side and Snape beside him, glowering as he lifted a warm peach salsa out of the coals, and it was so funny and so strangely adorable that Harry had to smother his laughter in a cough. “You are not subtle,” Snape muttered anyway, levitating the steaming jar to a table of food behind them.

“Will you still be making potions in the Ministry, or…?” When Snape side-eyed him, Harry shrugged. “Potions, cooking, it’s all the same, yeah?”

“Decidedly not. It’s little surprise you failed my class, if that was your sense of the craft.’”

“I made risotto in an iron cauldron last week, with a self-stirring charm. It turned out brilliant.”
“Potter.” Snape pinched the bridge of his nose. “Next time, use a tempered glass cauldron. You idiot.”

He grinned. “Yes, sir.” He pulled a tray of cauliflower off the flames.

It wasn’t meant to be a grazing meal, but it turned out that way – people skewered bits of vegetables and tofu and halloumi together, either levitating it like proper wixes or holding them in the fire like a Quotie campout. Others milled behind in the grass. When Harry next saw Q and Phaedra, they were carrying an entire bowl of hummus between them.

Parents split off to feed their kids. People were giggly-drunk. Viktor was tossing bits of roast pepper into Ron’s mouth as Hermione laughed. Dean had pushed away his plate, sketching tattoo idea for Lee with George looking on. Hestia was speaking animatedly to Kingsley and Andromeda. Behind a silencing spell, Percy and Audrey were talking to Moody (and Harry raised his eyebrows at that, but Percy’s shoulders had lost their tension and he looked even mildly happy, so.)

Lisa and Daphne took a seat beside Harry at the fire, where Ginny and Tonks had vacated. “We met all your snakes,” Lisa informed him. “With your girls, and Hagrid.”

“Oh god, I’m sorry,” Harry laughed. “They can be, er, fanatic.”

“No, it was good.” Her mouth tugged. “Remember that time with Justin…?”

“God. Of course.”

“Well, watching your kids gather a half dozen snakes in front of them was weirder than that.” She stuck a skewer of aubergine in the fire. “I told them they should come see my Crups sometime.”

“That’s nice of you.”

She made a gesture. “It was Daphne’s thing first, she figured out how to train them as service dogs.”

“My mother,” Daphne said, sounding a bit exhausted. “Her eyesight and her magic were going at once. She doesn’t trust human help in the house, and with Granger’s fucking elf welfare legislation….”

(SPEW lived on. Hermione’s bill hadn’t eliminated house elves from the oldmage economy, but it forbade breeding them into servitude, so there were fewer working elves now than there’d ever been. She only barely got the bill through the Wizengamot, with a final push from Voldemort pointing out all the civilized countries that had eliminated elf servitude generations ago. So. Hermione said they didn’t yet have enough of a social net for these elves, and she was right, but that was work that wouldn’t yet pass.)

“And we couldn’t be around all the time ourselves, of course,” Lisa picked up. “But Crups are brilliant. After Daph figured out the first one, we started breeding and training them. You’d be surprised how overlooked the need is.”

Really Harry would not be surprised, as the wixen world had always been rather shit about disability. But he was smiling now. “That’s brilliant,” he said. “You’re both brilliant.”

“Potter, shut up,” Daphne muttered. As this was Slytherin for thank you, he just smiled at her.

When all the food was roasted, Harry put together a plate: aubergine for him and mushrooms for
Voldemort, honeycomb cakes and starfruit and tabbouleh and some of Snape’s peach salsa. Voldemort was holding Aurelia alone at a table, murmuring to her in Parseltongue as she watched everyone move past, and he pushed a whiskey soda in front of Harry as he sat. “Cheers,” Harry said, handing him the plate. Aurelia eyed the bright colors of the food. “Not for you, sweetie, not yet. Here.” There was a bottle cooling on the table before them; Harry scooped Aurelia into his lap to try feeding her. But there was so much to look at, she kept squirming away. “Fine, fine.” He propped her up again. “Don’t complain that you’re hungry later.”

(Of course this was a joke. They probably overfed their daughters if anything. Voldemort and Harry had both grown up hungry, and were both committed to never letting their children feel the same. They hadn’t exactly discussed it, and Harry didn’t know that he’d ever be able to, entirely. But for now they fed their children well.)

People joined them at the wide table soon: Tonks first, telling a story animatedly to Moody with Ginny beside her. “… So we serve him a warrant and he starts crying. And apparently he’d planned it and he’d kept some sort of powder that explodes with saltwater on him, and he’s pitching that at us. It was a disaster. And Rufus didn’t believe me when I said he’d marred his own face. So.” She ran a hand through her hair, a shimmery metallic gold today. “Oh, also I’m really bad at being the bad cop. Ginny said I could give it a go, but I just don’t think veiled threats come easily to me.”

Moody blinked. “Then don’t make ‘em veiled.”

She grinned at him. “I gave myself these broad shoulders and this deep imposing voice – “

“Which was fantastic,” Ginny added.

“But I was still reaching for tissues as soon as he bloody starts. He said we had too much history together, he’s so ashamed, all his usual bullshit. Sorry,” she added with a glance at Harry and Aurelia. “All his usual… stuff.”

“Wait, who?”

“Dung Fletcher. Again. It’s just so much shittier when he’s defrauding old Quotie men of their pensions.” She sighed, drinking deep. “He said he’s not doing anything wrong because he hasn’t made any medical claims, but he’s hardly got to when the damned bottle goes turgid in their hands. It’s horrific.”

“No, it’s hilarious,” Ginny corrected. “And I really need to start a wall of worst things we’ve seized.”

“Oh god.” Tonks turned to Moody. “D’you remember that one who kept masks carved out of ice?”

“Dawlish has still got one. I’m sure he’d add it to your wall of stupidity.”

“He liked the aesthetic, apparently,” Tonks said to both Harry and Ginny. “But then he started crying too – why do people always cry when I arrest them?”

“Because you look like a Hufflepuff,” Ginny said.

“I don’t, though! One time Mad Eye and I switched – Polyjuice for him, right? – and the suspect still pegged me as the soft one. For some bloody reason. Anyway, the ice mask one, he starts crying and of course it melts and sticks to most of his face. The healers had to patch his entire nose back on….”

So Harry hadn’t known in school just how hilarious the Aurors were. Every single gathering, Ginny or Tonks or Kingsley would have a new anecdote. And if they sufficiently flattered Moody, sometimes he’d divulge the best/worst of his own. The Aurors’ party stories were only rivaled by the
Healers’ – Neville’s husband Otto at St. Mungo’s A&E, Lavender in pediatrics, Angelina in St. Oswald’s nursing home. Tonks and Angelina would regularly square off to compare shittiest day stories (quite often literally. Who knew that Aurors had to deal with so much shit?) and it was the highlight of all Harry’s parties.

By now others had joined their table: Andi and Ted, Fred and Angelina, Justin and Hannah. “George is setting up fireworks,” Fred said to Harry and Voldemort, glancing behind them. “That field isn’t very flammable, is it?”

“Just the normal amount,” Harry agreed.

“Brilliant.”

Food, drinks. Voldemort had told Harry he hoped he would get sloshed, that Voldemort would ensure their children were all safe and accounted for regardless, so Harry drank whiskey and laughed a little louder and smiled a little more. And then Q and Phaedra ran up to them, carrying a bowl of not-quite-cherries. “Close your mouth – “ Q started.

“Your eyes!” Phaedra squealed. “Close your eyes. You’ve got to eat this.”

Harry had no idea what it was, so it’d be a surprise without his eyes closed. Still, he shifted Aurelia so he could lean down to Q’s height. She dropped a berry in his mouth.


“I dunno. Aunt Luna brought them!”

Well, they’d need to have another talk with the girls about identifying plants before eating them, with as many potions ingredients as they kept around. There were tons of PSAs about it, it’d be embarrassing if the Minister’s kids had to get their stomachs pumped for ingesting something unsafe.

“Buzzberries,” Voldemort said, swallowing. “And don’t eat too many, as they keep you up late at night.”

“So?” Q said. She was putting one into Ginny’s hands and one into Tonks’s.

“So Effie can only stay in your room if you are both asleep.”

Q pouted, but the snakes’ place inside their home was rather tenuous, and she wouldn’t push it.

“Okay.”

“Thank you.”

After dinner came a mountain of baked goods. The cake they’d ordered from Padma’s restaurant was covered in a layer of golden strawberries, sliced so thin as to be translucent, and layered like dragon scales. Pansy had brought canapes, and Hermione had brought vegan macaroons shaped like puffskeins. (Which was remarkably whimsical of her, but she’d just shrugged and said Max picked out the mold.) Justin and his wife kept chickens now, so he’d brought custard. Arthur brought out a tray of coffees to go with it all. And by that time, it was nearly dark, and George said everything was set, and Fred went to help explode things as everyone else brought their cake to the grass, conjuring blankets or low chairs or pillows. The atmosphere was easy, after being together all day, and it made Harry’s heart full to watch everyone he loved just sort of puddle into a comfy group. He conjured a blanket amidst everyone else’s, and a bright pouf for Voldemort since he couldn’t quite sit on the ground. They were touching now, Harry sitting with his head resting against Voldemort’s knee. It
was nice.

The kids had to be corralled away from the fireworks. Most ended up on Molly and Arthur’s blanket, as they were grandparents in one way or another to quite a lot of them.

Luna and Ginny and Tonks and Moody and Tonks’s parents joined them on their blanket, then Ron and Hermione sans kids. His friends were still good together, that Hogwarts had been a long time ago but it still felt the same. He was grateful.

When Fred set off a rocket that transfigured into a dragon in midair, weaving and gnashing its teeth, there was a gasp of excitement from the kids and adults alike. Then Ginny leaned in close to Harry, dropping a joint into his hand. “Happy birthday, Harry.”

“Weasley.” Moody had barely looked up, but his gnarled hand was out.

Ginny looked very unconcerned for someone just caught by Minterpol’s current director of narcotic trafficking prevention. (“Don’t you want to chase dark wizards, though?” Harry had asked when Moody had taken the position. – “Potter, these are dark wizards. Ask Voldemort how he funded his terrorism when the purebloods couldn’t fence their own gold.”) “What is it?” he asked her.

“She rolled another joint and lit it herself, blowing out an umbrella-shaped cloud of purple smoke. “See?”

Moody took the tin, casting a few diagnostic spells that returned green sparks. “Fine.” He passed it back; Ginny passed him the joint.

The fireworks exploded above them. Harry passed the sweet, smoky joint to Voldemort, who inhaled easily. And soon others of his friends moved closer, passing Ginny’s umbrellaclove among themselves. Luna was lying back with her head on Pansy’s lap, and Angelina and Lee were flanking Audrey, as Percy bounced the baby a distance away. Lisa and Justin had Moira between them, her tail swishing wildly as they petted her. And Voldemort’s long fingers were in Harry’s hair, massaging his scalp as the effect of the clove made all the nerves in his body unfurl. A fractal pattern swirled in the fireworks above them.

When the finale, a cyclone of orange and red fireworks filling the sky, died away, soft chatter broke out, and people slowly got to their feet. Q and Phaedra were still with their friends, chattering and laughing even though they were going to crash soon. Ron was half-asleep against Hermione, so Viktor went to collect their kids. Voldemort pulled out his wand and all the dishes assembled in midair, clattering back toward the house.

Fred and George emerged triumphant from the open field. “Brilliant,” Harry said, when George slapped him across the shoulders. “You’re brilliant.”

“Stop, I’m blushing.”

He couldn’t stop smiling. He felt like he was slightly floating, and Voldemort’s hand on his arm felt so warm and soft. They all walked back to the house together.

Everyone was collecting their coats and bags and cloaks and dishes and children; and they ended up mostly gathered in the kitchen again, as Voldemort charmed the washing up to do itself. “I couldn’t think of what to get you for your birthday,” he said in a sultry way, lapsing into Parseltongue as Harry leaned onto the countertops beside him.

And Harry choked with laughter. “Ginny tried that same line,” he said, in English to summon Ginny’s attention. “D’you remember that, Gin? I didn’t get you a gift, I thought you could have me,”
he said in his smokiest voice, which was not very erotic at all.

“That summer,” Ginny sighed, tossing her hair out of her face.

“Tried?” Voldemort echoed.

“Well. If Ron hadn’t cockblocked me,” Harry said, just as Ron walked in, his kids’ bags over his shoulder.

Ron’s blue eyes flitted between Harry and Voldemort. “Sorry?” he offered, quietly terrified.

And Harry almost collapsed with laughter. “Not Voldemort. My god.” He wiped his face. He was a bit high and it was wonderful. “Ginny, on my 17th birthday. Did you even know?”

“Oh. Harry, my god, everyone knew. Mum gave me a sickle for every time I kept you two from shagging.”

“Why didn’t she give me a sickle?” Ginny said hotly. “It’s my vagina!”

“I was worth less than a sickle to you?” Harry protested.

She flashed him a grin. “I would’ve split it.”

“Yeah, alright.”

Chaos, hilarious chaos. And then Tonks came in with Hestia and Oliver – technically Hestia and Oliver came in with a woman with an eerily perfect blend of their features, but Tonks did shit like that. “Just think about it,” she was saying.

“But I hate men,” Hestia objected.

The thunder of kids’ steps on the floor next, and they all at least had the presence of mind to keep their further conversations clean. “Abba,” Q said as she ran up, throwing her arms around Voldemort’s middle. (He’d been trying to gracefully escape Harry and Ginny’s improv comedy routine, but now he was trapped.) “Hedwig stole a mouse from Sarai!”

“Are they both alright?”

She wrinkled her nose. “Not the mouse.”

“Well, no, not the mouse.”

(Some people were uneasy with how comfortable Q and Phaedra were with the concept of death. Molly always tried to redirect those conversations. But they were living among predators, what could anyone expect?)

“Can we go to Madhuri’s this week?” Q went on. “She already said yes.”

“Did her mother say yes?”

“Mmmm…” She giggled, pressing her face into Voldemort’s robes.

“I’ll ask Padma,” Harry said to Voldemort.

More kids, and his friends with parental responsibilities. Molly had taken Aurelia while Harry and Voldemort had cleaned up, and she brought her in again now. The Quotie parents were being
walked to the floo by Hannah. Each of them carried their daughter in their arms.

And Harry walked everyone who flew or apparated to the door. “Happy birthday,” Tonks said, pulling out brooms for her and Ginny.

“Cheers, fly safe.” He accepted a kiss on the cheek from Ginny and a ruffle of his hair from Fred and George behind her. In twos and threes, they left.

And finally the house was still. Harry went to find Voldemort.

Into the nursery, where he was dressing Aurelia in pyjamas. Q and Phaedra were still giddy, bouncing around the room and chattering about the party. “And there was a dragon, then a pond, then a hippogriff…” Phaedra recited the fireworks as though they weren’t all there. She was pulling out her braids as she babbled. Q was picking off the nail polish she’d let Phaedra put on her earlier.

“Want to get ready for bed?” Harry said lightly, holding out a hand to each of them.

“No,” Q said, shoving her hands behind her back.

“Just pyjamas. You’ve got grass stains on your robes.” (Somehow grass and grape juice were stronger than any shield charms either of them could cast, and the stains were worse than blood.)

Just pyjamas and brushed teeth, but both girls fell asleep before they’d even decided on a bedtime story. Harry hit the lights. He was pulling off his robes as he was returning to his own bedroom, and he was mostly undressed by the time he shut the door.

Voldemort had just gotten out of the bath, and he tasted minty when Harry kissed him. “Perfect,” he said. “It was perfect. Thank you.”

“I cannot emphasize how little I did.”

Maybe he should take peace for granted by now. But he doesn’t. Instead of answering, he pushed Voldemort toward the bed. “Still.”

They didn’t have hours for sex any longer. They’d only managed sex twice since bringing Aurelia home last month. But they had now, and it was enough. He pulled Voldemort down onto the sheets with him.
Harry is on his lunch break, eating a sandwich alone at an outdoor café in the middle of London, when the owl finds him.

“Well done,” he said, wiping his fingers clean. “Nobody else can ever find me here.” The owl blinks, offers the letter, and doesn’t even stay for a few grilled vegetables.

The letter is in a typed envelope, the sort from a relay service like a sort of telegram. It’s typical to use when communicating abroad, to avoid sending owls on overseas trips. So, Harry receives these things at his office, but he’s never gotten one over lunch before. He opens it and looks to the closing.

*Very sincerely, Dudley Dursley.*

Well. Fuck. The letter’s not long – the last paragraph is an address and phone number, is all. Harry assumes Petunia has died and Dudley thinks he should know for some ungodly reason, so for now he folds the letter and finishes his sandwich.

He doesn’t pull it out again until that afternoon, after he’s collected Q and Phaedra from school and Aurelia from Molly and they are all ready for quiet time alone. He sinks onto the nursery sofa, watching Aurelia fall asleep in her cot, and he feels the edge of the envelope poking into his thigh. Fine.

It turned out to not say much at all. Dudley wanted to talk. He didn’t have a floo (Harry’s eyebrows went up at this) so could Harry please call him or send him a letter? He lived in California now – eight hours behind England, but he would take Harry’s call at any hour, it was fine.

He doesn’t want to. All these feelings had been buried for so long – including some memories he literally removed from his mind – that he didn’t see the point in revisiting any of it. Dudley wants to apologize and Harry doesn’t need to hear it.

But, because he is good, he takes out his phone and texts the number. *This is Harry. I’ll call in a few hours.*

When Dudley’s *ok* arrives immediately, Harry wants to throw his phone against a wall.

Harry cooks because Voldemort will be home late, and he manages to get both the twins sitting at the kitchen table with food in front of them while he gives a bottle to Aurelia. And then the front door opens and both girls are up again, running to see Voldemort, and Harry just sighs and eats a carrot off Phaedra’s plate.

Voldemort enters, the girls darting and weaving before him with excitement. “We’re going to Russia,” Phaedra announces.

“Yeah?” Harry looks to Voldemort.

“I need to be at a diplomatic dinner there on Saturday evening. If you’d like to take a weekend there?” He sits at the table, kicking out his bad leg carefully. “Though it’d be best to leave Aurelia with Molly.”

“Yeah, sure. Should I be at the dinner too?”
“Happily, no.”

Harry smiles because he is so bad at those formal things, especially in settings where he knows no one. “Yeah. I’ll ask Molly and Arthur tomorrow.” He’s levitating the dishes to the table so he and Voldemort will both eat as well. When Q, giggling, jumps up onto her chair to try reaching for a pot of hot gravy, Harry hisses and pulls her down. “Don’t reach for hot pans. You know better.” He sets them in the middle of the table and ignores Q’s sulky look.

It meant nothing on its own, but Harry second-guesses himself every time he’s short with the girls, and moreso now with Dudley’s letter. His children can be infuriating, deliberately so now, and it’s just…. Voldemort and Harry both recognize anger as their vice. Voldemort has never once yelled at their children because they both fear what it would mean if he did. And when Harry loses his temper he goes a bit sick, wondering if he’d learned these things from Vernon. He still remembers the fear of it, being yelled at by someone stronger and more powerful and more capable. The world isn’t so dismissive of child abuse in 2013 as it had been in the 1980s, but still. Harry doesn’t want to be anything like Vernon, and sometimes he doubts himself. He must have learned a lot in those years, things he hasn’t yet excised.

And it’s stupid, but he hasn’t wanted to be like Dudley either – at least Dudley as a child, who knows what sort of adult he’s become. It took Harry a very long time to work out entirely what was so upsetting about seeing his softening stomach in the mirror every morning. “I’ve gotten fat,” he’d said flatly when he realized how much he hated it, and Voldemort had only given an appreciative murmur and then covered his soft stomach and thighs and arse in love bites that night. And it was kind of him, but Harry was aware that he hadn’t fully dealt with both food and body image issues yet. Vernon and Dudley both took up space in a way Harry associated with bullies and abusers, and – it was all painful. He didn’t want to be anything like them.

As they were getting Q and Phaedra into the bath, he says to Voldemort (English, as the girls were more inclined to ignore it than Parseltongue), “I’ve got to call Dudley tonight.”

Voldemort looks over with a frown. “Why? Did his mother die?”

Harry has to laugh. “That’s what I assumed, too. Maybe. He didn’t say.”

“I will get them ready for bed.”

“Thanks.”

“Who died?” Phaedra asks cheerfully. (Okay, so maybe they need to stress that most people don’t like death so much. The girls are too young for their peers to think they’re evil, or even to understand who Voldemort is beyond the Minister, but someday they’re going to end up with people scared of them if they don’t realize how creepy it sounds to outsiders.)

Harry scrubs his forehead, accidentally smearing bubble bath there so the girls laugh. “Probably no one.”

“Who’s Dudley? Is he your friend?”

Decidedly not. “I’ll tell you at breakfast tomorrow.”

“But why not now?”

“Because now you need to wash your hair.”
When the girls are shepherded back into their bedroom, Harry takes his phone into Voldemort’s study – the best reception in the house is in here, not that Voldemort would ever know that – and shuts the door behind him. He wishes he’d brought a drink with him. He dials the number.

It picks up after the first ring, and Harry is a little satisfied and a little disgusted that Dudley is so eager. “Harry?” Dudley’s voice is soft and a bit raspy.

“Hi, Duddie-kins.”

And there’s a laugh and then an exhalation. “Harry. Um. I saw you in the papers last week.”

What noteworthy thing had he been doing last week? Witch Weekly had run a cover calling him a DILF, but he doubted Dudley was reading Witch Weekly. “An American paper?” he asks, prompting him.

“Yeah. It said… you’re responsible for all this? I mean.” Dudley sucks his teeth in that way he always, that Vernon always did, and Harry finds it so unpleasant to still recognize the sound twenty years later. “That the mages haven’t got to hide anymore. (Americans said mage where Britons said wix, at least for a decade now. Dudley must have lived abroad for awhile then.)

“Oh, no. It was just an article on a charity dinner. I had look up the older papers, to find… everything. Why are your papers writing about it now?”

“Well done.” He’s wondering if Dudley wants to make amends knowing he’s important, the same way his father gravitated toward anyone wealthier or more powerful than himself. But Dudley still seems hesitant. “There’s books too,” Harry says, spinning in Voldemort’s chair to find them on the shelves. Untouched, but the publishers thought they should at least do the courtesy of sending them books about themselves.

“I know. I got one.”

“… Okay.”

“Harry.” Another suck of his teeth. “Did you really marry him?”

He sounds horrified. Harry grabs a quill and begins driving it into his thigh, he’s so irritated. “Uh-huh.”

“But he – he killed your parents. He kills people,” Dudley stresses. “Are you – alright? Do you need to get out?”

Oh. Well, he hadn’t expected that at least. It had fallen to just once or twice a year now, that people would attempt to rescue Harry. He would have never guessed Dudley would be among them. “Yes, I’m alright. We’re in love.” (Which felt strange and vulnerable to say, but he always had to stress it to these sorts, especially since half of them hoped to seduce Harry post-rescue anyway.) “And it was a war. And he’s our Minister now, a pretty popular one.” In the past year magical Britain has rallied to support Voldemort, largely. He stacked his legislation to pass the most popular bills first; and the Wizengamot generally works to present a united front so the dissenters stayed quiet, and Harry and their daughters continued to soften his image. So. “I’m really happy with him,” he says. “Is that what you wanted to know?”
“I never thought you were actually, y’know, gay. I only said it to be, er, awful.”

Harry drives the quill deeper into his thigh. “Well, I am. Bi,” he clarifies, because it’s important to him. He did an interview with The Bends, the queer wixie magazine, a few years ago, and all the “Bi Who Lived” headlines were predictable but all the letters he got, a great many of them from questioning teenagers, were worth it.

But this had broken something open for Dudley. “Harry, I’m really sorry,” he says with urgency. “About everything. That house… what the fuck were they doing to you?”

Harry really, really doesn’t want to do this. Being angry with Dudley is safe, having to forgive him is not. “I couldn’t tell you,” he says. “Ask your mum.”

“Oh. No. We – don’t really talk. Did you know that Dad died?” he adds. “When I was – when we – 18. Massive heart attack.”

Harry would like to say he’s sorry but he really isn’t. “Yeah, I knew,” he says instead.

“She remarried, only about a year later. A banker, I think. And then I met a girl and we moved together here right after uni. So – I don’t see much of Mum.”

“Congratulations. On the girl.”

“Yeah, she’s – she’s really great. Her name’s Julie, she’s a pediatrician. We’ve got a daughter, she’s just turned 4.”

“Oh,” Harry says. “So have we. Twin girls. And another baby, she’s just turned 8 weeks.”

“Congratulations.”

“Thanks.”

“Don’t you – “ He stops, starts again. “Every time I look at her, I think about shoving her under the stairs. Or – anything else they’d do to you. And I just don’t know how, how anyone would hurt a child.”

Harry stares up at the ceiling for a long moment. “I don’t know how either,” he says, even though he’s certain he’s been thinking about it longer than Dudley has. “But they do. A lot of people.”

“Are you – okay now?”

Oh, is that what he wanted? Some reassurance that he’s had no lasting effect on Harry. “What if I told you no?” he says, a bit bitter and a bit malicious.

“Then – I don’t know.” Dudley sounds miserable, and Harry finds it darkly satisfying. “I just, I know I didn’t help. Harry, I’m really, really sorry.”

“… Okay,” he says. “I mean, thanks.” He gets up, taking his phone downstairs into the kitchen.

“I should’ve told you earlier,” Dudley goes on, and he is so sincere that Harry is uncomfortable. “I could’ve – well, I don’t think I could’ve stopped them, but I could’ve done something.”

“Maybe,” Harry agrees. He’s found a lowball, and he’s grabbing a handful of ice.

“They starved you, didn’t they?” he asks, tremulous.
“Yeah.” Harry is pouring whiskey, he doesn’t care if Dudley hears the ice clattering in the glass. It’s not a great coping mechanism, but it’s what he’s got right now.

“I just remember you being so damn small. Even when we were teenagers. And my friends….”

Most of Dudley’s gang could pick Harry up by themselves, if they could catch him. He got good at fighting strategically, all elbows and knees, but he was better at running. How funny that he’d stopped running, in the magical world. He’d never run from Voldemort. “Your friends were all stupid bullies,” he says. “And I don’t know what you got out of it.” The times when he’d had to sit across the dinner table from Dudley and pretend like he hadn’t inflicted that black eye or split lip, either directly or indirectly, were humiliating. Vernon and Petunia would intimate he’d done something to deserve it anyway, and then he’d be ordered to put ice on it, because what would the neighbors think, you look like a menace and a thug, don’t let them see you like this. He drinks deeply.

“I don’t know,” Dudley says. “It made me popular? It was easy? I couldn’t have stopped them entirely, but I could’ve….”

Harry is not very impressed with the suggestion that Dudley would find it better to bully someone besides Harry. He swallows another mouthful of whiskey and lets his silence speak for him.

“Harry – why did nobody notice?”

He’s wondered this, too. Not just about the people of Little Whinging. Madam Pomfrey never said anything when he’d come back from every summer exhausted and malnourished, and the house elves must have known that he hoarded food in his room, and Arabella Figg participated in the Dursleys’ abuse really. Even Molly and Arthur, who have protected and nourished and cherished him more than anyone, did nothing before his second year, when the twins make the bars on his windows and his starvation the humiliating topic of breakfast. And Dumbledore… “They noticed,” he says. “It just wasn’t their business.”

“There are laws,” Dudley says. “Julie’s got to call CPS if she even suspects….” His words falter.

“Child abuse,” Harry says flatly. “Just say it.”

“Yeah.” He doesn’t say it.

“Well, I can’t exactly justify this, so….”

“No. Of course. Sorry.” He takes a breath. “I don’t even like yelling at Lauren. I think of someone hitting her and – I just go sick all over. They’re so small and they trust you so much.” A pause. “I’m really scared I’ll turn out like Dad.”

(It’s tangential, but Harry is irritated that Dudley says Mum and Dad as though they were remotely those things to Harry too.) “Me, too,” he says instead.

“… Really?”

“We both – Voldemort and I both – had shit childhoods that we’re not passing on to our own kids. Of course I don’t want to be like him.”


And Harry has to laugh at this. “Someone tried to kill me, pretty much every year,” he delights in
informing Dudley. “But yeah, I preferred it, too.”

“Harry….” Dudley makes a strangled noise that might be laughter. “But it’s safer now?”

“Yeah.”

“Good.”

“Yeah.”

“Look, I – I hadn’t kept up with all that when it was happening. When everyone found out about the mages. I didn’t know you were so important. But now – we think Lauren’s got magic?” he says in a rush.

Goddammit. Goddammit, Harry doesn’t want to hate Dudley for his undeserved access to this world, but he does. “Congratulations,” he says instead.

“Nobody else understands any of it,” Dudley says. “She made all her stuffed animals float over her cot when she was little. She turns her glasses of milk into ice. We’re proud, but – it’s a lot. And that’s when Mum stopped talking to me, when I tried to tell her.”

Harry doesn’t want to be Dudley’s support at this time. But for this kid’s sake – “There are schools,” he says. “Earlier than 11, now. She’ll learn to control it.”

“Yeah, there’s this weekend academy. She’ll start next year. There’s a boarding school, too, in Salem, but blimey, we don’t want to send her away this young.”

“Right.” Harry finishes his drink. “There will be other support. We’ve got these wands charged with Finite – it’s a spell to make most other magic effects stop – that even Quoties can use. And a hotline to the Accidental Magic Task Force.”

“Yeah,” Dudley says, and Harry can’t tell whether he already knew these things. “Harry. Can she meet your kids someday?”

“… Yeah,” Harry says, because he can’t let this girl be isolated like he was isolated. “Someday. We haven’t gotten that far out, before. Just the east coast.” Boston, where the US magical government is; DC for the no-maj government, New York City to travel on their own. “And you don’t visit here?”

“No, I haven’t. I’ve never been back.”

“I’ll give you a call if we’re ever out your way,” Harry says. “Or let me know if you ever put in a floo.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I will.”

“Alright. Bye, Dudley.”

“Bye, Harry.”

When Harry hangs up, he casts a very firm cushioning charm around his mobile, then he chucks it at the wall as hard as he can. He’d escaped. He’d thought he had escaped.

It wasn’t even Dudley. Dudley was… fine, and appropriately remorseful. But Harry had locked away all his feelings about Little Whinging and the Dursleys and his childhood, very deep inside himself. His years in therapy after Hogwarts had only really reached back to age 11, to Dumbledore and the prophecy and all the deaths he hadn’t died. Not even Rita could uncover his entire past, so it
wasn’t all in the books or the papers. He had escaped.

When Voldemort enters the kitchen, he doesn’t look remotely surprised to find the mobile on the ground and Harry staring at the wall. He slips beside Harry, their magic curling around each other’s.

“I thought I’d never have to think about any of it again,” Harry mutters.

Voldemort makes a noise of amusement, because they both know that it’s funny, between them, that Voldemort’s got the better relationship to his past. It was a long process, and mostly forced by indefatigable journalists, but it’s all in the public now: Tom Riddle, and his parents, and the orphanage, and everything from Hogwarts onward. Sometimes tabloid press would still call him Tom, looking for a reaction, but oddly none of their photos would develop at all. Voldemort would say he knew nothing of photography, but perhaps the journalist was just incompetent? So.

His hand is on the back of Harry’s neck, thumb rubbing the tense trapezius. “I am sorry.”

Harry’s laughter is hollow. “He has a daughter. She’s 4. And she’s magic.”

“Ah.” He slides onto the island stool beside him. Silently he summons Harry’s phone from its shameful place on the floor – god, he’s so dramatic – and hands it back.

“I said we’d bring the girls over, if we were ever nearby.”

“To California?” Voldemort sounds doubtful.

“Salem, maybe, someday.” (There were major schools both in Salem, Massachusetts, and Salem, Oregon. The schools found it funny and everyone else found it obnoxious.)

“You really haven’t got to.”

“It’s fine.” He’s opening his phone, flipping through his photos. Dudley would see all the professional ones already – all the ones that had Harry and Voldemort in them – so he’s just pulling up the private ones of his kids instead. He’s sort of smiling when he sends a photo of Q and Phaedra each holding a ball python. There.

“He asked if I needed to be saved,” he offers Voldemort.

“That is… brave of him.”

“Dunno what he thought he’d do about any of it.” Normally they find Harry’s saviors a bit funny, but his tone is flat now. “But brave, yeah.” He sends a photo of Fawkes on the edge of Aurelia’s crib, both of them asleep. He doesn’t write anything.

Very shortly, he gets a reply: What is that?

And Harry’s lips curve as he texts back, That’s a baby. A long beat, to let the joke land, then he texts, That’s a phoenix. You’ve heard of them before.

I didn’t know they were real.

There was so much he didn’t know. So much his daughter wouldn’t know, without access to the magical world. Harry had worked tirelessly to democratize access to that world, so newmage students no longer began with a decade’s deficit. It’s why Voldemort pushed early education through as quickly as possible, even burning some of his political goodwill in the early years to do so. And Harry didn’t directly have anything to do with US inter-world politics, but he’d heard enough from
people who did.

Dudley sends photos back: a tall woman with a wide smile, holding a girl with dark braids. Like Harry, he doesn’t send any photos of himself.

Harry doesn’t respond, at first. Then: Nice.

Yours too, Dudley writes back.

And then Harry slips his phone back into his pocket and stares at the ceiling. “He says he’s sorry,” he tells Voldemort.

“Is he?”

“Probably.” He gets up, setting his glass into the sink so it will wash itself. “He should’ve come to it a lot earlier than now. Without having a kid. But – I should’ve, too.” He’s done with it, for now, in any case. “Can you come to bed now?”

“Yes.”

They check in on the girls first. The twins are asleep, Phaedra curled around a stuffed dragon bigger than she is, and Q with Effie, because she can only fall asleep with the weight of a snake across her legs now. Then to the nursery, closer to their own bedroom. Aurelia sleeps quietly.

So Harry brings Voldemort into their bedroom. “Please just hurt me.”

It’s typical, for both of them really. A purification after a hard day, after pain or anger or sadness. He doesn’t think he’ll cry, but it’d be a relief if he did. They shed their clothing, settling onto the bed, and then Harry relaxes into Voldemort’s touch as he’s winding thick leather straps up Harry’s arms, pulling his elbows together behind his back.

And then he’s pulling Harry facedown on the bed, burying his face into a pillow so he’s not quite smothered but he must breathe deliberately. His hips are pulled up, and then there’s the sharp sting of a wooden spoon across his thighs.

And then he’s laughing and crying all at once after all. Maybe it’s fucked, to take back his abuse (his abuse, as though he owns it) like this. But Voldemort’s other hand is on his hip, and the magic between them is love, and he’ll be alright.
The years of 2014 and 2015 are a delight for Harry. Their kids grow older – Q and Phaedra start school full-time and are bursting with passions and interests and dreams now. Aurelia turns 2 and insists that she is “just Aura,” refusing to answer to Aurelia any longer, so just Aura it is. She is bright and funny, and Harry takes her to play with Fred and Angelina’s son Julian quite a lot, and it’s already clear they will cause trouble for teachers everywhere. Sometimes Percy’s daughter Lucy is there, though more often brought by his wife than by Percy himself, and – it’s good. Harry is very, very invested in making sure all the kids have a place to belong among their cohort – he’d grown up without friends and it still stung – so he was the one most often responsible for coordinating playdates.

So when he arrives to Aura’s preschool one day in December, to find Blaise Zabini shepherding both Aura and his own daughter toward the coat room, he only gives him a tentative smile. “Cheers. Here, Aura, arms up,” and he’s slipping her into her coat.

“Can Mila come play?” Aura asks, dark eyes pleading.

“If her dad says yes,” Harry says, looking to Blaise.

“Yes,” he says, “but not today.”

And they find a time over the weekend and then – then, well, Harry will have to figure out what to say to Blaise while the kids play. But it’s good, it’s a healthy relationship for Aura to have.

But before that weekend playdate can come to fruition, everything… well. It’s late on Friday evening, after all three girls are asleep, when Harry hears the whoosh of the floo downstairs. There is a low, tense conversation.

Voldemort stands before the floo with Wadha, chief of the itinerant Parseltongue community they both know. “Harry. Good.” Voldemort beckons him in. “Could we take in a child?”

Whatever he expected, it’s not this. “Uh. Yes?”

“She’s in labor now,” Wadha offers, as Harry comes up beside Voldemort. “She only arrived yesterday, and she hasn’t given us more than a name. She’s very young, it’s… not a pregnancy she wanted.” Probably not conceived in great circumstances, she means. “But we must move, and it’s not the time for a newborn among us. A month, perhaps.”

And Harry’s insides are twisted with pity. “Yeah,” he says. “Of course. We’ll need to….”

Get ready. All of it. Aura’s sleeping in a bedroom now, not the nursery, so it’s been unused for awhile but it’s still intact. They don’t have formula but they know a few quick-brew potions they can put on now. There are still clean clothes and blankets and towels in the nursery dresser.

Emotionally, he doesn’t know what they need. What the girls will need. Tomorrow, that’s a question for tomorrow. “You should go,” he says to Voldemort. “I’ll get someone to stay here and then I’ll come.”

“Thank you,” Voldemort says, and there’s more they should say to each other but it’s not the time. Harry runs a hand along Voldemort’s back, in place of all of it, and Voldemort departs with Wadha into the floo.
Harry runs upstairs first. The nursery needs a few rounds of Scourgify, and he puts new sheets on the mattress, and he pulls out clothing and nappies for newborns, both only just larger than his hand. Into their potions room, then, to throw together their typical formula. He set it to mix itself, checked in on the girls, and then returned to the floo.

Luna’s was the first home he called. “Harry,” she says happily, squatting with some difficulty beside his head in the grate, because she is 6 months pregnant herself with twins and she’d gotten quite wide recently. “How are you?”

“Good. I mean. Can you come watch the girls for a bit? They’re asleep, but we need to go out.”

“I’d love to,” she says easily. “Let me just get my handbag.”

Harry withdraws his face from the fire, and a few minutes later Luna is stepping through, still in quite cozy pyjamas. “Ah, sorry,” Harry says. “It’s an emergency.” With Luna’s questioning gaze on him, he feels compelled to say, “There’s a baby. Among the Parselmouths we know. We’ve got to take it in. Look, the girls shouldn’t wake up, but if they do, tell them we’ll be back soon.”

“Harry,” Luna says softly. “Congratulations.”

He doesn’t know if it’s warranted, if this will be their child. They’d spoken a bit of a fourth, but they’d intended to space them out a bit more. Aura is only 2½ and she tried their patience every single day, so. But he also knows about himself that he wouldn’t let a child go homeless; and Voldemort wouldn’t either. “Thanks,” he says. He’s reaching for his cloak hung by the floo. “Luna, thank you. Really.” And she gives him a little wave, and he goes.

He arrives in the pavilion, out of the only floo the Hajaya keep. There are a number of people around a cooking fire, and none of them look surprised to see him. “Healer’s tent is that way,” a woman points, as though they all expected him. “She said she’d carve the kid out herself if she had to, it’s been horrific.”

Harry takes a breath. “Thanks,” he says, and he approaches.

The tent inside is mostly packed up – Wadha wasn’t kidding, they were clearly about to move – and there are heavy silencing spells draped along it. There are silhouettes of people in the back, but in the entryway there is only Voldemort, waiting on a sofa with a book unread in his lap. “Sweetheart,” he murmurs.

“She was raped,” Voldemort says, and he’s putting away the book because there’s no point in it. “She’s 15. There should be complications, so young. She really should have miscarried.”

Harry exhales. “That’s….”

“She hasn’t said how she arrived here, but she did say she had nowhere else to go. Wadha offered to take the child back themselves when she is older – it’s a girl, the healer scanned it already – but we should also consider taking her in permanently.”

Adoption. They’d skirted the question before – Harry wouldn’t raise it before Voldemort did, because Voldemort still hadn’t dealt with some of those feelings in himself. “Do you want to?” Harry asks carefully. “I mean, would you want to. If we can.”

“Yes.”
“Vol….”

“Harry, I said yes,” he says, needled. “It’s fine. We will write Madam Pembroke for paperwork soon. I don’t know what she will need for an emergency adoption.”

Harry doesn’t know, either. They hadn’t gotten this far the last time they’d considered adoption. “Okay,” he says. “But it’s alright if it’s hard.”

“Of course it will be hard, this child’s entire existence is from trauma.” When he sees Harry’s expression, he softens. “I’m sorry,” he says lowly. “Yes, it will be hard.”

Harry’s not offended so much as he just sad on everyone’s behalf. “Okay,” he says again. “Could you tell me if I’m doing it wrong?”

Voldemort considers him. “This child doesn’t need a savior,” he says at last. “And she never will.”

“No,” Harry agrees. “I mean, I know.”

“Good.”

Harry sinks against Voldemort’s side. They’re both too distracted to do anything but wait. His phone, unsurprisingly, hasn’t got signal out here, and he didn’t bring the scroll on which he and Ron wrote each other sometimes. He needs to tell someone.

After a long stretch of time, healers begin to emerge from the back room. They bring supplies and re-cast privacy charms and don’t pay much attention to Harry and Voldemort until the last of them. “You’re the foster parents?” he says, approaching the sofa.

Both of them are up immediately. “Yes,” Voldemort says, even though – well, it’s complicated, isn’t it? That they don’t yet know what they are.

The healer only nods. “They’re nearly done. The girl was born underweight, but otherwise with no complications.”

Thank god. It was more than they had hoped for. They should at least try to get a medical history out of the mother, but Harry’s not sure she’d know it herself. She may want nothing to do with them, anyway.

“Is the child well enough to travel?” Voldemort asks.

“Yes. She will be.” He looks over his glasses. “You’ve got a place for her?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” He collects potions out of a mostly-emptied cupboard. “Someone will collect you within an hour.”

“Thank you.”

An they are alone again, an Harry is feeling a lot of things all at once. “I don’t know what to tell the girls,” he murmurs.

“Yes,” Voldemort sighs. “Would you, though?”

He means instead of himself. It’s how they handle hard conversations usually. “Yeah.” He chews at his thumbnail. “The twins should be old enough to – I dunno, respect it. The circumstance.”
Maybe this was overly optimistic – the twins would be 7 next month and were still quite young. It took them a few months to settle into having Aura around. And Aura... maybe she’d like it. The twins were too old to always play well with her, maybe someone nearer to her own age....

It was only wishful thinking on his part, but it was all he had at the moment.

Perhaps another hour, and the tent flap separating them from the back room is pulled open. Another healer looks out. “You can come in.”

Harry has to make his face deliberately neutral as they enter, because Voldemort was right, the mother is so young. The spells of delivery glow along her stomach. Her dark eyes look warily at them as they approach, and Harry immediately has an impression of how invasive the entire birthing process is, a half dozen strangers surrounding her and prodding at her body. There’s a healer holding the baby, and it’s Voldemort who takes her in his arms as Harry has a seat on a low chair beside the woman’s bed. “Hi,” he says. “My name is Harry. This is my husband Voldemort. How are you?”

The girl’s name is Sujatha, and she will say nothing useful to them until Voldemort takes out a coin purse and hands it to her. It’s one minted by Gringotts, meant to withdraw money in the local currency of any location, and they typically only need them for Ministry business. “I hope you would stay with the Hajaya for awhile, though,” he says to her. “Wadha is generous, and good at what she does.”

“Yes,” the girl relents, and tucks the money away.

So she tells them enough: that she grew up in Chennai and got shuffled around distant relatives’ homes among various Parselmouth communities after her mother died. She only knew of Wadha and the Hajaya from a friend, but it was known to take in Parselmouth children when nobody else would, and while Sujatha didn’t need a home for herself (Harry wants to object, but he doesn’t), she at least wanted somewhere to leave this child. She never says my child, and that probably makes things easier.

The baby doesn’t have a name, she doesn’t care what it is named. She does not know her medical history, but a pinprick of blood for diagnostics would provide quite a bit. She will stay with the Hajaya long enough to recover and then she will go. She does not want to see this baby ever again.

The healers take the baby from Voldemort and put her back a few times. They coax a few drops of colostrum into her mouth, and Sujatha agrees to try pumping for them again if everyone will get the hell out and leave her alone. They do.

It’s somewhere around 2 am in England when they can go. The healers hadn’t had all the paperwork for fostering, but Sujatha had signed as many things as she could to say she wouldn’t want this child. Wadha enters the tent at some point, and they have a tense conversation in Arabic that ends with her agreeing to stay with the tribe at least until spring. The healers give Voldemort and Harry breastmilk and formula and well wishes. They walk back to the floo.

Harry hands the baby to Voldemort since he’s always nervous about dropping it in the floo. She’s asleep for now, and it’s a relief. They go.

In the drawing room they find Luna asleep on one half of the sofa and Aura asleep on the other. The lights burn low and they move quietly upstairs.

But when they are preparing the nursery and getting the baby ready to sleep, there’s a noise behind them. “Is that a baby?”
Aura is awake, and now stands behind them, eyes wide. They both stop, careful about what to say next. “Yes, she is,” Harry says. “She needs a home, so she’s going to be a part of our family.”

He knows this is a bit reckless until they’ve spoken to their adoption attorney and signed everything, that it may not be permanent. But he couldn’t bear to say it in any way that implies this child doesn’t belong here.

Aura’s mouth works for a minute. Then she runs for the door. “Q! Phae!” There’s a moment when they could have grabbed her, could have stopped her with magic – but they don’t. She runs out, toward the twins’ bedroom.

So Harry and Voldemort settle onto the sofa, Harry holding the baby close. There’s scrambling in the corridor and then Aura leads the twins triumphantly back into the nursery. “See!”

They shouldn’t be doing this in the middle of the night. This should have happened tomorrow morning, when the girls have slept and Harry and Voldemort have planned what to say. Instead they are all crowded around the bundle of blankets in Harry’s arms, the baby’s pinkish face nestled within. “Sit down,” Voldemort says to the girls, and he’s pulling Aura into his lap as Q and Phaedra scramble onto the sofa beside Harry. “This baby needs a home. It was an emergency. So now she will live here.”

“Forever?” Phaedra asks.

“Yes.”

(So Voldemort is in agreement, it’s better to present it as a certainty now. Harry is relieved.)

“What’s her name?”

Harry and Voldemort look to each other. “Corisande,” Voldemort offers. A name they’d considered before. It is Greek, and its runes are beautiful and naturally protective.

“Corisande,” Harry says aloud. “Yeah. Cori,” he offers to the girls, who struggle a bit with longer names.

“Cori, Cori, wake up, Cori,” Phaedra sing-songs. She stirs minutely in Harry’s arms. “She’s so little.”

“Yeah, she is,” Harry agrees. She’s a few weeks premature, and her body’s more curled in on itself than any of them had been at birth. Her skin is still wrinkled and red. She looks… like she needs them. But Voldemort is right, Harry won’t be her savior. Just her father.

“I wanna hold her,” Q says, holding out her arms.

“Yeah, alright.” Harry gets up. “Here, sit flat and hold your arms like this. You’ve got to hold her head up. Good.” And he lets go, and Q is looking down at Cori in her lap with – awe. It’s amazing.

It won’t entirely be easy, they’ll probably all cycle through all these feelings across the next few weeks. But it was a relief now, that the girls were curious and gentle instead of upset. Harry leans in toward Aura. “Hey. You like the idea of being a big sister?”

“Mm.” She tugs on her messy curls. “Mmmaybe.”

“Maybe is okay. Q and Phaedra like it,” he points out. “I know it’s a big surprise. Why don’t we celebrate with crepes in the morning?”
So that’s how they speak to the girls, light and easy, as though this is all a big but good surprise. And when they’re nodding off again, Harry stays with Corisande and Voldemort delivers all three of the girls into their beds. He returns with soft blankets, pulling them over them both. Harry leans in.

“You’re so good,” he murmurs into Voldemort’s soft neck. “So so so good.”

“It’s really nothing exceptional.”

“You know that it is, though.” Harry’s got Cori in his arms, he’s reaching for the bottle to attempt to feed her again, as she’ll only drink a few drops at a time. “I’ll take time off work,” he says. It’s a slow time of year for him anyway: lots of Christmas and Yule parties to attend, little in the way of actual work. “If I could go in for just a few hours, I could write out everything Sigrid would need to do through the end of the year. She’s quite proactive, anyway, it’d be alright.”

“I will be with the Norwegian ambassadors the full day Monday. Tuesday?”

“Yeah. Perfect.” He pulls the bottle away when Cori squirms from it. “Is it too early to write Kyria Guillon?” The priestess who performed the blood ritual of adoption for their children. When Voldemort hesitates, Harry adds, “It’s probably presumptuous, we should wait to hear back from Madam Pembroke and whether adoption is even likely, but I thought….”

“It would be better for Corisande,” Voldemort says. “Her magic seems underdeveloped. I’ll ask if the priestess could come on an emergency visit.”

Harry doesn’t know how to phrase the question he wants to ask. Voldemort has snapped before – not at Harry, but at children’s books and films that don’t understand adoption – that adopting a child is nothing like picking out a puppy. “What if she can’t stay?” he says in a rush.

Voldemort’s hand is soft on the back of Harry’s neck. “I’ll do everything in my power too keep her here,” he says solemnly. “The stability would be best for everyone.”

“Yeah,” Harry says. “I mean, thanks.” Cori is asleep and he rises carefully to set her in the cot. Then he crawls back beneath the blankets. They’ll sleep here tonight.

The next morning they’re both awaken by Aura climbing on top of them. “Can Mila see the baby?” she is asking, tugging at the front of Harry’s shirt.

Mila. He searches his exhausted brain. Blaise’s daughter, meant to come over today. “Errrm,” he mumbles, even as Voldemort is awake and pulling Aura off his stomach by now. “I need to talk to Mila’s dad. Are the twins up yet?”

“Phae is with Aunt ‘Una.” (Aura is perfectly capable of saying Luna, she just doesn’t. Luna likes it.)

Luan’s here. Blaise is supposed to bring his daughter over. And Harry and Voldemort have a new baby neither of them had expected.

Voldemort sees that it is too early for Harry to think about all this. “We need to feed Cori,” he says to Aura, steady as though she’d understand the responsibility. “And then we may discuss our plans for today.”

“You promised -- !”

“Aurelia.” His tone is unusually sharp. “We need you to be good, because this is an emergency.”
Aura peers through the slats of the cot. “Why? Is she sick?”

“No. Babies need a lot of attention. You did, when you were that young.”

“Oh,” she says, though she’s not entirely convinced.

“Aura,” Harry says, leaning in, could you ask Aunt Luna if she wants to stay for breakfast?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Thank you, sweetie.” He presses a kiss to her forehead before she runs out.

So then it’s time to be up. It’s time for a feeding, and to change Cori into real clothes. Harry has to floo Blaise to see if Aura could play over there instead. He reaches for his robe.

And when they – all three of them – arrive downstairs, Luna beams at them. “Congratulations.”

“Thanks,” Harry says. He pushes the blanket back from Cori’s face a bit. “Corisande Melinoë,” he introduces her. “Good protective runes.” Voldemort had already cast an entire matrix of them around the cot last night. “You are amazing,” he tells Luna, taking in the scatter of art supplies around her and all three of their girls. “Really, truly amazing. Would you stay for breakfast?”

“I would love to.”

Harry had told Aura the crepes were in celebration, and it starts to feel that way, as he pours batter and whipped cream in their warm kitchen. Voldemort puts on coffee since neither of them really slept. The girls get sparkling fruit juice with animated straws (Harry thinks this is gross, having a straw squirming in your mouth, but they love gross things) and they’re squirrelly, running around the kitchen while Harry cooks. But they’re also good, relatively good and adjusted to all this. Cori sleeps in Voldemort’s lap, and when Phaedra picks up her tiny, tiny hand, she grasps at her finger. It’s enough, for now.

The next few weeks are a whirlwind. Harry takes time off work through the new year, and staying home with Aura and Corisande takes a lot out of him. Harry reaches out to his friends in twos and threes to tell them the news. He and Voldemort can beg off some of the formal holiday parties but not all of them, during which time Molly is a godsend, watching after Corisande in the requisite two hours they have to show up. They take the girls out Christmas shopping so they can get a gift for Cori too. Their attorney sends them paperwork, and the priestess comes to perform the ritual of adoption just a few days before Christmas.

Christmas day, they have everyone over as usual. Everyone tried to talk Harry out of it, and he refused to let anyone else host the holiday, so here they all are.

“A baby shower,” Neville says when he drops by late that afternoon. “Everyone, y’know, wondered when you’d adopt.”

It had always seemed very far off, until it wasn’t. Voldemort had thrown himself into doing it perfectly, just like he did everything else perfectly. When they’d first discussed the possibility of adoption, almost a decade ago by now, he’d told Harry that adopted children would need more than he would be able to give them, emotionally. And now – he was alright. They’d given a brief interview to Luna so nobody else could break the story, and Voldemort had even said as much there,
that it was a redemption of his own childhood to extend their home to another child now. He didn’t speak of it as gratifying or rewarding; Cori was our daughter and not a tragedy or charity case; but it was what he was willing to say, that he would redeem his childhood and Harry’s both. So he’d be alright. They’d be alright.

They keep Corisande in their arms that entire Christmas, so she can watch the festivities. And when Phaedra comes to press a gift bow on top of her head, Cori makes a gurgling noise like laughter. And Phaedra laughs too, before she and Q run off to be with their friends.
Harry doesn’t return to work after that first Christmas with Corisande. She was small, she needed more attention than two working parents could provide. After the new year Harry sends more directions to his office in Inter-World Relations, and says he’ll see them in a few weeks.

The twins’ 7th birthday is on January 6th, and they are happily now at an age where they’d prefer to celebrate it with their friends. Harry and Voldemort arrange a party at an indoor flying obstacle course (which Harry would kill to do himself, but the rules say 12 and under) and bring Q and Phaedra’s friends, and Aura is too young for a broom but would definitely pout, so she spends the day with Percy’s daughter Lucy, and then Harry and Voldemort keep Cori with them in the parental supervision area of the obstacle course.

Harry sends more letters, and comes into the office a half-day at a time. He doesn’t want to and he doesn’t need to; the world is at peace now. But it’s a month to the day when he finds Voldemort bottle feeding Cori one night, when Harry has just put the twins to bed and made sure Aura was still asleep (because she usually wasn’t. At least she was bad at being quiet, so they always knew). He takes a seat on the sofa beside Voldemort. “I think I want to quit.”

“You should.” At Harry’s look, Voldemort lifts a shoulder. “It’s clear you are bored. We don’t need the money, I assume?”

Harry does more of their financial stuff than Voldemort does, he’s just better at it. “We really don’t. But – unless we need to – I’d only stay home for a bit? A few months, I dunno. But I really miss magic. Don’t you?”

His job had been 16 years of public appearances, speeches, being nice and personable and photogenic. He thought he’d had enough adventure for one lifetime, but – he hadn’t. As it turned out.

“I do,” Voldemort says carefully. “But I’ve got rather more tradeoffs than you do. What would you like to do?”

“… Could I still be an Auror?”

The corner of Voldemort’s mouth twitches. “After all this time?”

“I mean. Here, babe,” he says, picking Cori out of Voldemort’s lap, wiping her tiny mouth and holding her close. “Or a curse breaker? Or – something. I just – wanted to ask first if I could. For your sake.”

He and Voldemort temper each other. Less for their personalities these days, but moreso for their public images. Harry needed to be the one forging good relations with the rest of the world, to undo the public perception of Voldemort. But now Voldemort is Minister, the inter-world relations are rather stable, and Harry feels irrelevant.

“Yes,” Voldemort says, thoughtful because it’s a legitimate question. “Really, it hasn’t been critical for a few years now. I only assumed you were content to stay. I’m sorry.”

“I’m not unhappy, exactly. Just…. ” He offers a self-deprecating smile. “I’m not done with adventure after all.”

“Of course you’re not.”
Cori is falling asleep, so Harry gets up to put her to bed. “I thought I could get a meeting with Scrimgeour?” He led the Aurors’ department these days. “I only know some of what they do in peacetime.”

“Ah. If you want the most dangerous job, day to day, curse breaking would be more appropriate. But some of the criminals you’d apprehend as an Auror would want you dead, personally. If that appeals to you.”

Harry grins. “Sort of, yeah.”

They stay up late to talk about it. Among other exciting jobs that use magic, Harry could pursue a career with animals, or in emergency medicine, or in tactics and weaponry like Ron, or in magitech like Arthur. He could even teach, which was not so much exciting as chaotic. He considers it, but the twins would start at Hogwarts in four years and he could not imagine being the child of one of the professors. “Maybe in my old age,” he says lightly. “When they’ve all grown up.”

“Your old age,” Voldemort repeats dryly.

Harry still hadn’t entirely adjusted to wixie lifespans. If Cori were to be their youngest daughter (maybe, but that’s not a conversation either of them could think rationally about while caring for a preemie one month old), then Harry would be 54 years old when she left Hogwarts. This was incredibly young, for a race that could live to be 200. It was also more expected that people would hold multiple jobs at different points in their lives, and more expected that people wouldn’t get married “til death do us part” (since the ones who married Quoties would see them die off in middle age, and even marriages between wixes could fade or distort with time). So it wouldn’t be noteworthy for Harry to start a new career from scratch, anyway.

In any case, they agree that Harry should get a job lined up before retiring from the Inter-World Relations, but not moving between them immediately. He wanted to be a stay-at-home dad, at least for awhile. While his kids still needed him.

He schedules a meeting with Scrimgeour late one afternoon in January. “Come in.” Scrimgeour shuts his office door decisively behind them.

He looks good. Scrimgeour had been obligated to care for politics over adventure too, in his decade as Minister, but now his face is a bit tanned and there’s muscle definition on his forearms beneath his pushed-up sleeves again. Harry thinks he will understand.

They don’t take tea. Harry sits across from him at his wide desk and says promptly, “I want to be an Auror.”

“Of course you do.”

It’s not what he’d expected. He blinks, then launches into the justification he’d planned. “The IWR is stable and I’d leave it in good hands, but I’m no longer the best person to head it. I enjoyed my time teaching Defense and I’d like to return to that sort of magic. Sir.”

Scrimgeour had his hands pressed before his face; they might be hiding a smile. “Surely you’ve got more relevant experience than teaching Defense?”

“Well, yes. But I could hardly say I enjoyed any of that.” It would be profoundly perverse, and really insensitive, to say he missed the war at all. But – maybe.
“I think you’re qualified,” Scrimgeour says. “And I think you’d thrive in the position. My first concern would be liability.”

“Sir?”

“You – both – are still considered likely targets of violence. We should take seriously that your children could be targets. It may be difficult to de-escalate some situations, if you are apprehending someone who personally intends you harm.”

“Yes, sir. I…..” He’d discussed this with Voldemort enough. He was still ambivalent. “We’ve got as many security measures as are allowed. We try not to scare the girls, but they get tracking spells and portkeys every time we’re out. They know the safety precautions. And Voldemort…..” He waves his hand. “He’ll be alright.”

Scrimgeour’s mouth tugs. “I believe I asked about your safety as well.”

“Oh. – Ah, I’ll be alright, too.”

Scrimgeour is rummaging through his desk, taking out a very thick envelope. “You need to sign off on every page before we discuss any of the particulars.”

“Yes, sir.”

So he comes back a few more times, for more paperwork and more liability forms and more negotiations. The Auror training is three years long so it’s not as though he’ll be in the field anytime soon. They agree that he would start training in the autumn, with the other incoming cohort. Aura would have turned 3 by then, and hopefully Cori would reach average weight for her age by then. And when all the paperwork’s signs and he’s got a job offer in hand, he’s free to announce his resignation.

Sigrid, the Associate Director of the IWR, had known it was coming, and really she was more proactive about such things than Harry was anyway. The public knew Harry had been at home caring for a new baby (they hadn’t found out all the circumstances of her birth, and if it were up to Harry they never would), and that was enough. So his resignation made second-page news but that was it. Some newspapers wonder if he’s doing this because Voldemort wanted a stay-at-home mum for his children (no, and this is fucking offensive) and others take the opportunity to swoon over him as a DILF (fine, but why).

Really, Aura is his harshest critic. “I’m going to be staying here with you for awhile,” he tells her as she toddles into the kitchen when he’s starting dinner. “Do you like this?”

He’s startled when she looks heartbroken. “Gram?”

“We’ll still see them.”

“And Mila, an’ Lucy, an’ Jule, an’….”

“Aura. Baby. You’re still going to school, you’ll still see them. But I’ll be home when you’re home, too. Okay?” His 2 ½ year old had a more vibrant social life than Harry himself did. It should embarrass him.

Aura is considering him. “For Cori?”
“Yeah. She’s still very small.”

“… Okay,” she decrees.

Harry grins. “Okay,” he agrees. “You’ll like it. We’ll have more time to play.”

Aura considers this. “I wanna carrot,” she says instead, looking to his cutting board.

“Yeah, sure.” He gives her a bit of carrot and she toddles off toward the cellar, probably to try to feed it to the snakes.

Harry’s last day at the IWR is mid-February. He leaves it in good hands and promises to come to all their fundraising events.

His first morning as a stay-at-home dad dropping the girls off at their respective schools, Voldemort comes with them. “You really haven’t got to,” Harry says, as he charms Aura’s hair into braided pigtails.

“Nooo,” Aura whines, shoving her hands into her hair. “They’re tight.” A meltdown is imminent and it is not yet 8 am.

“Okay, okay – “ He releases the charm. “What do you want?”

Aura gathers her hair on top of her head and smiles. So she gets an explosive-looking top ponytail and she’s very pleased.

“I want to come,” Voldemort says when they’re putting on her socks and shoes. “I would not want to so neatly partition our responsibilities.”

Harry smiles at him. “Thanks. – Aura, sit still for one minute, please.” He catches her kicking foot in midair, and she giggles.

The twins get dropped off first, Aura second, and then Voldemort apparates directly to the Ministry from the front of the preschool. “Well, Cori,” Harry addresses her in his sling, “what are we doing today?” She drools in response.

When Aura comes home from preschool, they make a list of everything they’ll do in the next few months. They will build a blanket fort and paint a mural on her bedroom wall and plant some bursting begonias in the empty garden plot and teach Moira new tricks. And when the twins get home later that day, they want in on this list too. So by the time Voldemort gets home that afternoon, Harry has committed to baking a cake (“a big one,” Phaedra says, “like – “ And she’s taking the quill from him, drawing an elaborate tiered cake beside the last item) and going buzzberry picking (he thinks it’s a late spring crop anyway) and going hiking.

So when they hear the back door and Voldemort’s gait on the wooden floor, all three girls scramble up. “Can Abba come?” Q asks, and before Harry can answer, she’s running out of the library. “Careful!” Harry yells after her because he can hear that Voldemort is walking with his staff today and maybe couldn’t withstand the sort of hugs where they hurl themselves at him. He scoops Cori into his arms and follows.

Phaedra has snatched up the list as she’d run out, and she’s holding it up to Voldemort now. “You’ve got to do them too,” she says as he takes it.
“Abba is busy at work,” Harry reminds her as he strides up. “I can do more with you while I’m home.”

“I’d be happy to,” Voldemort says as he reads down the list. “Many of these should be undertaken on a weekend, though. Would you together decide which one,” he stresses the word, “we will do this weekend?”

“Why only one?” Phaedra pouts.

“Because I am very old and very tired.” He’s only now unpinning his cloak. “Here. – Take Aura with you,” he admonishes as the twins try to run off without her. They get out, darting up to their bedrooms.

And Harry stands, with Cori in his arms, so in love with Voldemort. “Thank you,” he says. “Really, I’ve got them.”

“I’ve felt very mystified by a great deal of childhood. I missed much of it.”

Harry laughs dryly. “Q was horrified, when I said I’d never made a blanket fort. Not that I really needed to.” After all, if he wanted to hide in a dark enclosed space, the cupboard would do. “But we’re doing a great job. Nobody’s remotely traumatized.”

“Yes, well done.” They’re moving to the kitchen, to put dinner together. “How was your inaugural day at home?”

“Good. A lot. Ask again in a month? I will need to have people over, I’ll lose it without talking to adults occasionally.”

An amused hum. “Please do. I shouldn’t like to lose you to domesticity entirely.”

“You won’t,” Harry promises.

“Good.”

Staying home, Harry gets to watch Cori become a tiny person before his eyes. She begins to focus on their faces for longer, to grasp toys, to show interest in her surroundings. Harry is so in love.

And his older daughters adapt easily too. Q and Phaedra can have friends over more often, or go to other friends’ houses. After awhile they each get a portkey to Ron and Hermione’s directly, so they can go see Leo on their own. And Aura becomes Best Friends with Blaise’s daughter Mila, so Harry has to figure out how to make small talk with him and his wife, a Slytherin named Briony who’d been a few years above them. But he is determined not to model inter-house rivalry, or really any other sort either, for his daughters. Blaise is cool but competent.

Late in May, Phaedra breaks her arm, and Harry hates himself for it. They both do, because it happens when Voldemort has just arrived home in the back garden, where Harry is sitting at the fountain with Cori, and Phaedra is climbing on a tree nearby. She’s not very high – both the twins spend a lot of time outdoors, together or with the animals, so she’s climbed it before – but Harry has just pulled back from kissing Voldemort when he sees the movement in his peripheral vision. He hasn’t got time to grab his wand as Phaedra slips, but Voldemort is shooting out a net beneath her windlessly. But she lands in the net with her arm twisted under her, and she shrieks. They both run.

Phaedra’s face is white and she can’t properly speak. “I can’t – I can’t – “
And Voldemort is lowering the net the final few feet to the ground. “Don’t try to move it,” he says. It’s a bad break, visible beneath the skin. “I’ll cast a cushioning charm around it, and then we are going to A&E.”

There were a lot of PSAs that amateur healings should not be attempted at home, especially on children. This wasn’t only for the obvious reason, but also because healings could backfire if the healer themselves was distressed. And – well, Harry is relieved that Voldemort doesn’t try it himself, anyway.

And because they both spent so much time in war, they should be better at crises, but really Harry can barely keep his feelings off his face. Their Occlumency is shot. They are sick with guilt.

But Voldemort has cast a teal cushioning charm around the break, and before they move her, Harry and Voldemort look over her head to one another. “I’ll ask Molly,” Harry says. “Or Padma, or Neville.” Cori is 5 months old and he’s nearly okay leaving her sometimes, but. “Could you take her on ahead?”

“Yes.”

“Phae, baby.” Harry’s stroking her hair compulsively. Her face is so pale. “Do you want Q to come, too?” The twins are close but he doesn’t know if it would add to the chaos.

“Uh-huh.”

“Okay.” And they stand, and Harry levitates Phaedra into Voldemort’s arms before he sprints back into the house, holding Cori close to his chest.

“Q? Aura?” he’s calling into the house. “Come here. Please.” His voice has an edge that he doesn’t like. Cori is squirming, crying. It’s all a lot.

Q had been in the library; she comes out carrying Moira. “What?”

“Phae broke her arm. If you’re coming to St. Mungo’s, go put on your shoes. And bring a coat. And a book.”

Her mouth works. “No,” she says. “Where is she, I wanna – “

And she’s dropping Moira and running toward the back door, but Harry pulls out his wand and throws a glowing barrier at it, far enough out that she doesn’t crash into it. “Not now,” he says, and his tone is probably more severe than she’s ever heard from him before. “Go upstairs. If you don’t want to come – I think I’m bringing Aura to Gram’s. Where is she?”

Q scrunches her nose. “The dining room?” she guesses.

“Okay. Thank you.” He goes to collect Aura.

She’s coloring at the long dining room table. “Hey Aura, we need to take you to Gram’s for a bit. Do you know where your shoes are?”

“Nuh-uh.” She’s still coloring. “Why?”

“Because Phae broke her arm. You have five minutes to put them on, and be back at the floo. Give me your hand.” He charms a countdown onto it (a massively useful spell for raising distracted children) and lets her go.
Finally to the floo. He unpins Cori’s sling, which unfolds into a soft blanket, and lays it on the floor beside him. “Here, Cor.” He conjures her favorite soft toy, a checked wallaby, so he might look away for like two minutes. He grabs floo powder and sticks his head in the fire.

“Was that the floo?” Molly’s voice asks from the kitchen.

“Molly? Arthur? I can’t come through, I’ve got Cori – “

Arthur’s footsteps are quick on the hardwood floors. “Harry, is everything alright?” He lowers himself onto an ottoman set before the floo.

“Phae broke her arm, we’ve got to take her to hospital. Could I leave the younger two with you? I can’t….”

“Of course. We’ll pick them up, if that’s easier?”

Relief flooded Harry’s insides. “Yes. Please. You’re wonderful. We’ll be ready in a few minutes – “

And then Cori is crying, loud enough to be heard on the other side of the floo. He pulls himself out abruptly.

And it’s Aura, who is back with her shoes on (good) but trying to take Cori’s toy out of her grasp (what the hell). “Aura!” He grabs her wrist much too hard. “Don’t tease her.”

And Aura bursts into tears too because neither of them speak to the girls like this, and neither of them will hurt them, and for a moment Harry has the impression of himself as Vernon, grabbing Harry and shoving him into his cupboard for whatever infraction. Harry lets go immediately. “I’m sorry,” he says, because adults don’t apologize to children often enough. “I didn’t mean to scare you. But you’ve got to be good tonight. We’re taking Q to see Phaedra, and you and Cori are going to stay with Gram and Grampa. Not overnight. Just until we’re back.” He’s summoning bags for both of them. “We’ve got books and crayons, and you’ve got dolls there. They’ll probably make you dinner and you need to eat it. Okay?”

Aura’s eyes are still wide and teary. “Okay.”

“Thank you, baby.” He gathers her into a hug, breathing in the sweet smell of her shampoo. “I need to get food for Cori. Stay here and watch her, alright?” He presses a book into Aura’s hands to distract her for two minutes while he runs to the kitchen.

He’s bringing back formula and tiny jars of pureed fruit when he hears the floo. “Grampa, Phae broke her arms!” Aura is announcing proudly as Arthur steps out of the fire.

“Just the one,” Harry protests as he’s rearranging the nappy bag to fit food in. He has no idea where Aura got the idea that this was a joyous occasion, but at least she’s not crying anymore.

Arthur also seems amused by her cheer. “Fred and George broke nearly every bone in their bodies before they started Hogwarts. They’re no worse for it.”

“Really?”

“Oh yes. Ask them next time you see them. I’m sure they’ve each got a favorite.”

Harry is shrinking the bags and tucking Cori back into her blanket. “You are amazing,” he reiterates to Arthur. “Are you sure it’s not too much? We’ll be – god, how long do these things take? We’ll be back tonight, I guess.”
Obviously he is a disaster. Arthur squeezes his shoulder. “She will be fine,” he says. “She’s very brave.”

He manages to smile. “Yeah, she is.” He lets Arthur sling the bags over his shoulder, then take Cori carefully. “Be good,” he tells Cori, who babbles at him. “And you be good, too,” he says to Aura. “Could you make a card for Phaedra?”

“Uh-huh.”

It’d keep her busy for awhile, at least. “Okay.” He scooped her into a last hug, and set her down before the floo. “We’ll come get you in a little while.” A last ruffle of Cori’s fine hair, and he let Arthur go.

He scrubbs at his face and returns to the kitchen. He throws fruit and chocolate into a bag, then unlocks their potions store and pulls out a calming draught. He is a disaster.

Q enters the kitchen just as Harry has swallowed it and put another in their bag for Voldemort. She’s carrying her backpack, filled with books. She’s been crying. “Q, sweetheart. You are so good,” he sighs, relieved that she is dressed and ready. “We’re taking the floo to St. Mungo’s, you haven’t been there before. So hold tight until we stop, okay?”

“Okay.”

He pats down his pockets, ensuring he’s got his wand and wallet on him. He takes Q’s hand well before the floo, just because they both want it. But just before the floo, very quietly, Q asks, “Will she be alright?”

“Yeah. She will be.” It’s good for him to say aloud himself. It’s only a broken arm, hardly life threatening. If it can’t be healed with magic (although it probably can), it could still hear the regular way. It is his own guilt that it’s making him such a mess. “She’ll be fine. Maybe she’ll get a cast. That’d be cool, right?”

“Uh-huh.” Q follows him into the fire.

He’s very unpleasantly surprised to find Voldemort and Phaedra still in the waiting room when they arrive. “Phae!” Q runs up and Voldemort stops her from throwing her arms around Phaedra. “I want to see.” And Phaedra had her cloak draped over herself – she’s still in shock, pale and shivering – but she moves it now to show Q her arm, still wrapped in Voldemort’s cushioning charm. “Oh. Does that hurt?”

“Yeah.” Her voice is small, and Harry’s heart breaks.

He’s taking a seat beside her, smoothing her hair down. “You’re being so, so brave,” he says. “We won’t have to wait much longer,” though at this he shoots a look over her head at Voldemort, because what the hell, they’ve probably been waiting for a half hour by now. “Q brought books, do you want to look at one?”

He moves so Q can take a seat, opening her backpack to reveal at least half the books they own. Fine. She pulls out one of their favorites, a sort of choose your own adventure fairy tale, and Phaedra’s distracted for a little bit.

Harry sits beside Voldemort, handing him the calming draught discreetly. “Should it take this long?” he asks in low Parseltongue.
“I’ve never been in here. Haven’t you?”

“Ah. No. Always just the hospital wing. Surprisingly.” It’s probably entitled of him – it **definitely** is – but he’s grown used to people responding to Voldemort with a certain alacrity. He wraps his arm around Voldemort’s narrow shoulders, leaning in. Phaedra’s distracted by a story of an ogre and Harry is so grateful that she and Q are best friends.

A bit later, and a glowing bird – a toucan? – comes to fetch them. “Please follow me to Exam Room C,” it says in a hilariously posh tone. It flutters before them as Harry takes the girls’ book and they shepherd them down the corridor. The toucan deposits them into the exam room and again they are waiting. Harry lifts Phaedra so carefully onto the exam bed.

At last, a healer knocks and enters. She blanches slightly when she sees them. “Minister. Mr. Potter. I apologize, there was an Aurors’ raid gone badly – “

“Later,” Voldemort says. “My daughter’s arm is broken.”

“Yes, sir.” She checks her chart. (And Harry’s incredulous but relieved that their daughters aren’t known on sight by the entire world.) “Phaedra. Can you tell me what happened?”

She’s casting diagnostic spells, writing things into her chart. Phaedra recounts what she can, and Voldemort offers what spells are currently stabilizing the break, and finally she dispels it and casts a proper bone-setting spell. “Magic can’t heal you all at once,” she says. “You’re still growing, so it needs to heal more slowly. You’ll need a cast for a month.”

Okay. They could do that. At least it was her left arm she’d broken, since she is right-handed. It’d only make things a little complicated. Phae picks out a cast with a purple and yellow pattern, and she’s already talking about painting it. She gets a lot of pain potions, and more healing potions, and she needs to come back in in a week. They get out as the sky is darkening.

“It’s too late to cook,” Harry says, as Phae sucks on a chocolate bar. “Can we get takeout? What do you want, Phae?”

“Chips?”

“We can get chips anywhere. What else do you want?”

They get pitas from nearby, and Voldemort picks Phaedra up to apparate with her. Harry takes Q’s hand to follow.

When they arrive in the entryway, Moira is fluttering at Phaedra’s height, licking her face as Voldemort sets her down. “Look at this good dog,” Harry croons, patting her head.

Voldemort will eat with the twins as Harry goes to pick up Aura and Cori. And when he steps out of the Burrow’s floo, he’s overwhelmed by the sweet smells of baking. “Harry, dear?” Molly calls from the kitchen. And then Aura is running in. “We made tarts!”

Molly is pulling a tray from the oven; Arthur is wrapping the cooled tarts in parchment. “How is she?” Molly asks as she gathers Harry in a hug.

“She’ll be alright. She’s really excited to paint her cast.”

“Poor thing. Here.” She presses a basket of tarts into Harry’s hands.

“Thanks. Thank you. Cori’s asleep?”
It takes a bit of juggling, but Harry’s got Cori in a sling and Aura’s carrying the basket and Harry’s got her bag over his shoulder and he takes Aura’s hand. Parenthood was logistics first of all. He accepts a final kiss from Molly, and they head out.

Aura runs to see Phaedra. “Ohh -- !” She is fascinated. Harry walks into the kitchen to see her tracing the pattern on the cast, and Phae pointing – “And glitter on this part, and this part….”

“Gram made tarts,” Harry tells Phaedra, and her face lights up.

They eat. Voldemort drops his hand between Harry’s shoulderblades, rubbing out the tension. He bounces Cori gently, coaxing her back to sleep.

Bathtime can wait until tomorrow. Voldemort shears off the sleeve of Phaedra’s pyjamas and buttons the rest of it on carefully. “You will probably wake up in the middle of the night,” he tells her, uncapping both a healing and analgesic potion. “Because you’ll need another potion then. Come wake us up then.”

Phaedra makes a face as she swallows the first potion. “This is gross.”

“Yes?” He takes the bottle, tastes it himself. “I’ll put honey in the next one, it is inert.” (And Harry quietly swoons at Voldemort’s competence, as usual.) Voldemort hands her the other one.

Finally everyone is in bed. This includes Harry and Voldemort, because what a fucking day. They both sleep in pyjama bottoms, anticipating getting up within a few hours. Harry douses the lights with a lazy wave of his hand.

Voldemort draws close, fitting his head at Harry’s shoulder. “I could have saved her,” he murmurs. “There wasn’t enough slack in the shield, it should have cradled her better….”

“Vol.” Kiss to his jawline. “You were amazing.”

“Really, I wasn’t.”

They don’t need to talk about these quiet insecurities, these days. Just speaking them aloud is enough. But Harry’s not ready to tell Voldemort his secret, that moment in which he grabbed Aura earlier. It still feels too shameful. They both stay far from anger, they know it’s dangerous. They fall asleep in each other’s magic.

Later that night: “Papa. Abba. Get up.”

It’s not Phae, but Q who’s crawled onto their bed. Harry scrubs at his face. “What? – Phae’s awake?”

“Oh-huh.”

Voldemort is getting up, taking another healing potion from the bedside table. “Would you bring her in here?” he asks Harry. “I’ll warm the potion.”

“Yeah. C’mere, Q.” He throws off the blankets and takes her hand to return to the twins’ bedroom. Maybe they should’ve asked them to sleep apart tonight, knowing Phaedra would be awake, but the twins rarely wanted time apart. So.
He finds Phaedra huddled in her bed, tears running silently down her face. “Sweetheart,” he says, his heart constricting in his chest.

“It hurts.” Her mouth barely moves.

“I know it does. Can you come back to our bedroom? Abba’s getting the potion.”

A sniffle and a nod, and then Harry ends up scooping her up anyway since he just wants to hold her. They return, and Harry sets them each one at a time in the middle of the bed. “Want to sleep in here tonight?” he offers. It was rare for any of the girls to crawl into bed with them — they were all the independent sort — but honestly Harry liked it when they did. Sleep be damned.

So he’s conjuring more blankets as Voldemort returns. “Phaedra,” he says in a soft sigh, seeing her crumpled face. “Here.” He offers a glass of smoking potion, its sides coated in honey. It doesn’t quite look good, but it’s at least less bad. She drinks it with a grimace.

And then they arrange the bed to put the girls between them. Extra pillows and a cushioning charm to elevate Phaedra’s arm. At last they can douse the lights again.

Harry is stroking Phaedra’s soft hair as he says into the dark, “I broke my arm, when I was 12.”

“Really?” Her eyes glint in the darkness.

“Mnhm. At school, while playing Quidditch. There was a bludger, it’d been cursed…. .”

“How, though?”

By a very well-meaning house elf. “Someone didn’t want me at school that year, they thought it was too dangerous. There was a basilisk in the school, so they wanted me to leave. So they made a bludger break my arm.” (That’s how he talks about their past, avoiding everything awkward about Voldemort. The girls weren’t quite old enough to hear those things yet. They knew there’d been a war, but that was all.)

Q is sitting up in outrage. “But that’s so mean!”

Harry smiles. “He thought he was doing the right thing. It’s better to have a broken arm than to get eaten by a basilisk, isn’t it?”

“Mmm.” She falls back, thinking. “Couldn’t you just tell it to not eat you?”

“You know, I did try. But that wasn’t even the worst part. The worst part was that there was a professor that year who tried to heal me, but he did it wrong, and he vanished all the bones in my arm. It was gross. Like having a rubber glove instead.”

“Ew,” Phaedra says, wrinkling her nose as Q laughs. “What did it feel like?”

“Like… getting splinters on the inside? It was only for one night, though.”

“Ew,” Phae re-iterates, and then she’s giggling too.

“He’s working in Quotie films now,” Voldemort offers, looking over the girls’ heads to Harry. “Have you seen?”

“Oh, no, I hadn’t. Suits him,” He slumps back into his pillows. “Good for him. As long as he’s not doing magic anymore. Which is why,” he says to the twins, “only healers can do healing spells. Everyone else will muck it up. Got it?”
“Uh-huh.” “Yeah.”

“Good.”

When the girls have fallen asleep, Harry is up again, because Cori usually needs a bottle in the middle of the night. “I’ve got her,” he says lowly to Voldemort. “Just sleep.”

“Thank you.”

Sometimes Harry misses sleep. Being at home and being able to catch up with a nap at weird hours has been among the best parts of his time off work. He cherishes how fast their daughters grow – that Cori has begun babbling and trying to sit up, and everything about the world feels new as he watches her discover it. And Aura’s at a hilarious and opinionated age, and the twins are full-fledged people independent of what they need from their parents. It’s wonderful. He’s happy. So he doesn’t mind not sleeping much.

Partway through feeding Cori, Harry hears a noise outside the door. “Aura?” She pokes her head into the nursery. “Why’re you awake?”

“Why’re you?”

He grins, holding out Cori. “She’s still a bit small, yeah? She’ll be able to eat real food, too.” He moves so Aura can crawl onto the sofa beside them. “Hey, what do you want to do for your birthday next month?”

“Mmm.” She presses both hands to her face, thinking. “Swimming?”

“Yeah, sure. Let’s go swimming. And you can bring a few friends.”

“How many?”

“Three,” he says. “Since you’re turning 3.” He wonders if he can persuade Ron and Hermione to join them.

“And ice cream?”

“Sure.” He wipes Cori’s mouth. “Time for bed now?”

A slight pout from Aura. “With you?” she suggests.

“We’ve already got Phaedra and Q in bed.”

“Uh-huh,” she says, as though he’s just made her point.

“Alright.” He’s putting Cori back in her cot. “If you promise to sleep. All night.”

“Promise.”

Harry brings her back to their bedroom, where Voldemort and the twins are asleep. He’ll sleep beside Phaedra, but he pulls Aura against his chest on the other side. Her breathing goes slow and even immediately. Harry lies awake for awhile longer, listening to their daughters breathe, and he is so happy.

Phaedra mends slowly. She sleeps in their bed the rest of the week. Harry’s time at home is
invaluable. He plans Aura’s birthday party and watches Cori grow big.

More than once, he wonders if he should just stay home for a few years. But he was bored and unhappy with his job in the IWR, he knows he’d get bored and lonely staying home. And Voldemort is opposed, when Harry asks him – he says it would look too typically domesticated, that people want Harry to be a hero and a public figure even now.

The day after his 36th birthday, he writes to Scrimgeour, to confirm a start date of September 1 in the Aurors’ training. The twins will be in school full-time again, and Molly will take Cori and Aura, and Harry swears she’s worth her weight in gold. Cori’s big enough that Harry rarely worries about her anymore, she’s grown into a sweet bubbly baby and she always does well with Molly and Arthur. So.

The night before, when the girls have gone to bed, Harry gathers Voldemort in his arms on the library sofa. “Good?”

“I saw Rufus yesterday,” Voldemort says. “He said I cannot be privy to all the protective measures placed on the Aurors.”

“I’m really not worried.” A smile. “Phae is. Aura’s excited.” He’d told them he’d be an Auror, like Ginny and Tonks and Kingsley. Aura made him promise to come home in uniform sometimes, and he said he would.

He goes in to the Ministry mid-morning. The first thing he knew from Ginny was that the Aurors had odd hours, raids at midnight and so on. It would help, while their kids are still young, that both he and Voldemort can be a bit more flexible with work schedules. It is a privilege.

So he’s met in the DMLE office by Kingsley, who brings him through a series of locked doors to the entrance of their training facility. He gets DMLE-branded sweats and directions to the locker room.

Where he walks in to find Draco Malfoy, pulling on a vest. “Oh what the hell,” Harry breathes.

Malfoy looks over his shoulder, unimpressed. “Close your mouth, Potter. You’ll let in flies.”
Harry doesn’t have time to interrogate Malfoy on their first day of Auror training, as he so desperately wants to. They have to do a physical first off, including a stress test that involves a treadmill run, and *jesus* Harry hasn’t run extended distances in so long. And then Kingsley comes to collect them to walk them through the rest of the training facility.

There’s four of them in this new cohort: Harry and Malfoy; Orla Quirk, who had been a few years beneath them in Hogwarts; and a Castelobruxo graduate named Bianca Marciano, who’d charmed her name badge to just *Bia* as soon as it’d been pinned to her chest. Kingsley says it is imperative that they learn to trust one another with their lives; he’s not looking at Harry or Malfoy in particular but his meaning is clear.

The training facility winds away from the Ministry’s main building. They’re not allowed to see all of it yet. Kingsley gestures to the floor they’re currently on. “This is the first year, largely. Reflexes, hand-to-hand combat, defensive spellwork. We will also send you into supervised fieldwork within the month.”

Three years of training. He had watched Ginny toughen up in that time, that she’d gone muscular but also – quick. Alert and hyper-capable of managing surroundings. This mostly had been in service to ducking Fred and George’s newest mischief then, but he knows Ginny has survived some intense raids and confrontations.

Harry is excited. Even with Malfoy standing beside him. He has missed magic, excitement. He’s missed *war*, and that’s probably macabre but he was never suited for an office job.

Near the end of the day, they’re brought into a small training room where four dummies are lined up. They each step in front of one. “You’ll train on these for the first six months, so you won’t have the opportunity to kill each other,” Kingsley says. “They are smart, and they will learn from you and adapt. They can shapeshift, cast spells, engage – “

Then the dummies spring to life, charging in at each of them.

Harry jolts. With a twist of his wrist he’s got his wand, but he can’t get it up fast enough – he shoots the Protego too low, and the dummy raises its wand to shoot over the top. A second Protego overlapping the first, and Harry is fortunate that it happens to knock the wand from the dummy’s hand. It freezes.

The others have dealt with their own dummies. Orla is laughing, Malfoy is glowering. Kingsley might be hiding a smile as he steps in. “Good,” he says. “Marciano, what did you do and why?”

Bia cast an Incarcerous around the dummy’s ankles, winding up to its knees. Malfoy had disoriented it with blindness and vertigo hexes. Orla had ended up grabbing the dummy by the throat as she cast a stunning spell into its chest. And Harry’s two awkward shield charms lay atop each other, making clear he hadn’t gotten it at once. “I didn’t have my wand in position, sir,” he mutters.

“Yes,” Kingsley says, thoughtful rather than disappointed. “And it can be a tough decision, if casting properly a split second later is better than casting it imperfectly in the moment you have. Sometimes you’ll get it wrong.” He steps away.

Then they’re released for the day. Kingsley says he’ll see them tomorrow morning, and please take the provided muscle relaxants tonight, as it will help. The four of them walk back to their locker.
rooms together.

It’s very poor form to strike up a conversation as they’re collecting things to shower, but Harry can no longer help himself. “What are you doing here?”

Malfoy’s gaze is politely dismissive. “Just as you are, I assume.”

“But you’ve been living in France for twenty years.” He’s shaking out a towel furiously. “And now you’re back and you happen to be in my Aurors’ cohort? This is… incredible.”

“Whatever you’re accusing me of is inane.”

“Why are you back?” Harry demands.

When Malfoy starts walking away, Harry strides after him; Malfoy turns and catches Harry’s shoulders neatly. “You go shower over there.” He points to the other side of the room. “And don’t talk to me until tomorrow.”

“We’re supposed to work together.”

“We will be,” Malfoy says. “But not tonight.”

Harry swallows his feelings. Being around Malfoy made him feel young again, and not in a good way. He takes the farthest shower and they don’t speak again.

Harry apparates home into a massive rainstorm. Ducking inside, he pauses for the flurry of energy that accompanies either of them arriving home. “Papa!” comes Aura’s voice a minute later, and then the clatter of paws, and then Aura runs into the entryway with Moira behind her.

“Hey, baby.” He scoops her up, rubbing his beard on her face until she shrieks. “What’d you do at school today?”

“We saw a pixie!”

Harry carries her back into the kitchen, Moira fluttering at his elbow. He finds Voldemort putting on dinner, and Cori on a blanket nearby, mouthing a soft toy. “Aura – put your legs down, I’m putting you down,” Harry says as she pulls her feet up, not wanting to let go. “Or else – you go in the soup pot!” He holds her toward the stove, she shrieks and he sets her down. She takes Moira and runs off.

Harry falls easily against Voldemort’s side, accepting a knife to cut up cauliflower. “How was it?” Voldemort asks.

“Mm. Good. Kingsley will do most of the training, at least at first. Tonks says I’m unspeakably lucky it’s not Moody.”

“You are.”

“Also. Ah. Malfoy was there?” And then the absurdity of it fully hits him now, and he’s laughing. “Malfoy and I are going to be Aurors together. How the fuck – oops, sorry, Cor,” he says, remembering she’s on the floor behind them. “He wouldn’t even tell me why he’s back in Britain at all, much less why he’s in my Aurors’ cohort.” When Voldemort does not react, Harry narrows his eyes. “Don’t tell me you knew.”

“I didn’t know he intended to be an Auror.”
“Vol. Why is he here?”

“You will hate the answer.”

“Oh my god tell me.”

“His wife died last year. I assume he’s moved back for the social support. Or perhaps he just couldn’t bear to stay in their home any longer.”

Harry sets down his knife. “Fuck,” he says. And this time he doesn’t apologize to Cori.

Voldemort rubs circles between Harry’s shoulderblades. “I know little else,” he says. “The Horcrux wrote that they would be moving back. They’re in Wales now.”

The Horcrux. Malfoy had been involved with the locket in Hogwarts, but decades later…. “But he was married.”

A small shrug. “It’s accepted among purebloods to have a spouse and a lover. There were properties to be consolidated. Those bastard children have contributed to our overall genetic health, anyway.”

Harry had so many questions and he wanted answers to none of them. “This is awful,” he mutters. “I mean – thanks. But it’s awful.”

“Yes.”

Harry sighs and starts a pan of aloo gobi.

The next morning, he’s able to let himself into the locker room, his magic now keyed into the Aurors’ ward. And Malfoy is already in there, taking a pressed uniform from his locker.

“I’m sorry,” Harry says promptly, when Malfoy looks up. “I’m really sorry, I didn’t know about your wife.”

“Clearly.” He turns away to pull off his shirt, but Harry doesn’t step away. “Yes?” Malfoy says, dropping the hem of his shirt again.

“Is – he still with you?”

“Yes, and we’d appreciate if you showed some discretion for once in your life.”

“You should come over,” Harry says on impulse. “To, y’know, catch up. Voldemort would want to know.”

“You want to know,” Malfoy corrects. “And Potter, we’ve got at least the next three years together. Relax.”

It’s a shitty thing to say, but Harry sees his point. “Fine,” he mutters. “But you should.”

“I’m quite sure they will be in touch again.”

“I’ll make Voldemort ask, then,” Harry says, exasperated. Malfoy makes a resigned gesture, and they both move to get dressed.
Today’s training starts with a run and then there’s weight training. Harry knew the Auror who came in to train them, a lean wizard named Willoughby, from the beginning of his alliance with Voldemort. And he would’ve paid Willoughby far more attention then if he’d seen those sculped shoulders before. Anyway.

They put on music as they work through their circuit. The Hogwarts grads tell Bia about their school (“Did you, ah, learn though?” she asks, and Harry can only agree with the sentiment), and she tells them of the magizoology classes held deep in the rainforest. “But my partner would go on to apprentice with a potions master here, and now – well, we’ve got a life here,” she says with a shrug and a smile. “Malfoy, didn’t you just move back?”

“We were establishing a vineyard in Lorraine.” Malfoy sits on the bench press. “It’s self-sustaining now.”

“Does your kid like Britain?” When Harry chokes quietly at Bea’s question, she shoots him a confused look. “What?”

“Potter’s always been obsessed with me,” Malfoy says. “Ignore him.”

He can hardly explain the full surprise and horror of Malfoy having a kid. He takes his place on the lats machine. “Piss off.”

“He likes it,” Malfoy says, a bit pointedly, to Bia. “He just began the school year, and he’s bad at making friends but he’s very studious. He’s raising butterflies right now.”

This is where the conversation meanders, and Harry doesn’t know a single thing about butterflies so he is quiet. He’s certain he’ll learn more by listening anyway.

But then Willoughby returns to tell Harry his form is abysmal and Malfoy’s isn’t much better, and then they are distracted for awhile.

It’s Friday night, and Voldemort is able to leave work early so he can drop Q off at Quidditch practice and Phaedra at a friend’s house. Harry finds him with Aura and Cori in his study, where Aura is holding a book before her and chattering as though reading it. Harry melts. “Hi, Aura. Hi, Cori.” He presses a kiss to Voldemort’s temple in greeting, and Voldemort pulls him onto the sofa beside them.

“Did you fight?” Aura asks with interest. He’s come home still in Auror’s sweats, which probably look wildly impressive to a 3 year old.

“Not today. We talked about how to stop fights.” De-escalation would be a useful measure in their own safety, Auror Brightbone said when she’d come to introduce it to them that afternoon. “Because that’s important too. Don’t fight unless you have to.”

Aura’s dark gaze makes clear this means nothing to her, but he wants all his children to hear this anyway. It would give them a foundation for – well, everything, the war and armistice and Unification – when they’re old enough to learn about it properly.

The Aurors’ training goes on in this way. In the mornigns they have physical training, whether weight training or reflexes or dueling. In the afternoons there are academic classes, lectures on dark arts and contraband and curses. Harry finds that Bia is great at magical creatures and Orla is great at
potions and Malfoy is annoyingly *impeccable* at dueling. He finds out as they talk that Bia and her partner live in a mixed-population co-op, and Orla is physically repulsed by romance and lives with a lot of dogs, and Malfoy sold the manor to the Ministry as a historical building and he’s living with his husband (*husband!*?) and son in a penthouse in Cardiff. Harry tells them about renovating the Slytherin estate. He tells them about the Department of Inter-World Relations and all the Unification meetings he was part of. He tells them about their kids and they find out Malfoy’s son is in the same class as the twins.

The first raid comes two weeks later. “Better not to wait too long. The anticipation builds too much,” Kingsley says. It’s low stakes, an empty manor where the curses have already been stripped from the exterior. But before they convene to leave for the site, Kingsley brings Harry into his office. “How are you and Malfoy doing?”

Kingsley didn’t ask it to shame him, but it’s humiliating nonetheless. “Fine,” Harry says. “We’re not 17 anymore.”

Kingsley raises his eyebrows at the defensiveness. “You’re not,” he agrees. “But you will need to trust one another with your lives at some point. Not tonight,” he adds with a small smile. “But sooner than you might think.”

“Yes, sir.” Kingsley motions him out, and Harry can never bloody help himself where Malfoy is concerned. “Have you told him the same?”

“Don’t worry what I’ve told him.”

He knows it has crossed a line; and Kingsley is one of the kindest and most patient people in his entire life, he doesn’t deserve this. “Sorry,” Harry mutters. “We’ll work it out.”

“Please do.”

But in the locker room, when they’re both dressing in mission gear (it’s nearer to Quotidian clothing than anything else, no billowing robes to get caught on things), Harry can’t think of what to say to Malfoy. And Malfoy’s not looking at him anyway, so. So.

They take a portkey – apparition is too loud to be useful – into a small wixen village called Tussing. There had been a couple fencing stolen goods, and other Aurors had already ensured they’d be elsewhere that night, so there was no danger in this raid really. They approach the unassuming house on the corner.

“You’re going in alone,” Kingsley says. “Summon us if you need us.” He’s casting minding charms at the edges of the property, and his partner Anselm is setting up distraction spells so the neighbors don’t bother. The trainees climb the front steps.

It’s been drilled into them, don’t touch things you don’t need to. They all wear gloves, to avoid tactile curses and contact poisons in part, but also just to avoid contaminating a scene with fingerprints. So Orla spells the door open and lets them in.

The couple had fenced mostly luxury goods, mage and Quotidian alike. The Aurors didn’t know where or how they would conceal them, so they’d been drilling on Revelio and similar charms the past week. They moved upstairs in formation.

They found it all embedded in clever places: gold flattened as leaf on picture frames; pearls dotting silks; jewelry camouflaged on busts. Malfoy carried the evidence bags, dropping in any remotely
suspicious items. Bia and Orla were casting diagnostic spells, and Harry was unraveling a tracking curse currently following them.

And then they reach the master bedroom. “The mattress,” Bia says, before she even casts a diagnostic that makes it glow. “Oh, and there’s a safe….” She gestures.

Harry and Malfoy approach the safe and Bia and Orla rip open the mattress. Harry is revealing the combination spell – thank *fuck* it’s a combination lock and not biometrics, but that’s so atypical that he wonders if it’s a trap.

“Move,” Malfoy mutters, pushing past Harry. *Rude.* But he draws a long-bladed knife and wedges it into the doorjamb. There’s a hiss and a click, and the safe opens.

“Where did you get that?” Harry asks, staring. It *wasn’t* Auror’s tools. It was a lot like Sirius’s knife, and Harry had never thought about where it had come from. It seemed… dark.

“A gift,” Malfoy says, and then he’s entering the safe. Harry follows.

It’s funny, there’s a lot of rubbish in here – maybe because it’d be too obvious a hiding place for stolen goods. But Harry’s casting the first diagnostic for potential origins. Malfoy is detonating a curse hanging from the ceiling.

“They transfigured gold into tin,” comes Orla’s voice from the bedroom.

*Transfigured?* Malfoy’s voice is full of scorn. “Glamours, surely.”

“No,” she says sharply. “Transfigured. Look.” She storms into the safe, holding a tin necklace before her. “You don’t know Transfiguration better than me.”

“If they’re alchemists,” Bia says as she follows Orla in, “then some of this gold could also be tin.”

Malfoy throws up a hand. “If they’re alchemists, why would they need to steal gold?”

“I don’t know anything about them,” Harry murmurs as he transfigures a pile of silks transparent. There’s a bit of metal in the middle of it, he starts digging for it. “Are alchemists… common?”

“No,” Malfoy says just as Orla says, “Yes.” Glare. “It’s rarely permanent transfiguration. Pawn shops have a holding period.”


Harry wonders if he’d heard this from Tom. Borgin and Burke’s must have taught him healthy mistrust, among other things.

He reaches the bit of metal, he can feel it beneath the silks. But he’d taken off his gloves to better feel for it, and when his fingers make contact, there’s a curse of deep dark magic shooting up his arm.

“Fuck – “ He jerks back, but he knocks a rack of dress robes into the wall, and then another curse is exploding, and then the safe door slams behind them.

They all stare at it. Bia, the nearest to it, presses a hand to the door. “Warm,” she says. The sign of an active, high-powered curse.

Malfoy approaches the safe door with his knife again. “Don’t,” Harry says. “I melted a knife like that.”
Malfoy side-eyes him. “A knife like this?”

“In the Department of Mysteries. In fifth year. I’ll tell you later,” he mutters to the women, who are also looking at them in the same way. Lucius Malfoy had been there, had only just escaped, and Harry didn’t want to have this conversation in an enclosed space with Malfoy.

He did, apparently. “No, tell them, Harry.” He’s running his hand around the safe door, hooking a finger beneath a ward and tugging at it. It glows faintly against the steel. “Ah.”

“What?” Bia steps in, peering at the runes as well. “Oh,” she says easily. “The door doesn’t open until we’ve all suffocated.”

And suddenly all the walls feel far too close to Harry, the space too cluttered and warm. Everyone else takes this threat with such nonchalance, it’s embarrassing that he can’t.

And Malfoy’s hands are working quickly, pulling at the razor wire wards with his fingertips. He’d never fallen out of practice with runes, then, from their eighth year and what he had taught Harry. It was annoyingly impressive.

Until he tugs on the wrong rune and the walls actually shudder and move inward.

“Malfoy!” Harry snaps.

“Will someone cast a bubblehead charm on him?” Malfoy mutters, looking over his shoulder with disdain. “Before he hyperventilates.” And Bia actually does so, and it’s embarrassing but Harry also isn’t about to take it off. Malfoy nods at her.

Did Malfoy know how he felt in enclosed spaces? If Tom had told him, Harry would feel so irritated, if not properly betrayed.

So he steps in to help, even if his runes had only been used for domestic security since he’d learned them twenty years ago. They are written in swirling script, and Malfoy doesn’t look up from studying them as Harry moves in at his elbow. “Sirius gave me a knife like that,” Harry says. “Dunno where he got it.”

“They’re quite dark. The sort of thing his parents may have lying around.” He wedges his wand into a ward, pops it. “A bit shameful, though. The tools of a common thief.”

“So what’re you doing with one?”

Malfoy twists his wrist so the knife slid into his grasp again. “I’ve hardly got a family name to uphold, these days.” He presses the blade into a stubborn bit of the wards, tugs at it. “Hold this.”

Harry does, keeping the blade perpendicular to the wall. “Marciano,” Malfoy says, “hang a shield charm in front of us. In case tampering turns out to be explosive. Quirk… good,” he says when he sees that she’s already holding onto another ward, on the wall opposite. “Brace yourselves.”

He steps in beside Harry again, swirling his wand over a cluster of runes so they cringe away, seemingly aware they’re about to be vanished. Then he casts a clever enervation spell up the ward, making it spark and then go dull. Smoke begins filling the safe, and Harry has to suck in deep breaths from the bubblehead charm. The knife is pulsing hot in his hand. Another enervation spell.

Another. But each time Malfoy tries pulling open the door’s security, it rebounds on him. He is frustrated.

And Harry had let him work, because Malfoy is clearly just better at runes, it’s not worth denying.
But he is watching them sputter and writhe along the wall when he sees a familiar shape, one in all
the security on the Slytherin estate. “Malfoy – look.”

“What do not move,” Malfoy snaps when Harry starts to step in.

“Those wards aren’t going anywhere,” Harry says. The door was sealed, and would be sealed until
there were no longer any living creatures inside. “Let’s apparate out.”

Malfoy lifts his pale gaze, and Harry gestures. The common rune for apparition pulses on the wall
before them. It’s very near to going out, lifting its restriction. “Fine;” he says, even as he’s hiding
some relief. “Turn the knife 45 degrees – no, the other way.” And then he’s stepping past Harry,
prodding at the dying rune. “Marciano? Quirk?”

“We’ve got it,” Orla says. She has tied a knot in another ward across the room, and then she’s
following behind Bia’s shield charm to approach the center of the safe. Then Malfoy rips open the
anti-apparition ward, and the magic of the safe snaps like a popped balloon, and then they’re all
apparating out before the magic can rebound.

Harry had pictured the front steps, and that’s where he lands, his wand and Malfoy’s knife graps in
either hand. Beside him, Orla lands neatly as though she’d just stepped out of the front door. Bia and
Malfoy did not follow.

Kingsley and Anselm had come at the noise of apparition. “What happened?” Kingsley asks, taking
in the sight of them before Harry could take off the bubblehead charm. Blushing, he finites it.

“The vault closed behind us,” Orla says, and she’s leading Kingsley back inside, back upstairs.

Malfoy and Bia are both still in the master bedroom, and they give Harry and Orla hilariously

“Didn’t know we were doing it your way,” Orla mutters. Harry thinks this would’ve been better,
Kingsley never knowing they’d mucked up. Nobody mentions that it was Harry’s fault to begin
with, though – Malfoy says in an abbreviated way, “The safety spells on the safe door
malfunctioned,” and then he’s stepping forward in a way that doesn’t allow follow-up questions, and
then Kingsley and Anselm are moving to peer into the safe.

It takes them awhile to box up all the presumably stolen goods – and half of it is transfigured, which
is just obnoxious – and then they clear out, shutting all the wards behind themselves. They drop off
everything to the Ministry’s evidence lockers, and then Kingsley looks around at the four of them.
“We’ll discuss it in the morning,” he says. “Go home, for now.”

Harry gets home after Voldemort has already put their kids to bed. This isn’t too bad, as Harry had
had the day with them, but still he checks in on each of them in turn. “Papa?” Phaedra says into the
dark as he peers into the twins’ room. “Did you get hurt?”

It had been a concern of hers all day. Phae was their worrier, and sometimes it was exasperating but
now it was sweet. “No, I didn’t.” He’s quiet, entering their bedroom without turning on the lights
since Q is still asleep. “Nobody got hurt tonight.”

“No even the bad ones?”

At this, he hesitates. The girls, by now, are overdue to hear a bit more of Harry and Voldemort’s
past. It would help them make sense of why Harry never lets them talk about the world in terms of
heroes and villains, good people and evil ones. It’s made finding kid’s films hard, because he doesn’t want them to internalize this worldview. But it’s so omnipresent….. “The people who have done bad things,” he says awkwardly, “and no, they’d already been detained. We only had to search their house. It was very safe.”

“Oh.” Phaedra lies back down, and Harry sits at the edge of her bed.

“Were you good for Abba tonight?”

She scrunches up her face. “I was.”

“Oh no.” He’s got to laugh. “And who wasn’t?”

“Aura gave all her potatoes to Moira.” Their dog, perpetually hungry.

“Aura likes potatoes.”

Phaedra shrugs. “So does Moira.”

Harry loves his kids so damn much. They are hilarious. “That doesn’t sound so bad,” he says. “Are you ready to go back to sleep now?” He’s smoothing out her duvet.

“Mmmyeah.” She throws up her hands to hug his neck. “I love you,” she says easily, pressing a wet kiss into his cheek.

In moments like these…. Well, he knows he’s succeeded in giving his kids a better childhood than he had. “I love you too, baby.”

“And Abba, and Q, and Aura, and Cori when she’s quiet, and Moira, and Sarai, and Effie, and Hedwig, and Fawkes…..”

The animals of their household outnumbers the humans at least two to one. Harry is smiling now. “They love you too. Even if he – if Abba – can’t always say so.”

Phae thinks nothing of this, as complicated as it actually is. “I know.” She’s tugging on the whiskers of a stuffed seal she slept with. “When I go to Hogwarts, can I bring Fawkes?”

“Abba needs Fawkes. He delivers all his notes.” Voldemort still brought Fawkes into the Ministry quite often, had a perch for him in the Minister’s office and everything. They were a striking pair, especially when photos of Voldemort with Fawkes smouldering on the end of his staff ended up in the papers. Voldemort had said he never wanted another familiar, certainly not one that used to belong to Dumbledore, but he currently spends more time with Fawkes than with any of the snakes. So.

“Abba can get an owl,” Phaedra says, undeterred.

Harry pokes his fingers into her ribs, making her giggle. “You can get an owl,” he says. “Or a cat, or a toad. You’ve still got a couple years to decide, though, right?”

“Leo said Portia got a parrot.”

Ron and Hermione’s second child Portia, who’d just started Hogwarts a few weeks ago. “I think he’s telling you stories.”

“Nuh-uh. He said so.”
“Okay. But you still only get one of the regular pets. Otherwise when Professor McGonagall found out, she’d make you send the animal back and then you wouldn’t have one at all.”

“I’m good at keeping secrets,” Phaedra says stubbornly.

Harry arches his brows. “Oh yeah?”

“Not from you,” she adds. “Or Abba.”

“Uh-huh,” he says as though he’s unconvinced. And Phae giggles again, and Harry presses a kiss into her dark sweet-smelling hair. “I think it’s time for bed for me, too,” he says in a sigh. He straightens Phaedra’s sheets again, pets her seal on its head, and leaves quietly.

Voldemort’s office door is open, candlelight still burning inside. It’s late, it is already a late night for them both. Harry lets himself in.

Voldemort sits at his desk, reading glasses levitated upon his face where his nose should be. Harry finds it adorable. But he’s not reading at all – he’s staring up at the paneled wood ceiling, until Harry knocks on the doorjamb. “Harry. I will put this away soon.”

“Is it important?” He takes a seat.

“Not at the moment. How was your night?”

“Good. Fine. Did anyone at Borgin and Burke’s ever try to Confundus you?”

Voldemort’s incredulous look is exquisite – whatever he expected, it wasn’t that. “The clientele then was as charming and upstanding as you might expect. So they tried, certainly. I thought your raid was in a private residence?”

“Yeah, it was. Just – something Malfoy said.”

Voldemort presses a fist to his mouth, deeply amused now. “When you were in school, Lucius would always regret that Draco spoke of you so often, and yet so little of it was of any value to me.”

“Did he? All those times I beat him at Quidditch, you could have done something with that, I bet.” Harry kicks out his legs, grinning. “You’ve heard a lot about him recently,” he concedes. “He’s still really good at runes too, it’s annoying.”

He recounts the night. This time, after the girls are asleep, are sometimes the only bit of the day they’ve got alone together, and it’s quiet and easy, if not extraordinary. They need time away, away away, and alone. Maybe after the new year. But for now Voldemort puts all his paperwork away and rises stiffly to his feet. Reaching across his desk he grabs the front of Harry’s Auror uniform. “Red suits you,” he murmurs, and then he’s pulling Harry in to kiss him deeply.
It had been a surprisingly firm request of Voldemort’s, from the time the twins had been young. They would raise their children with knowledge of the traditional magicks, with holidays and altars and crystals scattered throughout their home. It was slightly questionable from a public perspective – paganism had always been associated with oldmage tradition and blood supremacy – but Voldemort said it would be a loss of history and culture if these things weren’t preserved.

Largely, Harry hung back to watch. He accompanied Voldemort and the girls out to collect flowers for the altars and wood for the fires. He cleared off tables and sideboards to arrange fruits and stones. But he felt that his mind was too mundane for some of it – it had the same softness as divination and other sorts of mysticism, and he didn’t know how to speak that language. Even as long as he’d lived in a world of magic, he rarely felt like a native.

But for his entire adult life, he’d taken up the Samhain ritual of visiting Godric’s Hollow on Halloween.

He didn’t know what he expected, the first time he’d gone at age 19. He’d never even seen Godric’s Hollow before then, apart from memories and photos. So he’d walked around the village more than the cemetery, and it would be another couple of years before he’d approached the house. It wasn’t directly accessible – there was a fence around it, with a placard – but Harry didn’t need to go any farther anyway. He’d woven the flowers he brought into the fence and went to tend to their graves.

There would always be other people paying their respects – it was Halloween as well as Samhain, the day everything converged, of course people would come. Most were gracious enough to avert their gazes from Harry, to extend some semblance of privacy.

Voldemort never came with him.

It would be okay if he did. Their relationship was at a place where… it was fine. Harry could embrace this life and everything that had brought him here. But Voldemort had said, first and foremost, that it would be a spectacle if they’d go together. There would be a public outcry. Every Halloween already brought articles in memoriam, reflections, analyses. It was the only time Voldemort was still particularly viewed as a terrorist or villain. Everything else he’d done to redeem himself, and everything Harry had done to keep him in the public’s good graces, but James and Lily’s deaths would always reignite anger at him.

The rest of the reason why he wouldn’t go was all – guilt or something like it. He would tell Harry it is perverse, that he has no right to ever step foot in Godric’s Hollow again. And that is true, and also Harry doesn’t care. But they’d both left the matter as it stood, and Voldemort would spend the day building a bonfire with their kids as Harry took a couple hours to himself.
When the twins are 7, they begin asking to join him.

It’s a few days before, and Harry’s left both the invisibility cloak and the blanket from that night on their altar. The twins are fascinated – they’ve never seen the cloak before, and they keep tugging it off the altar to play with until Harry casts a barrier. (“Just a few days,” he begs them. “A few days, then you can play with it, if you’re very careful.”) They bring out the photos that Hagrid gave him, and Harry will pour all of their pensieve’s memories out to examine even if they don’t go in properly yet. And then Harry finds Sirius’s mirror, the shards of it, and he sets those on the altar too.

“There must be others,” Voldemort says as Harry casts protective spells around the jagged edges of the mirror. “Other people to memorialize. You should.”

“We left our memorials at Hogwarts,” Harry says. “It’s enough.”

“Yes?” And Harry nods and takes his hand and draws him from the altar.

The next night, Q squares her shoulders at dinner. “We wanna come tomorrow. To Godric’s Hollow.” She pronounces it precisely, as though she’d been practicing.

Harry is feeding Cori strained beets; Voldemort is dicing Aura’s squash with small and perfect spells that delight her. They both stop. “Q…” Voldemort sets his wand before him. “Let Harry go alone.”

But Phaedra is also about to protest, and Harry is charmed that the twins have coordinated this. “They’re our family too. We should get to see them too.”

“Yes, you should,” Harry agrees, even before they offered Round 2 of their argument. “Could we all go?” He looks across the table to Voldemort.

“If you’d like.”

It’s easy, agreeable. They’d have much more to say to each other when they’re alone. But for now, Q bounces in her seat, upsetting her water glass if not for its spillproof charm. “We can go see… what would we call them?”

Harry’s heart hurts at this question. “They would have been your grandparents,” he says. “Maybe they would’ve liked Gram and Grampa, maybe they would’ve wanted something else. It’s up to you.”

“Mm.” Q mashes her squash flat on her plate. “We dunno what they’d like, though.”

Harry offers the only certain thing he’s able to say in this entire conversation. “They would’ve loved you.”

Late that evening, when the younger two are asleep and the twins are reading in their bedroom (“We’re staying up late tomorrow,” Harry says in a reasonable way, “so you need to sleep enough tonight or you won’t be able to.”), Harry and Voldemort draw together in the kitchen. “Thank you,” Harry says, before Voldemort can say anything. “You still haven’t got to. But I want you there, if you can.”

Voldemort’s mouth is stained red with wine; he conjures Harry a second glass. “Of course I’ll go,” he says. “Have you thought of what you’d like to tell them?”
“A bit. We can’t – we’re running on borrowed time,” he says with a wry smile. “They’ll overhear something, someday. But I’ll tell them part of it tomorrow.” He swallows a mouthful of spicy wine. “They’ll ask about your parents, too. Probably soon.”

“It seems rather inevitable.”

“Be careful,” Harry says. When Voldemort gives him a curious look, not expecting this, he shrugs. “Don’t hurt them. I’d rather – if it’s between having a stable home and letting out the truth, I’d choose household peace, y’know? But just – I don’t want you to be hurt either.”

“How the hell are you so good,” Voldemort murmurs, pulling him close for a kiss.

The morning of Samhain – a Sunday this year, so they have the entire sprawling day together – they make breakfast, and bundle the girls in outdoors clothes, and then go for a hike in a preserve, located over some of the oldest ley lines in Scotland. Voldemort tasks the girls with finding wood for the bonfire, and they shove leaves and stones and berries into their pockets to add to the décor. “Here, Cori,” Phaedra says, holding out a stick of bright orange berries to Cori, who’s harnessed to Harry’s chest as usual.

Voldemort makes a noise. “That is peploss. Do you see the shape of the leaves?” he indicates. “That means they are poisonous. And Cori still mouths everything she’s able to. We appreciate the gesture,” he adds when Phaedra’s hand droops. “What else have you collected?”

“Mmm…” She peers into the bag Voldemort had conjured for her. “This one?” She offers another stick, of deep orange and purple leaves arranged up the length in a spiral.

“Persephone’s tinsel. Perfect.” So Phaedra hands it to Cori, who takes hold of it and promptly shoves the leaves in her mouth.

Voldemort’s gaze lingers on the branch. “Do you know who Persephone is, Phaedra?”

“No.”

“Cybele?”

Q is busy turning over a large stone, examining the beetles that scurry when she does. “What? No. I dunno.”

“Come here.” He’s already got a hold of Aura’s hand; Harry drops back just to watch all three girls scamper around Voldemort’s legs. “We are honoring Persephone tonight.”

Harry is curious where this is going as well. Voldemort told more history than myth. He said prophecies had already caused enough trouble in their lives. Harry doesn’t know what, magically, Voldemort expects of Samhain or any of their other holidays. So he’s listening too.

“Persephone was a young woman, the daughter of Demeter.” He transfigures his wand into his staff, and offers it to both twins to hold onto. “Demeter was the goddess of the harvest, so she made the sun shine and all the plants bloom. And she loved her daughter Persephone very much.”

Q is darting away to pick up a stone that’s caught her attention. “Split it open?” she requests, holding it out to Voldemort.

A curve of his lips. Somehow he’s learned patience, because children have no attention span. “That’s
“I don’t care. Split it anyway. Please.”

“*Diffindo*,” and the stone splits in two, and they are all examining the newly-revealed sparkly bits inside.

And with a motion of his staff, Voldemort conjures the nearest fallen logs into something appropriate to sit on. Harry grabs the twins’ hands and pulls them seated, because this is important to Voldemort even if Harry hasn’t figured out how yet.

A look of gratitude shot over the girls’ heads and Voldemort is pulling Aura onto his lap. Immediately she’s picking at the buttons of his cloak; he lets her. “There comes a day when Persephone finds an entrance into the underworld. Do you know what that is?”

“Where all the dead things are,” says Q. “*Eww.*” Aura. Harry grins at her.

“And she meets the god of the underworld. His name is Hades. And he’s charmed by Persephone, who is warm and bright like her mother. She is everything Hades is not. He gives her a pomegranate, and she eats six seeds. And then she returns to her mother, in the world above.” He’s been gazing into the slate sky between the trees; when he looks down at their children, it’s to find Phaedra dragging a stick through the mud and Aura stripping the bark off a branch and Q sucking on her knuckles as she did sometimes. “Good enough,” he murmurs, to Harry’s smile. “Demeter had missed Persephone, though. When she was gone, the entire world went cold and dark. The plants stopped growing. And everything came alive again when Persephone came back. But there was a trick.” The girls look up in interest. “The pomegranate seeds had been a promise, tying her to the underworld. She would have to go back for six months every year, one for every pomegranate seed she ate. And in that half of the year, Demeter would make the world cold and dark again, because she misses her daughter. That’s why we have summer and winter. And that’s why we will celebrate tonight, Persephone returning to Hades.”

“Did she like him?” Phaedra, now curious and intent.

And Harry’s voice is sticky in his throat. “Yes,” he says, before Voldemort can say anything. “It’s a better story like that, isn’t it? If Persephone loves her mother and Hades both. And she didn’t have to choose.”

“She married Hades,” Voldemort says. “They had a family. So yes, she liked him.”

Phaedra considers this. “Good,” she decrees, and then drops a twisted branch into her bag.

They let the girls run a few paces ahead, and then Harry draws close to Voldemort. “You’re so good,” he murmurs, pressing his face into the softest part of his neck.

“It’s embarrassingly literal, really,” Voldemort says even as he’s running his fingers through Harry’s long hair. “But – when they are older – it will be a useful context.”

Voldemort will never, never give himself sufficient credit for his most thoughtful moments, the times when Harry is most in love with him. Voldemort was... what was he? He was Harry’s warmth of summer and stillness of winter, all at once. He was lucky.

Back at the Slytherin estate, the bits of nature get sorted out. They’ve got a stone firepit behind the
house, and the girls toss all the dry wood they collected into it. Other things go along the edge. They’ll add proper offerings tonight.

And then, too short a time later, they need to depart for Godric’s Hollow. The sun is kissing the horizon. Harry and Voldemort had told the girls it doesn’t matter what they wear, this isn’t official Ministry business, but it feels special to them and they took the time to dress up for it. So Phaedra comes to Harry wielding her training wand. “What was their favorite color?”

What was his parents’ favorite color. These questions are bringing them to life in small ways, ways Harry hadn’t considered before, so he’s smiling as he answers, “I don’t know. What colors did they wear a lot in their photos?”

“Umm.” Her hair is already red, the sort of red others got from henna. So Phae takes a strand of hair and charms it. It goes metallic gold.

She grins at him, he grins back. “They’d love it,” he says. “Really. They were funny, both of them. Your grandma was great at charms, and your granddad loved pranks.”

“Pranks?” Her eyes go bright.

“Uh-huh. I can’t tell you any of them, I don’t want you to get any ideas.” He pokes her ribs; she shrieks with laughter. “Is Q ready?”

“Yeah.”

“Is Aura?”

She makes a face. “Why would I know? She’s not my sister.”

“Yes, she is,” Harry says, deeply amused.

“Not as much.”

“Okay. You go get Q, I’ll go get Aura. Deal?”

“Mmmyeah.” She runs off.

At last they are collected in the front hall, and Voldemort offers a Ministry portkey. They are pulled away.

There’s a sweet smell of cherry wood burning in a hearth somewhere in Godric’s Hollow. Lanterns and jack-o-lanterns cast the street in a soft glow. While the village had been mixed use in James and Lily’s time, with masking and evasion spells around the wixie homes, it had since become exclusively magic. There was an apothecary on the street, and a few diviners, tarot readers, other charlatans drawn to the tourist element. Harry could ignore them; he could ignore the looks of interest from the crowds they passed. They’d arrived nearer to the cemetery; Voldemort had wrapped his arm around Harry’s shoulder as they walk in that direction.

“Minister!”

The shout behind them makes Harry freeze, but Voldemort barely pauses. He raises his staff to light the face of the journalist running after them, bright enough that the man stopped dead on the street. “Have some respect for the dead,” Voldemort says coldly. “Obviously we are not here in a professional capacity.”
The man’s mouth works, even as blood drains from his face. “This was a public crisis. The rest of the population deserves a part in it.”

“Perhaps,” Voldemort says. “But they don’t deserve a part in our night, with our family.”

“You’ve never joined Harry here before.” The man was fishing a quill out of his curly hair. “What has changed?”

“We’re not doing this.” Harry is stepping forward, out of Voldemort’s grasp. “If you don’t think Voldemort is worth listening to, maybe I am. I wanted him here. I always have. Please let our family have this night.”

“What has changed?” the man reiterated.

“I don’t know. Goodnight.” He takes Voldemort’s hand, puts his other hand on Aura’s back, and decisively leads his family away.

Voldemort casts a silencing charm in a bubble around them, just before Q blurts out, “Who was that?” (Parseltongue, which is clever for her. They only occasionally recognize the political implications of it all, or when to speak. Harry is proud and sympathetic, of how weird it must be to grow up as their kids in particular.)

“A reporter,” Voldemort says. “We don’t know him.”

“He didn’t want you here, though.”

“Not everyone likes me. They don’t have to.”

“But….” Q frowns, tugs on the end of her braid. “But why not?”

“It’s complicated,” he says, in a way that makes clear they won’t discuss this at the moment. Q shrugs and flips her braids over her shoulders.

They walk the wet streets, to the cemetery nestled at the base of St. Jerome’s church. There are only a few more people inside, and they all have the good sense to not stare.

Voldemort falls back, so Harry can lead them through the rows of graves. James and Lily are a few rows back, their gravestones carved in great slabs of marble. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. All three girls approach with curiosity. Aura had been carrying an armful of flowers, which she drops on top of the other memorials before the gravestones. “Who brought these?” Phaedra asks, falling to her knees, looking at the cards and notes tucked along the flowers and stones. “Were they friends?”

“Some of them.” Harry had spoken to Remus last week, who’d said he would take Severus. That was complicated, too. “Some of them just admired them. As heroes.”

Phaedra is sitting cross-legged at the gravestones now, reading the cards. Harry wants to redirect her – who knows what people have written – but he also wants to let them receive this night however they want to. Aura is rearranging her flowers. Q is staring at the headstones, thinking very hard.

“Q?” Harry asks.

“They were both 21,” she says. “That’s young. Isn’t it?”

“Yeah, it is. They were really young.”
“Why?”

“There was a war,” Harry says. They know this, if not that Voldemort had been the opposition then. “They fought as soon as they left school. They were very brave, you think?”

“I think there shouldn’t be wars at all.”

He smiles at this. “We’re trying, baby. That’s what we were doing together, right? We want you to grow up with peace.”

“Yeah.” She’s sitting on the grass beside Phaedra, reading a note that’s been there so long that the preservation charms are beginning to wear off. And then Harry unstraps Cori’s sling from his chest, hands her to Voldemort, and sinks onto the grass too.

*We will never forget you.*

**You were a beacon of righteousness in a corrupt world.**

*Your sacrifice will never be in vain.*

He’d never spent any time on what other people had left at his parents’ grave. It didn’t seem that he had any right to these messages. But with the parchment laid out in front of the girls – it’s touching. He likes seeing them, wondering what sort of people still hold James and Lily so near to their hearts after all these years.

Nestling all the notes back under stones and around the edges of the gravestones, Harry stands again. He steps in, running a hand down Voldemort’s arm so magic sparks between them. “I want to see their home,” he says. “But the girls haven’t got to.” The house was still a spectacle, burnt out and half-crumbling. Harry thinks it would give them nightmares.

“We will walk through the village.”

Harry smiles up at him. “Thank you. Are you okay?” he asks. Their Legilimency was a bit cool, rigid, detached.

“Yes. Of course.”

“Okay. You haven’t got to be, either.” He doesn’t say it often enough, but he’s known it about Voldemort for a long time, that that night had been deeply traumatic for him as well. But they’ve had this conversation before, if not standing in the graveyard of Godric’s Hollow. So Voldemort only lets him go.

The house is three streets over. Someone has set glowing lanterns along the path. It feels sacred.

The street opens wider, and the statue of them stands before the home. Harry has climbed onto its base before, to peer into the face of the infant. He can’t see himself in it, but then – the statue is for everyone else. It means something else.

But there is nobody actually standing before the home. And Harry is only curious at first – he’s got an Auror’s set of permissions now, so he’s taking out his wand, slipping the tip into the fortressing spell that holds the fence closed. It clicks open without protest. And he’s barely considering it before he steps through.

He’s never been inside before. Maybe he could have, should have asked an Auror to let him in to the home before, but it hadn’t seemed necessary. There was nothing left to heal or to resolve, really. He
only wants to walk the space now.

The ground floor is half-destroyed. The kitchen and dining room to his right are intact, the living room on his left is devastated. His father had died here. The explosions that scarred the walls were probably killing curses that had missed, as there hadn’t been much of a duel otherwise, he knows. His father’s body had been found slumped against the southern wall. And then Voldemort had climbed the narrow staircase. Harry does so now.

There’s dust, ash, stray leaves where the roof had caved in. It seems nobody has walked this site since that night, 35 years ago. He lights his wand to peer down the corridor.

“Papa?”

Harry jumps, turns. Q is hovering where the front door hung off its hinges. Her eyes are wide and shiny.

So Harry is taking the stairs three at a time, hitting the ground floor hard. “Q. You were supposed to stay with Abba.”

“I wanted to know where you were going.”

“But – here, come here.” He’s bringing her into the dining room, out of sight of the street. He conjures a candelabra and scrubs a hand through his beard. “Abba doesn’t know where you went?” She shakes her head. “You know better. You know it’s dangerous to go off alone.” Raising his wand, he casts their Patronus. It doesn’t need to carry a message, Voldemort would understand its intent on its own. But he allows it to hover for a moment, letting the glow of the thestral light the space. Then he lets it go.

Q is restless, looking around the house, touching picture frames and picking up bottles and linens still stacked in the sideboard. “I want to see the house,” she says. “All of it.”

“Why?” When Q’s brow furrows in a frown, Harry sighs. “I mean. I don’t think it will help to understand things. Even I haven’t been inside before.”

“I’m not scared.”

You should be. “That’s good. Let’s go find Abba again.” He reaches for her hand.

She doesn’t take it, but walks toward the front door. And when Harry has followed, she abruptly turns and sprints up the stairs.

“Q! Stop.” He hates the tone in his voice. They don’t use magic against the girls, so Harry can only run after her.

She runs to the end of the corridor, whipping around when she finds the nursery. “Don’t go in there, it’s not safe,” Harry says, and he means it.

“Is this where Abba tried to kill you?” she demands.

And Harry feels as though his legs are giving out from under him. “We can’t talk about this here.”

“They were our family too.”

“That line isn’t going to work again,” he says, amused in spite of everything. “We can – alright. We can talk about this tonight. At home. I didn’t know you knew that, about Abba. How did you know
that?"

She shrugs. “I dunno.”

He would interrogate this later, but it’s not the most critical point now. “And how do you feel about it?”

“I dunno.”

So Harry’s stepping in close, past her. The nursery looks cast in grayscale, for all the ash that has settled over everything. There had been a fire in here. Voldemort had immolated his first body in here, as Harry must have looked on.

His hand finds the doorknob. He pulls the door closed. He doesn’t need to see it after all.

This time he does take Q’s hand, and she understands that she’s in enough trouble that she doesn’t resist him. “Does Phaedra know?”

“Uh-huh.”

He sucks air through his teeth. “You should have asked us. I bet that’s confusing and hard, to keep it secret. I’m sorry,” he says, and he really is.

Q gives him a skeptical look, that he’s not angry with her so much as just sad. “Maybe. You talked about the war, being on opposite sides. But you’re not anymore.”

She doesn’t expect it when Harry stops, scooping her up in a hug. She’s almost 8 years old, almost too old to pick up without magic, but Harry does and squeezes her close to his chest. “I’m sorry. We didn’t know when the right time was to tell you. Why some people are so – interested in us. Not just because Abba is Minister.”

“There are books. Scorpius showed us.”

Scorpius. Harry wonders what Scorpius has heard from Malfoy. Or god help them, from Tom. “We’ve got books, too,” he says. “I haven’t read them yet. We can look at them together.” There’s another flicker of emotion across Q’s face. “Or you can look at them alone, if you want to be alone. But not everything in those books will be right. And we want you to know, but we want you to know the truth.”

“Okay.” She squirms and he sets her down. “You should take something from here,” she says. “To put on the altar.”

“… You know, we should. You want to help look?” And Q nods, and Harry brings her into James and Lily’s bedroom.

They are looking through James’s Quidditch gear when there’s sounds from downstairs. “Harry?”

He does not like the pitch of Voldemort’s voice. It is uncharacteristically concerned. “We’re alright,” he calls, taking a few steps out onto the landing. “Up here.”

So Voldemort brings their other three children upstairs. He’s holding onto all of them: Aura and Phae at either hand, Cori swaddled against his chest. “Cybele – “

“I’m sorry,” she says quickly, before he can actually say anything.

Voldemort is not deterred. “People can hurt you. Do you not realize this?”
“I would curse them.”

There’s a flicker of amusement across his features. “Yes, you would.” He lets go of Phae and Aura’s hands.

Harry gestures to the room. “Q said we should find something to add to our altar. I thought it was a great idea.”

“We found their brooms,” Q says happily. “But they don’t work anymore.”

“Here.” Harry opens Lily’s wardrobe wider. “We can take some things. To remember them with.”

Lily’s jewelry is bright and chunky, exemplary of the 1970s. Harry is charmed, and moreso when Aura pulls out an entire handful of necklaces and drapes them all over her head at once.

So Harry and Voldemort fall back to watch as their girls pull out jewelry, clothes, and trinkets hidden in smaller drawers, photos and letters that had been tucked away. And when Harry rubs circles into Voldemort’s back, he can relax marginally.

“We need to talk to them,” Harry murmurs.

“I know.”

“They seem okay, though.”

“I should hope so.”

Harry lets his head fall on Voldemort’s shoulder. “I closed off the nursery.” At Voldemort’s look, he shrugs. “I just didn’t… need to see it. I don’t think I need to be here at all, really.”

Harry takes James and Lily’s brooms and Hogwarts class rings. He takes a photo framed in undulating silver – James and Lily with their respective parents on their wedding day. He takes artifacts – from the kitchen, a wall sculpture that projects the solar system; from the living room, a tiny animated set of magical animals that will get immediately integrated into Aura’s toys, he knew. He takes a box of things he doesn’t entirely understand, but he knows enough to know it’s all magic James was inventing for the war.

The girls are too small still to wear any of their clothes. His parents were tall, Harry finds with surprise as he holds up some of their dress robes. His malnourished childhood had long effects.

“Listen,” he says to Phaedra, who’s hanging onto a gauzy coral-colored robe with embroidery across the hips. “You can have them when you’re older, but we can leave them here for now. They’ll be safe here.”

“Just this one,” she insists.

Voldemort shoots an apologetic look at Harry, for being about to undermine his parenting. “Come here, Phaedra.” And he charming the hems, spelling pins into the bust and across the hips. Phaedra is glowing when he pulls the resized robe on top of her first one. And then Q and Aura are grabbing robes – “One,” Voldemort stresses, “you can have one each.”

At last they can go. Cori needs to be put down, as she’s now fussing in Harry’s arms. Then they still need to conclude the night with a bonfire. They close up the house, insofar as this violated space can still be closed up. Harry spells the fence closed once more. They take a portkey.
The girls are so — happy. Harry loves it, the way they are chattering about Grandma and Grandpa as though they are real. They tuck away some mementos. James and Lily’s brooms are mounted above their altar. Their class rings both end up on Harry’s hands.

Cori is fed and put to bed. The girls all need to brush their teeth and put on pyjamas before they can return outside to the firepit. Harry and Voldemort cut up apples, pumpkins, pomegranates. They bring out crystals. They arrange it all around the firepit. Voldemort draws sigils in salt.

The fire must be started without magic, paradoxically. Harry is better at this, so he holds the flint close to the dry twigs the girls had gathered earlier. The fire catches with a sizzling spark.

The day has already been a lot, more even than most Samhains. So Harry and Voldemort sit together, their sides curved into one another as their magic warms.

The twins come out together, their heads bent low in conversation that Harry and Voldemort aren’t meant to hear. Then Aura comes out, still in one of Lily’s chunky necklaces. Harry’s smiling as he watches her play with it, twisting it around her fingers.

Most of their Samhain ritual is small and personal. Harry’s skeptical and Voldemort’s got a lot of complicated feelings about death, and they’ve kept their dysfunctions away from their daughters but they’ve been rather hands off about what the day means. So.

But they’ll recite the ancestry, it’s the one thing they do very traditionally. Their daughters climb onto seats on either side of them. Harry runs a hand down Phaedra’s silky hair, still charmed with a gold accent. It really does suit her.

Harry looks over at Voldemort. “I’ll start?”

“Please.”

So Harry drops herbs into the fire: calendula for remembrance, hyssop for clarity, verbena for peace. “Ancestors, stay near to us in this year. Join us, and visit upon us your wisdom.” It is the shortest and plainest invocation, the one they use because their daughters would also understand it. Voldemort says the dead don’t speak in words, anyway. “We start with my parents?” he prompts their daughters.


Q is giggling before she manages to say, “Great-Grandpa Fleamont.”

“And?” Harry prompts.

“Eu…?”

They invite Fleamont and Euphemia, Henry and Petra. It gets complicated when Harry’s family tree reaches the pureblood generations on both side. He unfolds a sketch he made of his family tree to read them off, through the medieval line of Potters, back to Iolanthe Peverell, Arsinoe Peverell, Ignutus Peverell.

“Our elders are welcomed,” he says to conclude the invocation. “May they find their travels between worlds to be easy.” He drops a thick stick of rosemary into the fire, and breathes the smoke deeply.

Then Voldemort leans in. He handles the herbs easily, letting them fall between his fingers into the fire. “Ancestors, stay near to us in this year. Join us, and visit upon us your wisdom,” he recites. “Merope Gaunt, join us.”
But before he can recite any farther back, Phaedra looks up, tugs on his sleeve. “Abba. Don’t you have a dad?”

They’d never questioned it before. Voldemort speaks of Merope as a single mother who had died and orphaned him. This question wouldn’t be avoided forever. And Harry doesn’t know how to have a private consultation with Voldemort – to say that he’s already going to disclose a lot to the girls, that they don’t need to do everything tonight.

But Voldemort is carefully neutral as he says, “My father was Quotidian. And he died too.”

“What’s his name?” Phaedra is picking up another sprig of rosemary, ready for the invocation.

They do not invoke Quotidians. Most texts of magick do not address the possibility. (The identification of traditional magick with oldmage supremacy had precedent, really.) But Voldemort decides to acquiesce. It is easier. “Thomas Bernard William Riddle, join us.” He watches Phaedra drop the rosemary into the fire, the sweet smoke that arises from it.

And she is satisfied. Q and Aura don’t ask. Voldemort doesn’t know whether to offer them anything further, whether they deserve to know anything more about their grandfather. Harry leans in, rubbing the tense spot between his shoulderblades. Voldemort doesn’t need notes to recite his family tree – though there are gaps, generations that shielded themselves from the public so efficiently that there were no official records of their existence, only notes and ephemeral writing.

He gives them the Gaunt line, back to Tarquin and Rowan lines. Back to the Slytherin line, to Salazar Slytherin. He has always been insistent that their daughters should know their lineage. “Join us,” he recites, and drops another handful of herbs into the fire.

Their daughters had been quiet for Voldemort – he is still charismatic, people still fall silent when he speaks – but they are vibrant and chattering now. “That’s why we’ve got Parseltongue, from a thousand years ago – “ “From all over the world. From Singapore and China and, and – “ Phaedra falters, struggling to recall where else the Slytherin line comes from, because when they weren’t intermarrying, they were seeking out Parselmouth spouses.

“Zhao Ji from Shanghai, Jhalak Surash from Chennai, Kiturra from Darwin,” Voldemort recites. Some of these he had found out himself – they traveled to Asia at least once a year, he had had opportunities to look through some genealogical records; and he’d written someone in Australia’s Northern Territory to track down his Aboriginal ancestor, eight generations back. It had all been a labor of… perhaps not love, but a labor of determination to give their children as much respect for their history as possible.

The fruits balanced on a grill above the fire were beginning to roast and sweeten. Voldemort picks up a half of a pomegranate, offering it to the girls. Q takes it curiously. “From the myth of Persephone,” Voldemort says. “Those are the seeds she had eaten.”

“Oh. Really?” Q picks out a seed. “How many?”

“Six.”

“One, two, three, four, five, six,” she counts out. Then, grinning at Voldemort, she throws them all into her mouth at once. “Here, Phae.”

Their daughters’ fingers go red from picking seeds out of their pomegranate. Harry lets his head fall to Voldemort’s shoulder, the meditative crackle of the bonfire holding his attention. And when
Phaedra asks for a quill, Voldemort produces small scrolls and a bottle of ink made from the ashes of last year’s fire.

It is… not quite prayer. But they’d write notes – to ancestors, to gods, to the universe itself – to thank them for the previous year, and to ask support for the next. They never asked their daughters what they’d write, for as long as they’d been old enough to write their own. Harry wants to know, he is certain his daughters are happy and well-adjusted, but he’s just curious what their more deeply-held hopes and dreams, now that they’re old enough to have them.

But Phaedra sits across the fire from Harry, playing the feather quill across her face as she thinks. “Q, you want one?” Harry holds out the miniature scroll to her.

“Maybe later.” She feeding more sticks into the bonfire.

“Aura?”

“Mmm, yeah.” She takes a scroll, and Harry opens a ink jar for her as she crawls up beside him.

“Do you want us to write it? Or do you want to?”

“I can.” She holds a quill awkwardly in her fist, poking the nib through the parchment a few times. She’s 3½, so she’s going to scribble and draw rather than write, and that’s okay too. So Harry is watching as Aura begins drawing an approximation of Parselscript across the page, big swirls and jagged edges. This is hilarious. He loves having kids.

And Voldemort’s watching over Harry’s shoulder, also incredibly amused. Then he takes up a scroll of his own. “You may not read this,” he murmurs into Harry’s ear, and then he’s moving to get up, to take another seat alone.

This is – good, really. Harry has never asked what Voldemort writes on these nights, but their Legilimency is always warm and safe and alright. And they do try to model for their daughters that privacy is fine, that even secrets are fine as long as it’s not anything that will hurt them. So Harry is also curious how long they’d kept the secret of him and Voldemort, of Godric’s Hollow.

Aura’s note has become a sprawling doodle, of people and animals and a night sky. Phaedra is chewing on the end of her quill. Q is sitting cross-legged on the ground, a bit too near to the fire, staring into its depths.

Harry doesn’t know that he’s got anything to write.

They’d put cider over the fire too, witches’ cider that contains flowering milfoil in addition to the typical cinnamon and cloves and orange peel. So he picks up the hook to lift the cauldron out of the flames, letting it hover a bit so it can cool. Samhain occasionally involves something stronger, psychotropic potions meant to induce prophetic visions, but it’s not something they could ethically partake in with four children in their care. That had been the early years of their marriage, when they’d bring jars brimming with sweet potions out to their fire and fall asleep beneath the stars. Now they may add rum to their cups, but nothing more interesting than that.

Phaedra is still writing – or maybe drawing? – when Q gets up to join her. “You can’t write that,” she says, peering at the parchment.

“Yes, I can.”

“No – do it like this – “ And she’s taking Phaedra’s quill, writing something new on top of the original. And Phaedra watches curiously as Q finishes with a flourish, rolls up the scroll, and drops it
“Do you remember what to say?” Harry prompts her.

“Uh….” Q tugs the ends of her braid.

“Phae?”

Phaedra wrinkles her nose. “Please – please take this – “

“Please receive these supplications and all forces for good in the new year,” Voldemort says behind her. Then he drops his own scroll into the fire.

They drink cider and watch the fire. Aura scrunches her parchment into a ball and chucks it into the fire so sparks rise from the embers. Harry is grinning as he pulls her into the seat beside him. “Did you write good things?”

“Oh-huh.” She takes a glass of cider from him. “Are Grandma and Grandpa happy now?”

Harry is given pause. He isn’t sure he can flat-out disbelieve in an afterlife, given that they’ve got ghosts and all, but he… doesn’t. It’s an alien idea, to imagine his parents watching him or being present in his life now. Maybe it’s just easier than the alternative, but his parents feel very definitively gone. So does Sirius. So do all the casualties of the wars.

It’s probably the bare minimum of decent parenting that Harry deflects with, “What do you think?” And Aura happily chirps, “Yeah,” as though there were nothing complicated about the question, and then she’s investigating the bits of star anise floating in the cauldron of cider and Harry is alone with his thoughts for a bit.

And then Voldemort slips next to him once more, running his fingers through Harry’s hair. “You haven’t written anything.”

“I don’t want anything,” Harry says, and he knows it’s cheeky and wrong so he flashes Voldemort a grin. “Really, I dunno. I’m not good at this. Where did you even learn it?”

“Abraxas Malfoy. In school, and just beyond, when I would stay with him. His family held a silent feast for Samhain, and then they would burn goat’s eye and zilbah in their fire.” More psychoactive herbs. “We were only ever together when we were high and hallucinating.” He means sex. They can’t say these things in front of their daughters, but Harry knew about Abraxas before. He’s only curious about the relationship because Voldemort never spoke of it as transactional, that he’d slept with important people in his youth to gain entry to their world, but Voldemort never spoke of Abraxas in the same terms. “Was it good?” Harry asks, half-teasing.

“Fantastic. And far more illegal now than it was then. But should we ever confiscate a bag of fresh zilbah….”

Harry smiles, pressing a kiss to his soft throat. “I am so old now,” he says. “And so boring.”

“Mm, yes.” And Voldemort conjures their rum, handing the bottle to Harry first.

Aura is lying on the adjacent bench, watching the stars and probably very close to sleep. “What stars are up there?” Harry asks her, looking upward.

“Uh….” She squints, thinking. “The triangle?”
“Capricorn,” Voldemort says, following her gaze. “Right there. And Sagittarius, with the bright star in the corner. You’ll take astronomy at Hogwarts. They’ve got a good telescope, you’ll be able to see the planets as far as Jupiter and Saturn.”

“Oh,” she says, fascinated. “Can we go?”

To Hogwarts, she means. “We’ve only visited in the day,” Harry says. Just a couple weeks ago, they’d gone so he could show Aura Hagrid’s pumpkins as big as cars. “We’d need to go at night to see anything.”

“We could get a telescope, though,” Voldemort says. “It would help. The light pollution now, you would never see the full night sky here.”

Aura doesn’t know what light pollution means. “Okay,” she says happily, and a couple minutes later she has dropped off to sleep.

Harry pours more rum into his cider. He knows the conversation that must come next, the four of them, will be a complicated one. He is apprehensive, and Voldemort is… something rather more than that.

Q and Phaedra seem not to be thinking any longer of Godric’s Hollow. Voldemort raises his staff, transfiguring the bench beneath them curve inward, to suggest a more intimate conversation.

“Phaedra. Cybele. Come here, please.”

They’re drawing on spare parchment. “Why?” Q asks, folding her drawing over to be secret.

“Because I need to speak to both of you.”

“You’re not in trouble,” Harry adds, just because Voldemort’s way of talking could sound so bloody ominous. The girls slip off the benches to approach.

And so it’s Harry who wants to begin. “We didn’t know you knew anything about what happened in Godric’s Hollow. When I was a baby. And I’m sorry, we probably should have told you earlier. But we didn’t want to scare you.”

Phaedra is picking up one of the blankets they’d brought out with them. Q is picking cloves out of her cider. “It’s okay,” Q says.

“Good. Can we tell you about it, though?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Good.” But then he looks to Voldemort, who’s got more to divulge and more to carefully obscure until they’re older. Some things, they will never tell their daughters. But for now: “Should you tell it? Or should I?”

“I will.”

“Thank you.”

“It begins with a prophecy,” Voldemort says. “It was made when Harry was a baby. About six months old.”

“How old were you?” Phaedra asks.

A flicker of a smile. “Much older. An adult. I was fighting the war then, and both sides were doing
badly. And then someone made a prophecy that I thought meant, if Harry grew up then he would kill me someday.”

“Really?”

“That’s what I thought it meant,” Voldemort reiterates. “I was wrong. It meant something else entirely.”

“What did it mean?”

“I need to finish this story first. But it’s important – prophecies are spoken in riddles and ambiguities, things that may not come to pass. They only have power because people believe in them.” He swallows rum, pours more. Their magic burns very bright between them.

So Voldemort continues, “I assumed it would be better if I killed Harry first, while he was still young. His parents – your grandparents – knew of the prophecy too, and they had gone into hiding. So that house was invisible from the outside, everyone forgot it was there. But I found a way in. I killed his parents because they would have fought me. And then I would have killed Harry, but his parents had loved him so much, that they’d been willing to die for him, that it created a powerful protective spell. So the magic rebounded and nearly killed me, and Harry only got his scar. But that was the end of the war. That’s why people think Harry is a hero. Because they say he won the war when he was only a toddler.”

He pauses, for their reactions. Phaedra is pressed to Harry’s side, wrapped in a blanket. Q sits beside Voldemort, cross-legged on the seat. They’re both quiet.

“And Harry knows how sorry I am,” Voldemort says. “It was wrong. I was wrong about the prophecy – and it was wrong for Harry to grow up without his parents. And that you will never know them.” His free hand finds Harry’s, holding it tightly. “Do you have any questions? Or….” He falters, unused to talking to their daughters like this.

“Did it hurt?” Q asks him.

He blinks. “Yes. Immensely.”

“Oh. That’s sad.”

“Phaedra?”

Her small shrug is nearly lost beneath her blanket. “Scorpius showed us a book. A long time ago.”

This had to be relative, they’d only started school with Scorpius in September. But the world was bigger to children. It’s probably best that they’re not currently shocked or horrified, though Harry expects they’ll cycle through more feelings than this in the future. “What did you think of Godric’s Hollow?” Harry asks the girls.

“Did you grow up there?”

“Until I was 1½. Just little bit older than Cori,” Harry adds. “And after that I grew up with my aunt and uncle. I’ve told you about them before. And then when I get to Hogwarts, I only had to spend the summers with them.”

“With Dudley,” Q says, in a tone of contempt because Harry hadn’t been entirely successful in talking about him in a neutral way.
So it makes him smile. “Yeah. With Dudley. It’s why – well, both of us loved Hogwarts so much. We hadn’t had a proper home before, really.”

The girls had always known both Harry and Voldemort had grown up as orphans. They thought it was sad. They were such empathetic people, children who had a fantastic capacity for caring about others. Harry is so proud of them.

By now Q is slumping against Voldemort’s side, quiet if not properly sleepy. He conjures another blanket for her. “Do you want to go to bed?”

“Not yet.” And beside Harry, Phaedra shakes her head faintly.

It’s fine. Traditionally Samhain was celebrated outdoors all night, that they’d sleep outside. Harry and Voldemort would probably carry their daughters in later, but for now they fall quiet and still.

And then Harry and Voldemort had this moment of relative solitude. “You did good,” Harry says, leaning in affectionately.

“I do not believe they’re okay.”

“Well. They’re okay for now, at least. Maybe it’ll get more complicated later.” He pours another drink. “And maybe it’ll be different for Aura, or Cori. I dunno that this is the right age. But it was – good for them to see the house tonight. Can we do that again?”

“I do believe they’ve already been promised a return, when they could take any of their clothing.”

“God. Yeah.” Phae was still wearing Lily’s coral robe, and it made Harry so happy. “I don’t think I’ll ever want the house properly, but – I hadn’t expected it to be so well preserved.”

“Neither did I.”

Harry conjures a blanket for them as well, as the fire dwindles into glowing embers. He doesn’t know what to give the twins next, what to say to them next. They’d both expected worse. They were lucky.

So Harry at last reaches for a scroll and ink. Voldemort’s thoughts are elsewhere, even as their magic touches, so Harry feels relatively alone with his thoughts. He writes in Parselscript too, because it’s a language they speak privately, it’s the language they speak as a family. *Give them a good childhood*, he writes. *And give us enough wisdom and patience to give them a good childhood, too.*

It’s all he needs to write. Barely slipping out from beneath the blanket, he drops the scroll into the bonfire.
Cori’s first birthday was to be a celebration. Her first year of infancy had been – not dangerous, but a bit touchy. She’d been small, premature, slow to hit milestones. But just a few weeks prior to her birthday, Harry and Voldemort had both entered the nursery early one morning to find her awake, babbling happily to one of their hognose snakes, a skittery male that Q had named Elf. (“He looks like an elf,” she’d said. Voldemort looked bewildered. “It hasn’t even got ears.”) Most of her babbling had been that, but among the nonsense were a few real words – blanket and bear and outside. Parseltongue, she’s got Parseltongue, which means she’s got at least some magic. When her eyes alight on them, she lifts her chubby arms. “Up?” she asks, and when Harry picks her up he squeezes her close. English would come later, as a language that had to be properly acquired, but Parseltongue came once the babies were cognitively able to grasp the concept of language. It made some things easier.

Anyway, her birthday wouldn’t be a large celebration. She was turning one, after all, it’s not like the party was for her sake. Their December was filled with Yule celebrations and planning Christmas day, but Harry wanted to have some friends over. He’d barely seen Luna all year.

In March, Luna had had twin girls named Grainne and Finnabair – she felt about Irish names what Voldemort felt about Greek names, so. “Nobody else even knows what I’m talking about,” Harry had said to Voldemort one night. “When I talk about protective magic in names. I’m not convinced you didn’t just make it all up.”

“Would you even reject a placebo?” Voldemort had asked as he’d tugged Cori’s small fists into sleeves.

“I guess not.”

So Luna’s girls supposedly had deep connections to the earth and sea forged by the magic in their names. They were 9 months old now, so they’d be content to sit in the vicinity of Cori as Harry and Luna caught up over tea. He asked Ron and Hermione to come over with their two younger kids (the older two were still at Hogwarts for another week), and he’d caught Ginny in the Aurors’ office just the day before. “Come over to eat cake tomorrow?” he’d asked her.

“Yeah, alright.”

So that’s the commotion coming from his floo now – Luna is carrying one baby and Ginny is carrying the other, and Tonks has a case of beer and a tiny cake. “A smash cake,” she says happily, patting Cori on her curly head, from her place harnessed to Harry’s chest. “It seems hilarious, but not enough that I want to have my own cake to do it.”

“We tried to feed a cake to Arnold once,” Ginny says brightly, setting Grainne into the playpen set up in the drawing room. “But he just lay in the middle of it. He smelled like icing for weeks. When Hermione brought Crookshanks over, he tried to eat him.”

“Hi Finn,” Harry says, ruffling the hair of Finnabair as she babbles and reaches for him from Luan’s grasp. “Look at all that hair. Just like your mum.”

“Thank you,” Luna beams, tossing her own blonde mane.

Then there’s commotion at the door. “Harry?” Ron calls into the entry hall. And then there’s the commotion of children, and Leo and Imogen are running by.
“Hi – hi – Q and Phaedra are in their bedroom – “ Harry is trying to herd them in the right direction.
“And Aura – I don’t know where Aura is – “ He accepts a kiss from Hermione.

“Where’s Voldemort?” she asks. “You haven’t got everyone alone, have you?”

“He had a thing?” He frowns. “With Moody.”

Her eyebrows arch. “Is everything okay?”

“It’s not a social visit,” Harry shrugs. “But they’ll make it okay, yeah? Cheers,” he says as Ron drops a stuffed hippogriff into his arms.

“Mum said she’d knit Cori an extra-large cap to fit all her curls underneath,” Ron says. “Also she said not to buy pumpkins for Christmas, the last of her new hybrid crop just came in and she needs to make pies.”

“She needs to make pies,” Ginny stresses, coming up beside Harry. “They’re keeping pumpkins in the twins’ old room. It’s absurd.”

“Yeah, alright.”

They end up in the sitting room with beer and tea. The babies all play at their feet. Hermione says she looks forward to the age where babies start actually interacting with one another, and Luna says their children’s spirits already glow in complementary colors, and Hermione gives her the most incredulous smile.

At some point Aura runs by, Moira grasped in her arms. “Can we paint her nails?” she asks Harry.

“Can you?” he asks, amused and skeptical all at once. Their dog is patient but perhaps not that much.

“We’ve got cheese.”

“… If you don’t get nail polish on the rugs. Can you do that?”

“Uh-huh.” She runs off.

Hermione is looking at him in quiet horror. “You’re going to have pawprints everywhere when the dog runs off.”

“I mean. She’ll do a lot for cheese.”

It wasn’t that Harry and Voldemort intended to be cool or well-liked parents. But they both knew children were built to survive. While Hermione had fussed over whether Mozart or Tchaikovsky were better pre-natal music, Harry had quietly contemplated surviving an entire childhood of neglect, starvation, abuse. Maybe not unscathed, but – well. Children were resilient. So they were not overly worried about optimizing their parenting strategies, exactly. And Harry liked chaos anyway.

Luna is stirring the cranberries in her drink into a tiny vortex. “Pansy gave her cats to her parents until her baby is older,” she offers. “Even though it’s the wampus who steals a baby’s breath as it sleeps. Not a housecat.”

Harry’s eyebrows go all the way up. “Pansy’s got a baby?”

“Oh yes. Only a month old. Her name is Ruby.”

Luna treated this as unexceptional, even as the rest of the room was a bit agape. Luna and Pansy
dated very casually sometimes, such that she might bring her to Harry’s parties maybe once a year. Now there were more babies? “Is she raising Ruby alone?” Harry tried tactfully.

“No, no. Her husband does quite a lot! When she married him, he was so cossetted, she expected he would need his own nurse. So this has been a relief.”

A few more questions drew out of Luan that Pansy’s marriage to a Swiss heir to a metals fortune had been assured since they were both children. It was well within the culture of oldmage families to have an arranged marriage as well as a lover, if it were all kept discreet and respectable. So.

Harry was thrilled to have Cori growing up alongside Luna’s twins, in any case. He expects it will be a trip. So when Luna is telling them all about weaving gourdfinch eggs into the babies’ mobiles (“Goldfish?” Hermione tries to correct. Luna’s bland smile. “No.”), Harry is still grinning.

At some point, their gaggle of children runs across the rear hall, accentuated by Moira’s barking. “Kids?” Harry calls, fully expecting to be ignored.

Phaedra pokes her head into the sitting room. “What?”

“Where’re you going?”


“And not the pond?”

“No, not the pond.” So he gestures her out, watching fondly as she runs to catch up with Q and Leo.

“How do you do it, sending them away?” he asks Ron and Hermione. The twins were only going to be 8 next month, but already they were anticipating Hogwarts. And Harry and Voldemort really wanted them to love Hogwarts, to understand why they had loved it so much themselves, but still.

Hermione’s smile is a bit wistful. “I still worry,” she says. “Everything they can get up to there, without us! I’m sure there are things we don’t even know about. I certainly didn’t tell my parents everything.”

“Your parents didn’t know you’d missed half our second year,” Ron mutters. “Until I casually mention it at dinner one night, and it turned into a bloody inquest – “

“I didn’t want them to worry,” Hermione says, going pink.

“No, no. Getting petrified by a great fuck-off snake – “ Ron makes a breezy gesture.

“Shut up, Ron, you haven’t told Mum and Dad half of it all,” Ginny says, raising her eyebrows over her beer.

“Course not, they were still raising their baby girl – “ And then Ginny is throwing an acnification curse at Ron’s face, which he deflects but still he shuts up.

And Harry is quietly having a moment, because he knows Ron and Hermione don’t know everything about their kids. Max, their oldest and Harry’s first godson, had written to ask how to tell his parents he was dating a Slytherin. She’s really funny, and she takes me flying on weekends, he’d written. And Harry had felt he’d had no real insights but he’d written back that Ron and Hermione were unconditionally loving parents, and if Max wanted to tell them with Harry present over Christmas holidays, he would be there for him. So.
“Dad says the Ministry keeps surveillance sprites around Hogwarts anyway, perhaps you could ask one to check in on Max and Portia?” Luna suggests. “They jam all the electronic signals so as to stifle competition.”

Sometimes Harry wonders if Luna is just fucking with them. After he and Ron share a glorious look, Ron says, “Nah. Let them have their secrets. Anyway, we gave Portia a camera before she went off this year, so she can show us a carefully curated experience.”

Hermione makes a noise in the back of her throat. “Don’t say it like that.”

“It’s a valuable skill, though.” And Hermione gives him a lovingly exasperated look. Ron grins back.

At some point, Cori starts fussing, throwing away all the toys that surround her blanket. “Hey, hey, hey,” Harry protests as he catches her stuffed seal. She’s got a great arm. “Is it time for cake? So you can cause chaos elsewhere.”

He gathers her up. “No no no,” she’s babbling in Parseltongue until he puts her seal back in her hands and moves to the dining room.

Tonks summons all the children, and the dog, from the back garden. When Harry’s put Cori into her high seat, he turns back to his other kids. “Did you manage to paint Moira’s nails?”

“Yeah,” Phaedra says happily. “Look. We’ve both got purple, and Q and Leo have got green, and Imogen’s got blue, and Aura put sparkles on top.”

The dog’s nails are a technicolor mess. She is so happy with all the attention. “Great,” he says, giving Moira a pat on the head.

“Hedwig next?” Phaedra asks innocently.

“Definitely not.”

Hermione had become a talented baker out of necessity, learning how to craft vegan goods that people wanted to eat. She’d brought a three tiered cake with her today, filled with lemon curd and dotted with berries. Harry hands her the cake knife and then takes Cori’s own cake from its box. “This is going to be a disaster,” he says as she eyes the bright blue and yellow frosting. A happy gurgle.

Luna sets her twins in high chairs as well, putting smears of icing on plates before them. Hermione passes everyone tall slices of cake. Harry puts a candle, with a cool-safe flame, in front of Cori. “Can you blow it out?” he asks her, and inhales deeply to demonstrate. She looks at him, and then pops the candle, flame and all, into her mouth.

After a minor amount of chaos, the candle is retrieved and Harry’s scooping icing onto a spoon. “Try it,” he says, putting the spoon in her chubby fist. “You’ll like it.” Clumsily she lifts the spoon to her mouth, gurgling around it. “There you go.”

As they eat cake and drink beer, Cori eventually throws the spoon away, dragging her fingers through her cake and then through her hair. They are all watching, but Q has the most mischievous glint in her eye, setting her own fork down stealthily. Harry looks over, amused. “Q. No.”

“Why does Cori get to, though?” she protests, even as funny as she finds it.

“Because it’s cuter with a one year old than an almost-8 year old.”
"I can be cute!"

Honestly, Harry would have let all his kids smash their cake slices if they’d been alone, but Hermione had already quietly judged his laissez faire parenting once this afternoon, and he expected she’d forbid Leo and Imogen from partaking. “We haven’t decided what to do for your birthdays next months,” he says reasonably. “If you want to celebrate it by destroying a cake then, you can.”

“Me too?” Phaedra asks, perking up.

“Sure. But you hate feeling sticky,” he reminds her.

“Oh yeah.” She continues to swirl icing around on her plate.

When Aura has stuck a raspberry on all ten of her fingers, the back door opens. “Vol – “ Harry calls, but then Tonks is up and striding across the dining room.

And when Voldemort steps into the doorway, he only looks mildly surprised to find Tonks immediately before him. “How was it?” she asks.

A quirk of his mouth. “You must have seen Alastor recently.”

“We had lunch yesterday.”

Voldemort is peeling off his leather gloves, tucking them in a pocket of his robes. “It went well. Swallow is in custody.”

At this the room quietly inhales – Tonio Swallow was a kingpin who’d been wreaking havoc on Britain for the past few years. Harry hadn’t known this was happening – Voldemort had only said briefly that he was needed in the Ministry today.

And so Voldemort takes in their reactions with some amusement. “Do try to look surprised when it’s announced in the Ministry tomorrow.” He steps into he room, past Tonks.

Cori looks up from smashing two handfuls of cake together, her eyes lighting up. “Up?” she asks charmingly in Parseltongue.

“… Harry?”

“It’s a thing people do now,” Harry defends himself, in case Voldemort just thinks he’s become an incredibly negligent parent. And he hasn’t even noticed Aura eating raspberries off her fingers, bringing the total count of their children knuckle-deep in food to two. “It’s cute.”

“Yet another cultural touchstone I have missed,” Voldemort sighs, sinking into the chair beside Harry. “Absolutely not,” he addresses Cori, who lets her hands fall back into the plate of icing with a wet slap.

“D’you want cake? Hermione made it,” Harry says, sliding a plate before him as he pours coffee.

“Thank you,” he says to Hermione.

“You’re welcome.”

And then the conversation sinks back into what it had been, as Luna recounts tracking down a Heliopath-to-English translator for a new piece. (Even if Heliopaths were real, and they’re not, they wouldn’t be verbal animals. Harry can see Hermione gritting her teeth out of the corner of his eye, even as Ron grins.) “Lee says they could learn sign language,” Luna says. “Like the gorillas do.”
Q, who loves animals the most of all, looks up with interest. “Gorillas know sign language?”

“Yes,” Luna says –

and then Hermione tries to speak over her. “They can learn sign language,” she amends, “when scientists teach them. There’s this one called Koko – “

And she’s reaching for her phone before shooting Harry an apologetic look, because they have mostly been successful in keeping electronics away from their kids. “It’s fine,” he waves her on, and then all the kids are clustering around Hermione’s phone to watch videos of Koko.

“Can we go to the zoo?” Q asks Harry and Voldemort in between videos.

The next three weeks were a solid block of Yule celebrations and other Important Political Things. “For your birthday, maybe,” Harry suggests.

“Oh yeah.” She grins at Voldemort. “Papa says we can smash a cake then too.”

“I really don’t see the appeal,” he mutters, looking to where Cori is now scribbling in the smeared frosting.

“You can for your birthday too,” Q says cheerfully, and turns back to Hermione’s phone.

And Harry’s pressing his fist to his mouth, delighted at the idea. Voldemort’s birthday is wedged firmly between Christmas and the twins’ birthday, and typically superceded by New Year’s celebrations anyway. But this idea is inspired.

At last Voldemort is rising from the table, carrying out the coffee pot. “Oh, I left beans to soak earlier,” Harry says. “Can you put them on?”

Voldemort pauses in the doorway. “Of course. Are your friends staying for dinner?”

The room sort of itches. “Please stay,” Harry says to them.

Glances. “Yeah, sure, mate. Thanks.” Ron directs the last word to Voldemort.

Every single time, it feels like a gift. “Cool,” Harry says, and upends the last of his beer. “And you,” he addresses Cori, “are going in the bath.”

She’s fully covered in cake. He should have just undressed her first, for easier cleanup. Scourgify and Tergeo are too rough for delicate baby skin, so he just wipes her hands clean and then puts a shield charm over his own clothes. “Up?” Cori asks, and by the reaction of everyone else, it’s Parseltongue again.

“You bet up,” Harry says, hoisting her against his chest. “And then we’re having quiet time before dinner. You too, Aura,” he says, because she is over-sugared and overstimulated, which is bad at any age but worst of at all 3 ½.

“I don’t wanna.” She shoves her plate away.

“Just some time reading,” Harry says. “We’ve got a new Wisteria book you haven’t seen yet. You want it?”

“Mmmm….”

“God, quiet time is wasted on children,” Ron sighs. “Do you know how happy I’d be if someone
told me to just lie down for a bit?”

Aura contemplates Ron, eyes wide. She *adores* him, most of all of Harry’s friends. “’Kay,” she says.

“Awesome. Let’s go upstairs,” Harry says. And he shifts Cori to one arm, offering his other hand to Aura. She is sticky too, which just seems to be a constant fixture of children. And as they climb the stairs, he can hear Voldemort in the kitchen, and his friends in the dining room, and the kids now scrambling to chase Moira back outside.
Really, they were lucky that Harry had joined Voldemort for lunch that day.

He’d gotten out of Aurors’ training from that morning (they’d been working on deflection, which was fun but Harry now had a few good welts along his shoulders from his misses) and had gotten takeaway, returning to Voldemort’s office. And now they sat across from each other, eating stir fry as Harry prattles on about this brutal tongue-splitting curse Malfoy had tried on him this morning.

The floo splutters to life.

It’s not a person that emerges, but only a scroll, spat out in the approximate direction of Voldemort’s desk. Harry catches it neatly, and when Voldemort’s eyebrows arch, he grins. “Still got it.” He passes the scroll over.

Typically Voldemort would set it aside, but when he sees the seal, he pushes his food away instead. “What?” Harry asks as Voldemort picks the wax seal.

“It is from Wadha.”

The last time they had seen Wadha, had been a year and a half ago, when they’d brought home Corisande. “Okay,” Harry says in an exhalation. His stomach goes funny.

Voldemort unfurls the parchment flat on his desk, and they both lean in. Her message is brief but foreboding: a pregnant woman arrived in poor health, nearly in labor already. Wadha does not think she’ll be able to take of the child, at least not at first. Would they be able to take in the baby “if it becomes necessary,” she writes in a delicate way.

Already Voldemort is summoning his cloak from its hook, clearing off his desk. “Wait,” Harry says. “Voldemort, wait.”

He looks surprised. “I assumed you would agree.”

“I do,” Harry says. “I mean – I don’t want to leave the baby to – whatever would happen otherwise. But are you sure….?”

He can’t make the words fall from his mouth. He couldn’t subject Voldemort to watching a woman die in childbirth. It seems unspeakably cruel.

Whether Voldemort understands the mess Harry is making of his question, he doesn’t pursue it. “It doesn’t seem the time to sort out feelings,” he says, imminently practical. “Here.” And he’s summoning another cloak, since Harry had left his own in the Aurors’ locker rooms.

Harry is scrubbing a hand through his hair. “We haven’t got another nursery, another crib – the girls will be out of school next month and having all of them home at once will be a lot – I don’t know that I can take much time off – “
“Harry.” Voldemort is up by now, his hand on the doorknob. “I am not thinking so far ahead as taking the child home. I only want to get there before its mother dies. Are you coming?”

Harry’s stomach twists itself into a tight knot. “Yeah.”

“Good.” He pulls open the door. “Penelope?”

They cancel everything Voldemort was meant to do this afternoon. Penelope says she will tell Auror Brightbone that Harry’s had an emergency too. She doesn’t ask, but Voldemort says he will tell her later regardless. Their partnership is a strangely good one.

Voldemort needs to peel back all the security measures on his own floo before they can go. He and Harry lean subtly into each other’s touch and each other’s magic, because they know they are going to find something bad.

The Hajaya’s settlement looks approximately the same, breezy tents surrounding their single floo that has been opened specifically for Harry and Voldemort. But it’s midday and it’s quiet, everyone having retreated from the high sun. Harry throws cooling spells over them both and then they approach the medical tent, sand whisper-soft beneath their boots.

Wadha herself is in the atrium of the medical tent, a healer and shaman each staying with her. She lifts her chin as they enter. “Voldemort.”

“Is she dead?”

“Not yet.”

“The child?”

“Nor the child.”

“Good,” Voldemort mutters, and then he’s undoing his cloak and robe at his throat. “May I see her?”

Wadha’s mouth tugs. “What do you believe you have that we do not?” she chastises.

“Necromancy.”

It’s a harsh, strange answer – but Voldemort’s endured something like death before, his soul barely clinging to this world. He knows of magic that will perform the impossible. Harry’s fingers curl into Voldemort’s as Wadha leads them in.

Already it is a brutal scene: a woman lies slumped and pallid on the bed, surrounded by healers so thoroughly that Harry can scarcely spot her. By the way they move, the birth is vaginal – strange in the wixen world, when there are spells that serve as the magical equivalent of a c-section, delivering the baby through the carrier’s navel. Maybe she’d arrived too late; maybe there were complications. Every time a healer turns to strip off old gloves and put on new ones, they are caked in bright blood.

“I need your magic,” Voldemort says lowly, and pulls Harry forward.

The nearest healer, a small woman with dark twisted locs, has some harsh words of Arabic for Voldemort. His face remains impassive as he returns in Parseltongue, “I only offer my assistance, Madam.”

“Can you prep a sanguination potion?”

“Yes.”
“Do it, then.” She gestures him toward the far corner, where a cabinet of potion ingredients stands. Voldemort is incredibly unused to being spoken to in that way, but he bites his tongue and brings Harry with him. His movements are steady and practiced as he puts the potion over a burner.

And Harry… watches. There is little else for him to do. Positioned at Voldemort’s elbow, he keeps shooting glances toward the bed. The room smells of blood.

So Voldemort works quickly, competently. Harry pops open seed pods for him as he powders lungfish whiskers, and Harry takes over stirring when Voldemort needs to step away to speak to a healer. The woman – they haven’t even learned her name – has been put in a magic-induced coma, so they could slow her decline. The healers are tense, and while most of their conversation is in Arabic, the few strays bits of Parseltongue Harry catches sound dire.

His stomach hurts.

At last Voldemort takes the potion off its fire, drawing it into a syringe. “Don’t watch if it will upset you,” he murmurs to Harry before slipping into the ring of healers. And Harry didn’t know what he’d expected – all the other blood potions he knew were ingested, he supposed – but then Voldemort pushes the woman’s head to one side, finds her jugular, and injects the syringe directly into it. And then there’s a flush of magic between them as Voldemort presses his fingertip to the puncture. Her cheeks may go a bit less sallow.

But the baby isn’t coming. It’s in the wrong position, or her pelvis is too narrow, or something else has gone wrong. The healers begin arranging their equipment for a c-section.

It is strange to watch wixes work with scalpels and sutures and clamps, all the Quotidian equipment as Harry thought of it. Wixen medicine was typically bloodless and disembodied, and it just seems dire to watch the healers work like this.

Harry and Voldemort must step out of the way as they work. And Harry’s hand rubs small circles into Voldemort’s back, even as they can’t speak.

After too long a time, a healer lifts a baby up, and another severs the umbilical cord with a spell. It’s a girl. She looks so small and so pale. She’s not crying.

And then the room shifts, as they conjure a small cot to work on the baby. Most of the healers step away from the mother’s bedside. They know she will die.

He wants to take Voldemort away from this scene. It is cruel to inflict it on him. But Voldemort only pulls Harry forward, into the space left by the healers. He grips his wand tightly.

He is free to cast on her now – there is one healer packing the incision with gauze, but she only gives Voldemort a short, permissive nod as she works. Voldemort lifts his wand.

Harry doesn’t recognize many of the spells. The first of them are healing spells, ones he’s learned with the Aurors or farther back, from wartime. But then the spells go darker, tugging at their shared magic and inducing tiny fractures within their souls. Harry gasps when a spell of blue light makes his chest feel abruptly hollow, but when Voldemort looks over in alarm, Harry waves him off. “It’s fine. Just… whatever you need to do.” And then he’s pressing his own magic, all of it, into the places where they touch.

More magic, dark enough that Harry is going sick with it. Voldemort puts crystals in her limp hands and fresh herbs between her blue-tinged lips. He casts magic again and again, until his movements look more desperate than perfect.
Behind them, the baby screams.

There’s a flush of relief between them – the quiet had been so painful, more than Harry had even consciously recognized. Healers move quickly, gathering equipment and potions. There is still something wrong; they are still tense and frantic.

And the only other healer who’d been tending to the woman pushes her stool back, standing. “Sir, there is no point in it.”

“I know there’s not,” Voldemort says, and does not stop casting. The healer hesitates, then leaves them to it.

Harry can think of nothing to say. Voldemort doesn’t deserve this. He stays close, pressing warm magic into Voldemort’s flesh.

But the woman is fading. “Conjure a vial,” Voldemort mutters, and Harry looks around to find a bottle he can transfigure. Voldemort casts sterilization spells, then pricks the woman’s finger. It will be useful to have her blood, for medical history. While he’s leaning in close, he breathes, “We will provide for her.”

And then he removes Harry’s hand from his forearm. “Step away, Harry.”

A mercy kill. It’s not that Harry is opposed, he’s just so – sad. Voldemort shouldn’t have to do this; he shouldn’t have to be here at all. “I’m sorry,” he says, and he is. He leaves Voldemort to it, turning away as Voldemort is taking the herbs from the woman’s mouth and putting his wand to her lips. Their magic tugs and fractures as he casts.

Harry hovers at the outer circle of the healers tending to the baby. They’ve put most of their equipment to the side, but she’s got IVs of potions in both tiny arms and a breathing apparatus covering most of her face. Harry’s heart is twisted in pity and fear.

And when Voldemort joins him, Harry slips an arm around his waist, caring nothing for propriety. “I’m sorry,” he says again, because it’s all he is able to say.

“She did not suffer.” And they move to join the healers.

Wadha stands at the foot of the tiny cot. Apparently she’d been watching Voldemort. “Thank you.”

He shakes off the sentiment. “And the child?”

“Her magic is unstable,” Wadha says. “It is harming her.” She arches her eyebrows. “Do you know any clever magic for it, as well?”

“I don’t know that it is clever,” Voldemort says. “But yes. Where is your shaman?”

“She had only come to shepherd their souls. She does not have typical healing magic.”

“Would she perform an adoption ritual?”

Wadha’s eyebrows rise higher. “I didn’t mean to impose the baby on you. Not permanently, at least.”

“It will work.” He turns to Harry. “Say no now,” he says. “It’s nearly irreversible.”

“Are we allowed to do this?” Every other adoption had mountains of paperwork. And the signature of the birth parent. This felt illicit, and it’s not as though Harry followed rules very stringently, but it would destroy him to have this baby taken away.
Voldemort makes a vague gesture. “It’s not illegal, properly. But it won’t go uncontested.”

“If we do this – it’s got to be forever.”

“Yes.”

“Okay.”

Wadha had stepped away, returning with their shaman. “You’ll adopt her?” she asks, sizing them up.


“What magic do you have on you?”

They empty their pockets as the shaman sets up a ritual space. The healers are looking over at them with curiosity, but they must understand. Blood magic, familial magic. Harry has saved Voldemort with it before; they will both save this child with it now.

The shaman doesn’t set a space quite like the Ministry priestess had done for them before. She fills bowls with oils, casting spells so it barely smoulders, making the tent smell sweet and smoky. She drapes an enchanted cloth over the child.

Some of the healers stay close – all the diagnostics still flicker in red lights – but others drop back, watching. And Harry is very, very careful as he presses his finger into the baby’s palm. She grasps it instinctively. “There you go,” he breathes. Then, as the shaman steps in, he straightens for the ritual.

The language is unfamiliar, but the sentiment is clear. They burn herbs. Then the shaman pricks each of their fingers, drawing blood out in a tiny swirling vortex. She draws runes with it on the baby’s stomach.

She asks the child’s name. “Livia,” Voldemort offers.

Livia Felicitas. Harry can only hope it will actually bring her luck. The shaman brings together a bundle of glowing strings of magic, casting a deep chanted spell with them over Livia’s chest. Then they vanish.

They all lift their gazes to the diagnostic spell. All in red still, at first. When Harry reaches for Livia’s hand, Voldemort stops him. “It would be too much, to give her magic yet,” he murmurs.

“Just….” He’s holding her tiny fist. They watch, barely breathing, as the diagnostics drop from red to orange to yellow. The healers move in, but without the urgency of before. Harry exhales.

A daughter. They’ve got another daughter. He wades through his own complicated feelings, seeking out happiness somewhere among them.

At last the healers take the rest of the equipment off Livia. “Take her home tonight,” one of them says as he places her in Harry’s arms, “and then to a healer tomorrow. But she is strong.”

“Thank you.” Harry is pulling the blanket around Livia, as Voldemort accepts a roll of potions. They can go.

On the way out, Harry wants to stop to say something to the woman’s body, to tell her her baby is in loving hands. But somebody has already taken her away. They leave in silence.

It’s not until they step out of their own floo that Harry can really begin to think about any of this. They need a second nursery; they need ingredients for pediatric formulas; they need an appointment
ASAP with their pediatric healer. “Would you write Pembroke?” he asks Voldemort, because he doesn’t know what to say to their lawyer.

“Yes.”

“And… I can’t think,” Harry mutters, lifting his free hand to his face, scrubbing his beard.

“Would you tell the girls?”

“Yeah.” When they’d brought Cori home unexpectedly, a year and a half ago, their daughters’ reactions had been a slow burn, and really it wasn’t fair to them to give them an unstable home. Harry was supposed to pick them up from Molly in an hour, and he couldn’t think what to say to them. He brings Livia upstairs.

They’ve got a spare bedroom and furniture, and Livia can sleep in a pram until they get another crib. (The Ministry runs quite a lot of PSAs about not sleeping in conjured or transfigured beds, lest they revert overnight, so. Safety.) When Harry levitates a sofa into the corner of the room, he drops onto it, drained.

Livia is asleep in his arms. He thinks her complexion is just flushed, until he rubs it and a stray bit of blood comes off. He conjures a wet cloth and carefully cleans her face.

It was… complicated, everything he felt. He didn’t know how to handle looking down at a child – their child, now – and feeling pity and sadness first. “We will love you so much,” he promises her, just to say it aloud. She continues to sleep.

Harry goes downstairs to listen in on the floo call with their lawyer. She is understandably exasperated, telling Voldemort that taking a child without the proper legal proceedings is tantamount to kidnapping, and of course she can fix it but honestly.

And then it’s time for Harry to collect their daughters from Molly. He plasters on a smile and takes the floo over.

It’s a Friday, so Arthur is off work early, and they’re both puttering about the kitchen. “Harry?” Molly calls, and he follows her voice.

“Is everything alright?” Arthur asks as he steps through the kitchen’s threshold. Worry is already etched into his features. “We heard that the Minister left abruptly, I thought it was one of the girls….”

He should have said he’d tell them later, when he’s sorted and thinking straight. Instead, he sinks onto a kitchen chair and makes a grateful noise as Arthur hands him a beer. “Where are they?”

“Upstairs,” Molly says. “Asleep, last I checked.”

“Nice,” Harry says in surprise. He swallows a mouthful of beer. “There was another baby.”

And then he tells them the rest of it. They sit on either side of him, Molly smoothing his hair with a mother’s touch, as he tells them that a woman died that day, but her daughter lives, surviving off their magic. “I want to be happy,” he mutters. “We should be.”

He and Voldemort had talked about it before, sort of. That when Cori was older she would ask why her mother hadn’t wanted her, and then they’d have to tell her something careful and mostly true. Livia… Harry had once gotten truly angry with Voldemort when he’d said, matter-of-fact, that he had killed his own mother. It was cruel and grotesque and just a ruthless way of self-identifying. But Harry knows that Livia will come to the same conclusion, at some point. Every adoption is a loss,
Voldemort had said; but Harry doesn’t know how to speak about this one.

Molly and Arthur haven’t got a lot of practical advice on this front, but they offer what they’re best at. “Would you leave the girls here tonight?” Molly offers. “We’ll feed them and put them to bed – a new baby is always hard, but dear, I can’t imagine….”

“No. Thank you,” he amends. They need to sit down with their daughters tonight. “But in the next few weeks – while we’re figuring out how to take time off work – “

“Of course, whatever you need.”

Something in his chest loosens, finally. He gives them a smile and moves to get up before he starts crying. “Time to round up our brood, then,” he says, and goes upstairs.

The twins prefer Ron’s old room, so he goes to the top floor first, knocking on the worn door. Inside there is giggling and scrambling and then he definitely needs to let himself in, only to find Q and Phaedra rapidly disassembling a tower of pillows and blankets. Just a few feet above them is the door to the attic. “Leave the ghoul alone,” Harry reminds them, as he has to every time.

“He ate a chocolate,” Phaedra says, proudly brandishing a wrapper as proof. “He says his name is Gooey. And that he’s lonely.”

Ghouls aren’t capable of speech, so Harry is quite doubtful on both counts. “You know that we need to be careful with creatures,” he says, repacking their backpack a bit haphazardly. “They don’t all want to be your friends.”

“Gooey does.”

Harry sighs. “Okay. But if Gram and Grampa tell you no, that means no, alright? Here.” He hands them each their backpack. “Can you go downstairs, put on your shoes and say bye while I get Cori and Aura?”

Q scowls. “Leave Cori here. She cried all day.”

“So she’s probably tired herself out by now, yeah?” Harry says. “Please go put your shoes on.” They scamper.

Aura is asleep in Ginny’s room, sprawled on the bed as though she’d just passed out, because being almost 4 was an exhausting endeavor. He steps in closer to shake her awake, then does a double take. Coiled close to her chest there’s a snake. It’s one from the cellar, a hognose that’s shy and docile even for its type. Harry picks it up carefully. “How did you get here?” he asks in Parseltongue.

The snake’s dark, unblinking eyes stare back. “In the dark,” it hisses. “Your human said to be quiet.”

Fantastic. Now they’d have to check everyone’s bags for snakes every morning. “I’m putting you back,” Harry says, “and we are going home.”

“She said I would get an egg,” the snake says hopefully.

“We don’t have any eggs here. Maybe later.” And then he shakes Aura awake.

“Papa – nooo,” she wails as soon as she sees him still holding the hognose. She’s up immediately, standing on the bed to reach for it. “Don’t hurt her!”
“Of course I won’t. We don’t hurt animals. And you know what else we don’t do?” he asks sternly.

She pretends not to know, pressing her hands over her mouth to hide giggles. “No.”

“We don’t take the snakes out of the house, and we definitely don’t take them into other people’s homes without them knowing.”

“Taffy was bored.”

He takes a moment to admire his children’s naming prowess. “That’s not a reason. Here.” He drops Taffy into Aura’s backpack and hands it to her. “Go get ready to go. And just… don’t tell Gram and Grampa about the snake.”

Aura grins, pleased to have a secret. “‘Kay.”

Cori is last. Arthur and Molly had turned Percy’s room into a nursery years ago – before Percy had been reunited with his family, so he’d never want his old room back on visits. She’s asleep until Harry tries to pick her up, at which point she bellows a cry into his ear. “Hey – ow – hey – Cori, calm down, we’re just going home.” He takes her blanket from the crib, pushing it into her grasp. “Hey,” he says into the curve of her ear, like it’s a secret, because it will be the only uncomplicated thing he says tonight. “You want to be a big sister?”

Cori gurgles and flails and throws her blanket. Catching it, Harry drapes it around his neck like a scarf to make her laugh. “Let’s go home.”

He’s pleasantly surprised to find his other three children all ready with shoes and cloaks on, even if it was all Molly and Arthur’s doing. So he shifts Cori to one arm in order to accept a last kiss from Molly. “If you need anything….”

“I know. Thank you.” He takes Aura’s hand, checks that the twins are following, and lets them into the floo.

At home, there is once again the shedding of shoes and backpacks. Aura has run ahead of Harry to find Voldemort in the kitchen and she’s now telling him breathlessly that they planted a garden at school, and she got to pet a plant that feels like a bunny and and and…. Harry is smiling at her recitation as he enters the kitchen, pressing a kiss to Voldemort’s jawline as he joins him.

“I ordered dim sum,” Voldemort says. (Floo delivery was amazing.)

Phae skips in behind them. “With green tea buns?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” She’s pulling her braids out, examining how her hair has crimped against her shoulders.

“We should….” Harry makes a vague gesture. They should ruin dinner, is what he means, but it feels strange to let their daughters remain unawares that Livia is asleep upstairs now.

Voldemort is quiet. He will never trust himself with things of compassion or nurturing.

So Harry puts Cori in her high chair, spreading out some cereal to distract her. “Here, sit down. Aura – fine, bring the snake with you, but be careful with it – “

“With her.”

“With her,” Harry agrees. (They never actually sexed the snakes, and the snakes themselves didn’t
know the concept of gender, so they were whatever the girls decided they were.) “Q?”

“What?” She wanders in, pulling off her outer robes.

“Come here. We’ve got good news.”

Aura and the twins climb into their kitchen chairs. Voldemort’s got a hand at Harry’s neck, thumb rubbing at his tense trapezius. Harry fishes for the lightest, most positive way to say this. “Today we met a new baby who needed a home. From the same place where Cori was born. And we were lucky enough to be able to adopt her. Her name is Livia, and she’s upstairs right now. Do you want to meet her?”

Quiet, then a crescendo of feelings – “You didn’t tell us – “ “We’ve already got a baby – “ “Where will Cori sleep?” “Just give it back – “

“Wait, wait,” Harry pleads, because it’s not the worst possible response, but they’re all going to work themselves into hysterics if he lets it go on like this. “Listen. Ah. We didn’t know about the baby before today. Like Cori, right? Not everyone is born with parents, but these babies need homes too. And so we needed to bring her home with us.”

“Forever?” Aura asks.

God, he hopes so. “Yeah,” he says. “You want to meet her?”

“Uh-huh.”

So Voldemort charms cereal dust off Cori’s fingers before hoisting her onto his hip, and then they all trek upstairs. “You’ve got to be quiet,” Harry reminds them, casting a silencing charm in a sphere around them anyway. He lets them in.

Livia is asleep in a carrier – they’ll get another crib tomorrow, and won’t that ignite public interest – and Harry keeps the lights low as he brings his kids inside. She looks so small, even for a newborn, and he just feels so fiercely protective of her.

Q is in first, leaning close to study her. “Is she ill?”

“Well – no,” Voldemort answers, careful. “But it was a hard birth. She will get stronger in the next few weeks.”

“Is that why her mum didn’t want her?”

There’s a stabbing bit of grief lodged in Harry’s heart at this question. “No,” he answers before Voldemort can say anything. “Sometimes difficult things just happen – “

“Harry,” Voldemort interrupts, actually somehow amused, goddamn him. “No,” he says to Q. “Her mother died. That is why she had nobody.”

“Oh.” And Q sinks to the floor, sitting beside the carrier. Phae and Aura approach. Harry runs a hand across Voldemort’s back.

The wards chime then, to indicate their delivery is at the floo. Somewhere in the house, Moira is barking furiously. And the sad, quiet moment recedes into their usual chaos. “I’ve got it,” Harry says. “Ah – have you got gold?” he asks Voldemort. He must’ve emptied out his pockets unthinkingly at some point, because he hasn’t got a coin purse on him now. Voldemort hands him his own. “Cheers – give me a sec – “ And he sprints downstairs.
Finally they’re around the dining room table, platters of dim sum before them. Harry holds Livia, tipping a tiny bottle into her mouth, and he’s so relieved when she swallows the formula.

They talk over dinner – Harry was sure it would ruin it, that the girls would get too upset or riled to eat. But they are resilient. And by the end, Harry and Voldemort promise, no more babies, at least not without consulting them first. Because they deserve a stable, predictable home too. So. Five children. Five daughters. Harry can be very happy with that.

That night, Harry sets an alarm on his phone to check on Livia again. “I’ll ask Kingsley,” he says as he sets the phone on his nightstand. “But getting time off is complicated. So Molly…. I told them everything. Of course they want to help. But it’s a lot to ask of them.”

“Yes.” Voldemort is pulling on silky pyjama bottoms. “I’ll bring her into the Ministry, when I can.”

“You’ve got, y’know, a government to run.”

A wry smile. “There is less to that than you may expect.” He slips into the sheets. “Speak to Kingsley. But I would be able to take more time off than you could.”

“Thank you.” He drops his head onto Voldemort’s shoulder. “I really want to be happy. For her. For us.”

“In time,” Voldemort says.

It’s two hours later when Harry faintly hears his phone’s alarm buzzing. He shoves his face into his pillow. “Ugh.”

And then the bed shifts – Voldemort is reaching over, silencing the alarm, getting up. “No, I’ve got it – “ Harry protests, rolling over blearily.

“I was already awake. Go back to sleep.”

Voldemort would never be demonstrative, properly, in the ways he showed love. It was these smaller things that Harry cherishes, anyway. “I’ve got it next time,” he murmurs.

But he doesn’t fall back asleep after all. There’s footsteps at the door, too light to be Voldemort’s, and Harry squints into the dark to see Phaedra there. “Phae? Are you alright?”

“Uh-huh.” But she comes in anyway. Harry shifts the blankets so she can crawl in beside him. She’s 8 ½ now, and really Harry doesn’t know how old is too old for the girls to sleep in their bed anymore, but he expects this won’t last much longer. He’ll miss it. “Abba’s feeding Livia,” he says, “and then we’ve really got to sleep.”

“Can we go to Madhuri’s tomorrow?”

“I’ll floo her mum tomorrow. But yeah, probably.” He pulls her into his arms, squeezing until she giggles. “Hey. We still are going to make time for you, you know.”

“Uh-huh.”

“You were very grown-up today.”
“I know.”

He smiles at this. “Good. I’m glad.”

A beat, then: “Does that mean we can get phones now?”

Since he’s still squeezing her, it is very easy to worm his fingers into her sides, tickling until she shrieks with laughter. “Is that what you want?”

She squirms out of his grasp. “Abba said to ask you, ‘cause he doesn’t understand phones.”

Voldemort understood phones just fine, he just thought they were a curse on humanity. “You’re already with your friends at school all day. And you can already write or floo us if you ever need to. What else would you need it for?”

“Just, stuff.”

“You know, it won’t work at Hogwarts.” (Hypothetically, if anyone could jimmy the magic of Hogwarts to accept electronics, it would be Voldemort. So far he has always declined on ideological grounds.)

“That’s so far away!”

“It’ll come faster than you think,” Harry says.

Phaedra, dissatisfied with this line of inquiry, tries again. “I would take pictures,” she says. “You said I could have a camera next year, but I want this. It’s better.”

“Is it?”

“’Cause I could play the cat game, too.”

He thinks this is hilarious. “Yeah, alright. But we probably won’t have time to buy phones for a couple weeks. And we’ll have rules.”

“What rules?”

“That you’ve got to let Aura play on it sometimes,” he says, already anticipating the tantrums. “And don’t talk to strangers, and don’t put anything private online, and – ugh.” He runs a hand over his face. “You’re old enough now to understand, some people are really interested in you. And us.”

“Because you’re famous.”

Good enough. “Yeah. So you need to be especially careful. I’m sorry, it’s probably going to be weird sometimes.”

“That’s okay,” she says beneficently, and Harry grins at her.

Footfall, and then Voldemort re-enters the bedroom, holding a carrier. “She should sleep nearby, actually, until she’s stronger,” he says when Harry props himself on an elbow. Then, squinting into the darkness: “Phaedra?”

“I wanna stay. I’ll be good.”

Voldemort comes in, rearranging pillows so he can set the baby carrier between them. Livia is sleeping, her red lips parted as she breathes. Harry runs a finger over her silk-soft cheek.
“Harry?” Voldemort asks. He can be deferential about parenting, sometimes.

“You can stay. But if you can’t sleep – which, by the way, newborns don’t, not for long – then you’ll need to go back to your own bed. Okay?”

“Okay.” She sinks against the pillows. But then it’s clear that this is why she’s awake, not insignificant questions about phones. “Why did her mum die?”

She asks this of Voldemort, who is more likely to talk to them as though they are adults. Still, he pauses, choosing his words carefully. “Because pregnancy can be difficult, and dangerous. She got injured, and the healers couldn’t save her.”

“But they’ve got magic.”

Voldemort speaks over Harry’s inhalation. “Magic isn’t always enough.”

“It’s supposed to be,” Phaedra says. “It’s supposed to do everything.”

“Phaedra – this is important.” Voldemort reaches for the bedside lamp, then reconsiders. They all speak more freely in the dark. “Magic can’t do everything. It can’t create true love or life. It can’t disrupt fate. And it cannot heal death. We are powerful, but those are all bigger forces than magic.”

“But – “ She’s pushing her knuckles to her mouth, a gesture Harry hadn’t seen from her since she’d been young. He wants to hug her, to pull her into his lap and just hold her, but he can only listen in the dark. “But you won’t die,” she says all at once.

It’s not what they’d expected. Their daughters knew a bit of their past, but nothing of the Horcruxes. Voldemort said it was grotesque magic to which they should never be exposed. “Where did you learn that?” Voldemort asks. When Phaedra shrugs, he sighs. “Thank you for asking,” he tells her in a measured way. “You will hear a lot of people who believe wrong things.”

“It was in a book.”

“Ah.” He is sitting up properly, stretching out his bad leg because it’s hard for him to sit cross-legged. “There is magic between us. Not any typical sort, but a sort that is unique. It has held off death before. It may again.” His mouth quirks. “But that’s not the sort of thing one can test, is it?”

“No.”

“If we die, it won’t be for quite a long time. Well into your adulthood.”

“But you said magic….”

“Our magic is special.”

Harry had picked up his wand by now, summoning the stuffed dragon Phaedra slept with from its place in her bedroom. “Here, sweetheart.” He puts it into her arms. “Enough for tonight.”

“Okay.” And she lets Harry tug the sheets over her. Her breathing goes steady.

Harry and Voldemort can’t discuss this now, not with both Phae and Livia between them. And really, they hadn’t discussed the Horcrux since – before, since they first came together in the war. It was still extant, though, and thus they were both hypothetically immortal and/or fated only to die together. It was a strange feeling.

Voldemort is still sitting up, gazing into the dark. “You did good,” Harry offers.
His gaze flicks back to him. “Thank you.”

“We should… talk about it. Later. And also move those books to a higher shelf.”

He clicks his tongue. “They are clever. They will find what they want to find. Didn’t you?”

“Well. Hermione did, typically.”

“Of course.”

“Oh, also we’re getting Q and Phaedra phones now.”

“You are so soft,” Voldemort says, amused.

“Yeah,” Harry agrees.

And then they fall quiet. And when Harry is awakened by his alarm again in a few hours, he shuts it off before either Phaedra or Voldemort can stir. “Come here, sweetie,” he says into the dark, gathering Livia’s sleepy warmth into his arms. And as he carries her out, so they can warm up formula in their potions lab, he’s humming wixie lullabies with his mouth pressed to her delicate scalp. He doesn’t remember where he’d learned them. Maybe Molly? Or maybe Voldemort himself, in those moments of peace Harry dare not disturb. Who’s to say.
When Harry Meets Scorpius (April 2019)

Chapter Notes

This takes place 1.5 years after the previous chapter; I just got tired of writing about infants. Also welcome to ~the future,~ as this chapter is set in April 2019 but I am posting in February 2019. The dates aren't particularly correlated to real life events, just a way of marking how much time passes between each chapter.

Scorpius, my beloved cinnamon roll <3

They continue to make parenthood work, mostly. In the year after Livia is born, Voldemort will take her into the Ministry more often than not, where she’ll sleep in his office or in his arms as he attends to people’s problems. Occasionally Harry can bring her into his Auror’s training, and they both rely on Molly, but – well, all the journalists on the Ministry beat get a lot of photos of Voldemort as a parent, anyway. They try asking him about it, too, but even with Livia – whom they begin calling Ivy, a less weighty name for her sweet inquisitive personality – swaddled at his chest he will tell them that he has no particular insights into the intricacies of parenting, but he’d be happy to tell them about his newest legislation. His relationship with the press is only marginally antagonistic.

Cori and Aura both thrive in preschool. They are both extroverts, which neither Harry nor Voldemort really expected or know how to handle. So Harry is now dropping Aura off with Blaise’s daughter Mila or Fred’s son Julian or Percy’s daughter Lucy most afternoons, until finally Blaise says curtly that they might as well have a standing arrangement, that he’ll bring Aura home with him twice a week unless Harry says otherwise. And Blaise has always been cool if not hostile to Harry, so he’s entirely surprised by this offer. “Thanks,” he says, to which Blaise only nods.

Cori becomes best friends with Luna’s twins. When Luna offers to take her on a day trip to go find Humdingers, Harry has a long debate with Voldemort about their responsibility for teaching their children fact from fiction, especially with the weirdness of growing up with magic, such that cause and effect are not always a given. Voldemort tells him to preserve their daughters’ sense of wonder while they are young, which is quite funny, for him. So Cori is dressed in sturdy shoes and a wide-brimmed hat and allowed to go look for Humdingers.

Harry and Voldemort are still cautious about what they will reveal of their past to their children, but they scarcely need to be. One day they enter the library to find that the twins had left out one of those books, and Aura is now happily coloring a page with the image of the Dark Mark in cheerful oranges and pinks. Voldemort is actually at a loss for words for a moment, and then he takes the book, ripping out the page to stick it to the fridge. It stays there for a very long time, and Harry delights in how horrified his friends are when they notice it. Aura beams.

The world falls in love with Voldemort when he comes into the Ministry one day with a rainbow of nail polish still on his hands, leftover from Phaedra the night before. Witch Weekly runs an article that is entirely too long for the subject, and Molly is noticeably warmer toward Voldemort the next time he picks up their daughters. “It is embarrassing,” he says to Harry, “how desperate they are to like me.”

“I bet you feel silly, putting on two wars when you could’ve just painted your nails.”
“Immensely.” But he is pleased, really. The re-election will be held later this year, and he intends not only to run but to win handily. His rapport with the wixen world is valuable.

And then there’s the day in April when he and Draco receive matching summons from their children’s school.

They were in the academic half of their day – Auror Squire was delivering a lecture on poisons as Harry furiously took notes – and when the two purple envelopes wiggle beneath the door, she doesn’t notice them, though everyone else does. Harry and Draco had been sitting at adjacent tables, and exchange a look as they read the front of the envelopes stamped with For immediate action: disciplinary notification from Magullus Primary School.

It is a summons, that Harry needs to go pick up Q and presumably Draco needs to pick up Scorpius. Harry clears his throat. “Squire?”

She turns away from the board. “Yeah?”

Apologetically he holds up the envelope. “We’ve got to go.”

She’s not happy, and it’s only after Harry and Draco both promise to do extra homework (yes, they get homework) are they allowed to leave.

They walk the Ministry’s corridors briskly. “So, which of them started it?” Harry asks, mostly kidding.

Draco gives him a dry look. “Yours. Absolutely yours.”

“Why mine?”

“You’ll see.”

And so he does. When they enter the headmistress’s office, Harry finds Q with her arms crossed over her chest, and a boy who looked like Draco but with soft curves everywhere in his face where Draco had sharp lines. He looks deeply in need of protection.

Harry had heard about Scorpius, from Draco and from the twins. He’d thought their children were friendly if not properly friends, at least. Apparently not.

The headmistress looks over them both as though they are also in trouble. “Your children,” she says crisply, “were caught staging a duel. Ms. Povinelli had to separate them and confiscate their wands.”

Training wands were only allowed at school on designated days. Harry had gotten lax in checking that the girls had left theirs at home otherwise. When the headmistress sets Q’s wand before them, Harry takes it before she can. “Wands are a privilege,” he tells her at her pout. “That you are going to lose. You know dueling is dangerous. What if you had hurt Scorpius?”

“What if Scorpius hurt her?” Draco adds, a bit defensive, even though it was clear Scorpius may not even be capable of hurting anyone.

Harry suppresses an eyeroll. “Sure, yeah. You don’t want to hurt anyone.”

“Scorpius challenged me to a duel!” Q protests.

“She called me a swot!”
“You are, though,” Q says as though she’s being reasonable.

“I’m not!”

“Q,” Harry says before she can fire back Are too. “You need to get along. With everyone. You still have years of being classmates, so you may as well be friends. God, you might have the rest of your lives together. Look at me and Malfoy – Draco – Scorpius’s dad.”

“You aren’t friends,” Q says with frightening honesty.

“We weren’t, growing up. And now – well, we trust each other. We’ve got to.”

“But you dueled.”

“Yes, and it was wrong. Malfoy’s – Scorpius’s dad has probably still got scars,” Harry says, shooting a glance in Draco’s direction. He hadn’t known what Sectumsempra would do, when he’d found it in Snape’s textbook; but at the end of their sixth year, Harry had accused Malfoy of casing the castle for Voldemort, and Malfoy had snapped that Harry would see his mutt of a godfather again soon, and then – then Malfoy ended up bleeding out in a remote corridor, and Harry had had to summon Snape with his Patronus. It was still an awful memory.

“Of course I’ve got scars,” Malfoy mutters, not interested in reliving the moment.

“Exciting ones,” Scorpius says, as though proud of him.

“Scorpius,” but Malfoy’s mouth twitches.

“Please, please don’t be like we were,” Harry begs Q. “It’s not worth it. Nothing about our time at Hogwarts was better because we were – rivals, I guess.” Enemies should probably be reserved for Voldemort alone.

“Except Quidditch,” Malfoy says.

Harry glares. “Not helpful,” he informs him. “Anyway, I didn’t realize you liked losing so much – sorry,” he says when the headmistress looks over her glasses at him, unimpressed. “Fighting isn’t worth it,” he reiterates to Q. “Ever. And now you need to apologize to Scorpius.”

She obviously doesn’t want to. “Sorry,” she mutters in Scorpius’s direction.

“For?” Harry prompts.

“Saying you were a swot.”

“And?”

“And that’s it.”

“And for trying to duel. Sorry,” he adds to the headmistress. “And to their teacher. And to the rest of the class.”

Maybe this is too abstract for Q, or maybe she’s just not contrite enough. She shrugs. Harry sighs, scrubbing at his beard. “It’s about time to go, isn’t it?” he asks, looking to his wristwatch. “We’re going to wait for Phaedra to get out of class, and then we’re going home.”

“Not to Gram’s?”
“Nope.” He’s pinning her cloak on straight, getting ready to go. “I had to leave work to come get you, what do you think of that? – Have you got your backpack?”

“No.”

“We’ll get it when class lets out, then. There.” And then he stands, reaching for Q’s hand even though she’s sort of too old to want or need it. “I’m sure you wish your school had summoned Abba instead. He’s hopeless at proper punishment.”

Malfoy shoots an amused look over Scorpius’s head. “You’re the mean one?”

“I’m the mean one,” Harry agrees. “See you tomorrow.”

They walk out separately. When Malfoy and Scorpius are a good distance away, Harry watches Malfoy hand his son his wand back. It’s probably for the best. But he’s glad Q doesn’t notice.

Q and Phaedra are in different classes this year, so when Phaedra exits her classroom shortly thereafter to find Harry and Q on a small bench, she looks as though something is wrong. “What happened?”

“Scorpius and I dueled,” Q tells her, proud.


“I was going to cast that oil slick spell – “

“No no no,” Harry interrupts. “She did nothing. Poor Ms. Povinelli broke it up. And now I’m taking you both home.”

“Oh.” Phaedra falls in step with Q. “Will he be okay?”

Q glares. “He would’ve been fine.”

“You can’t hurt him. We’re friends. And he’s the best at catching bowtruckles at recess.”

By now Harry is walking a bit behind his children, fascinated. He hadn’t known Phaedra and Scorpius were friends. He hadn’t known Q and Phaedra had different friends at all.

Q shrugs. “Maybe.” But then they draw closer together, and Phaedra is showing Q an assignment her class had done, and they’re giggling and chattering in a mix of English and Parseltongue. Normally Harry stops them from speaking Parseltongue in public – he worries that people will make some wrong assumptions about them – but today he lets it go.

The next morning, both he and Malfoy arrive in the Aurors’ locker room early. “Hey,” Harry says, shoving Malfoy’s shoulder in a jocular way as he passes. “Sorry for yesterday.”

Malfoy sort of rolls his eyes at him. “Potter, it’s fine. He’ll live, if you can believe it.”

“How did you end up with…..” He stops, but his aborted question still hangs there. “He’s less like you than I thought he’d be,” he says more tactfully.

Malfoy is not offended. He may even be a bit entertained. “If my parents weren’t dead, Scorpius’s entire existence would have killed them. Do you know how long a streak of Malfoys in Slytherin Scorpius is going to break?”
“I bet you do.”

“Three hundred years, back to when the near-squib Eliezer Malfoy bargained with the sorting hat to be put in Hufflepuff rather than being thrown out. So the family lore goes, at least.”

“Great. Fantastic. Hufflepuff would be lucky to have him.” It’s the only thing Harry and Voldemort have committed to saying to their own children re: Hogwarts houses, because they refused to let one another pressure the girls into either Slytherin or Gryffindor.

“Thank you, Potter.” Malfoy is pulling on his flying gloves, because they were training on brooms this week and Harry was so happy for it. A moment later, and he adds, “I probably spoiled him. Genevieve didn’t. She had loftier ideas about parenting, that we were raising a citizen of the world and so on. But then she was put on bedrest, and we would give Scorpius whatever got us all through the worst of things. It’s a wonder those years didn’t make him monstrous.”

Harry knows he’s no longer allowed to say sorry about Malfoy’s dead wife. He lets the silence stand in for it anyway.

“Tom doesn’t spoil him either.” Malfoy gives him a wry look as though he already knew that Harry was curious. “He says charm and emotional intelligence are underappreciated as fundamentally Slytherin qualities, that will serve Scorpius well regardless.”

Harry blinks at this. “I didn’t know he… parented.”

“He doesn’t like the idea either,” Malfoy promises. “And yet he’s more available to Scorpius daily than I am. Scorpius doesn’t understand – everything,” (that Tom had been a Horcrux, was arguably not alive, was sort-of literally Voldemort even if their magic had long ago been severed) “and we don’t intend to tell him. Please say you’ve decided upon something similar for your children.”

“No. Of course not. It’d give them nightmares.”

“Good.” He belts on the leather over-trousers.

“D’you want to come over sometime?” Harry asks, dying of curiosity now. “I mean, all of you. If Scorpius and Phae are friends anyway, it can be a playdate.”

“You don’t feel like we already spend too much time together? At least this,” Malfoy gestures around the locker room, “I am compensated for.”

“Git,” Harry says fondly. “I’m having a birthday party this summer. Everyone comes. You’ll get an invitation now, too.”

“Daphne always brings back mildly interesting if not remotely useful gossip from your galas. So does Pansy, in the years she and Lovegood are pretending to have a real relationship.”

“Good. Come see for yourself, then.”

“Verbal invitations are for plebeians,” Malfoy informs him. “But fine. I’ll bring wine.”

Harry is still worrying this conversation when he arrives home that night. He finds Voldemort in the kitchen just beginning dinner as Ivy plays in a playpen nearby, merrily beating a stuffed niffler with a wooden spatula. “Ivy,” Harry says, dodging the spatula so he can scoop her up and hug her, “that looks like it hurts the niffler.”
“Yeah,” she says happily.

Then a hug for Voldemort, slipping in beside him to begin washing and chopping broccoli. “Good day?”

“Yes. I saw Remus and Severus today. Together,” he clarifies.

“Why? – Oh, the repeal?” he guesses. Hermione and a vocal minority of the Wizengamot had burned through a lot of political capital, trying to get the werewolf registry repealed. It wouldn’t happen until Voldemort’s next term at the earliest, but he was priming all the Wizengamot members likely to still have their seats then. It was among the work of Voldemort’s that Harry was proudest of, and even moreso how proud he was of Hermione for pursuing it.

“Yes. And Snape’s developed more effective wolfsbane, but if he releases it now, it will be the Ministry’s intellectual property. Neither of us want him to cede his work so easily.”

Snape worked as an Unspeakable on dark magic now. It gave him and Remus a more comfortable standard of living than either of them had grown up with. Remus had told Harry that he still bought used books, but now it could be for mere sentimentality. So. Voldemort had been good for them, and had opened pathways for them from his limited position. It was useful.

“That’s really good for him,” Harry agrees. “And it’ll help Hermione?”

“It must.”

“Nice.”

“I also met Ms. Cho Chang today.”

This was far more surprising, and far less welcome. “Uh, why?”

“She just stepped in as Acting Head of Magical Games and Sports. Bagman is taking a sabbatical, though I don’t expect he’ll return at the end of it.”

“Oh.” He puts the cast iron pan on the range, waiting for it to heat before adding the broccoli. “How was it?”

“Fine. She spoke of building a new stadium, more accessible to the Quotidians. She says their interest in Quidditch is underwhelming, but a mage-Olympics would unify us. She had already drafted a budget for it.”

“Nice.” Broccoli, hot pan, cracked salt and pepper. “She’s really… we’ve avoided each other for this long, and we really shouldn’t have. We just ended, ah, miserably. I should see her sometime.”

“You should join us next time she discusses Quidditch.”

Harry grins. “You know enough to know if the girls’ teams played well or poorly.” (Q played in a children’s rec league, and Aura in a modified game for 5 and 6 year olds. Each was its unique sort of adorable.) “And what happened to your entire, Sports are the populist sublimation of violence and we need them for a functional society? That bull… stuff.” Ivy was the perfect age to learn all the words he’d rather she not learn.

Voldemort beams at him. “I hadn’t thought you were listening when I said those things.”

“Sure. I mean, you’re wrong, but I was listening. And… let me see Cho first, on my own. So the
worst parts of our relationship don’t ruin your next meeting with her.”

“Thank you.”

“I like the idea of a wixie Olympics. We won’t see the Quidditch cup here anytime soon anyway, our national teams are rubbish.”

“Surely they could just recruit better players?”

“You’d think.” He tosses the pan, making it sizzle. “And… I talked to Malfoy this morning?”

“Yes? – Tempeh or tofu?”

“Ah. You choose. And so I told him Scorpius was just. Surprising. Sweet. And he said Tom’s been useful as a – parent, or whatever. And then I said we should have them over. And then I invited them to my birthday.”

“Good.”

“Is it?” Harry gives him a sidelong glance. “You don’t keep in touch with them or anything, do you?”

“Minimally. Everything I should know about Draco, I learn from you.”

Harry cops to this with a grin. “He introduced me as his most trying frenemy last week, to all the new recruits.”

“And Corvus,” (the Horcrux’s pseudonym, along with some strategic glamours) “has had little use for me since his magic stabilized a decade ago. Are you concerned whether we may occupy the same spaces?”

“Maybe. If, I dunno, someone notices you both move the same way or whatever.”

Voldemort considers this. “I don’t believe we do, actually. I had to relearn all of those gestures in this body, after forgetting them all in dispossession. There would be no continuity.”

“Ugh,” Harry protests, and his shudder is only half-performative.

“I have probably heard more recently from the diadem than the locket.”

“Really?” The Horcruxes had both parted ways with Voldemort as soon as they’d been severed. Harry had heard literally nothing from the diadem since the end of his time at Hogwarts, nearly twenty years ago. “Did he need something?”

“Forged documents. He,” (Voldemort overpronounces the word to mock Harry, as he generally refers to the Horcruxes as it otherwise) “has spent most of his time in Albania, but he wants British research now. I don’t know why,” he adds to head off Harry’s question.

“Still with the vampires?”

“Yes.”

“That’s so fucked.” The vampires of Albania had severed the Horcruxes to begin with, nearly killing Voldemort in order to take back his immortality. But they’d mentored Tom when he’d been young, and apparently they were again. Fucked.
Voldemort presses the block of tofu before him. “He seems satisfied. He built a greenhouse. And a stable, for thestrals.”

This all makes Harry’s head hurt. “Malfoy said they’ll never tell Scorpius about – Tom. I think he’s right.”

Voldemort clicks his tongue, amused. “Perhaps Q would feel more appropriately protective of Scorpius if they thought of themselves as family.”

“Ew. No.”

“Cousins?” he suggests, now just mischievous.

“That is grotesque,” but Harry is laughing.

And then there’s an indignant shriek from behind them. Ivy, obviously feeling that she’d been left out for long enough, has pulled herself standing at the edge of the playpen. When she’s got their attention, she pitches the stuffed niffler right at the stove. If not for Harry’s reflexes, it probably would have caught fire. “Good arm,” he says approvingly. “Should we give you one of Aura’s Quaffles for practice?”

“Yeah,” Ivy says happily, though of course she doesn’t know what he’s saying. And for the rest of their time making dinner, Harry keeps Ivy on his hip, giving her bits of broccoli to chew on as they work.
When Harry and Voldemort Celebrate Alone Together (August 2019)

Chapter Notes

Oh look, the first significant time they spend alone together in like 100,000 words. The chapter is slow to get there too, but I needed to mark some time of both character and political development.

The summer of 2019 was a summer of campaigning. The Minister faced re-election every seven years, and Voldemort’s first term was just ending. There were a lot (a *lot*) of articles that led with some version of the question, “Are we better off than we were seven years ago?”

But they were, honestly. The Quotie and wixen economies were integrated in generally beneficial ways. Employment laws had been changed so there were more opportunities to work across worlds. Voldemort had signed arts, business, and research grants into law as often as he could, because he said this was an era for growth and celebration of their culture.

The last of this headed off most of the reactionaries, the ones who wanted to argue that the magical world was being subsumed by the larger one. “We are fortunate to be able to share our talents with you,” Voldemort would say in the shows and press conferences that showcased wixie advancements for interworld consumption. It was really hard to argue with.

So they were lucky that all of Voldemort’s plausible opponents ran from the right, arguing that he had made too many changes to their world too quickly, or that he was too young and too much of an outsider, or that his *celebrity* didn’t make him credible as a politician.

The Wizengamot spends a lot of time at their home. Hermione spends at lot of time there in particular, such that Harry thinks Voldemort must see more of her than he does. She brings Leo and Imogen to play with the twins on weekends, and then she and Voldemort shut themselves in his office to argue about legislation. She wants human-equivalent rights for elves; Voldemort says slavery and colonization are among Britain’s proudest traditions and her proposals will get her censured in the Wizengamot. So.

Harry is reaching the end of Auror training, with a bit more muscle and a lot more scars. He hasn’t begun to specialize, but he enjoys stakeouts and raids the most. “It’s like you want to die,” Malfoy tells him when he’s mopping blood off his face, the remnants of a broken nose when the suspect ran.

“I’m not going to die,” Harry promises. And Malfoy gives him a side-eye, because he understands that with the Horcrux, this is literally true.

Malfoy is good with forensics and reconstructing the crime scene; Bia is good at interviews and mock-interrogation (they wouldn’t get to actually interrogate difficult subjects for another few years, when Kingsley said they’d be more “grizzled,” and maybe that was a joke and maybe it wasn’t); and Orla is good at keeping up with black markets and organized crime. They’ve seen one another through a lot, by now.

But the first time they appear in the papers together and bloody Rita Skeeter writes that the sexual tension between and Malfoy is palpable, they both think they should strangle her.
Harry works weird hours, to accommodate Voldemort and to watch his children grow. Q and Phaedra are 10 now, and they’d funny and thoughtful and sweet kids. Their Hogwarts letters will arrive next January, and while they haven’t started school shopping yet, Harry and Voldemort have spent some time discussing going-away gifts. They need to be perfect.

The younger three are all very much children: Aura had turned 6 in June, and had spent most of this summer at Fred’s house, with his son Julian, digging around in the gardens and chasing gnomes. Cori was 3 and Ivy was 2, and they’d begun to play together in ways that make Harry’s heart melt. It was his favorite thing to be lying on the floor with his daughters, staging great dramas of animals and dolls and spaceships.

One time Aura and Julian have a great battle scene set up across the tearoom. “Did you ever ride hippogriffs in the war?” she asks when Harry enters to offer them lunch.

“Ah – no, we didn’t.”

“Why not?”

“We didn’t have a hippogriff herd at Hogwarts at the time. We used thestrals sometimes. Real ones,” he adds, because his children only know thestrals as the Patronus he and Voldemort share.

“Make these thestrals?” Aura holds up a handful of hippogriff figures.

“Sure.” He transfigures them, until Aura is holding a handful of miniature leathery thestrals.

“How was it?” She’s setting up the herd in a tight formation against the flanking dolls.

“Mum said there’s this time – “ Julian is taking up two dolls, dropping them on top of a stack of pillows. “She hid in the trees!”

Harry will tell them nothing about any battles. In the past few years some people have formed war re-enactment societies and he hates them; he’s not making the war into a plaything for his children too. “Can you clean up in a half hour for lunch?” he asks.

“We can eat here,” Aura offers brightly.

“Nice try. Here.” He charms a clock above the door, with a wedge in purple until he’ll come back for them. Aura scrunches her nose and balances a thestral atop a train.

The week of the election, Harry takes night shifts so they don’t have to worry about childcare, so he can be fully responsible for getting their daughters to daycare and summer camp and friends’ houses, and then he’ll cook dinner, and when Voldemort gets home in the evenings, Harry can depart for a shift on security in Diagon Alley. Recently he’s been paired with more experienced Aurors, so he gets a night each with Tonks and Ginny, corralling drunk wizards to the apparition points nearby. He begs Voldemort to sleep enough this week, but he will still come home in the pre-dawn to find him awake again, looking over tax law.

“I’m taking you on holiday,” Harry murmurs in one of these mornings. “Leave the girls here. Just us. To celebrate.”

“Thank you for your confidence, but – “ Somehow Voldemort is less certain of this election than the last one. He’s told Harry it’s bad luck to talk about it as an inevitability.
“Fine. We’re going anyway. Could we leave the day after the election?” At Voldemort’s look, he shrugs. “No point in waiting. I know the Wizengamot is recessed through the end of August anyway.” He falls into bed, upsetting the books spilt open around Voldemort. “Tell them you won’t be reachable for that week. And that’s it. I’m going to surprise you.” And then he’s barely awake for long enough to set his alarm.

The morning of the election, Harry wakes Voldemort with a blowjob for luck. Then he sends him to the Ministry where he and all the other candidates will be sequestered with the Wizengamot to deliberate their appointment.

Harry spends that day with Ron, as their kids play together. And Ron and Hermione’s oldest son Max is visiting for the summer, and Harry’s asked him to watch after their oldest three kids while they’re traveling. Max, now 19 and charmingly dorky in a self-confident way, asks if he can bring his girlfriend around because she loves snakes and kids equally. Of course Harry says yes.

(And when he and Ron are alone later with a football match on, Harry asks in some disbelief, “How the hell are you old enough to have an adult child?” And Ron only sighs and shoves a handful of crisps in his mouth.)

Late in the afternoon, Ron’s phone rings with the first few notes of All Apologies. Hermione’s ringtone. He grabs it, thumbing the call open. “Hi babe – yeah, he’s here.” Pause, listen. “There was trouble? – A duel? – And now Voldemort’s strangling Amelia Bones with her own hair? – “

Harry, who’d gone through quite a lot of emotions in that fraction of a second, shoves Ron’s shoulder and steals away the mobile. “Hermione?”

“I apologize for my husband,” Hermione says in a sigh.

Harry grins. “I apologize for him too. Did the election go alright?”

“Well, yes.” She says it with some hesitation. “That is, he got re-elected. He’ll tell you more. He asked if you could get your daughters to the Ministry tonight?”

“Sure, yeah. Is he around?”

“Mmm…” She pulls the phone away and Harry can hear the ambient buzzing of the Wizengamot chambers. “I’m not sure. I think he and some of the cabinet stepped out.”

He could text Penelope then. “Sure. I’ll see you in a bit, then? Should Ron come, too?”

“Yes, please. Tell him I need a date.”

“She says you’re arm candy tonight,” Harry tells Ron, and he can hear Hermione laughing as he hands back the mobile.

A lot of charms to clean clothes and untangle hair and shine shoes later, and then Harry is shepherding all five children to the floo. At least they can take the one into Voldemort’s office directly, not a public floo, but Harry still watches anxiously as Q and Phaedra go in first. Then he arranges the younger three around himself and throws down a handful of powder.

Into Voldemort’s office. The décor is sparse, though not as sparse as he prefers, and the portrait of
Ulick Gamp, the first Minister, clicks his tongue as Harry enters. “Where is that boy?” he asks. “Leaving you to your offspring all alone!”

Harry gathers from context that the boy in question is Voldemort himself, which would doubtless annoy him. “It’s fine,” he says, picking bits of ash off Ivy’s tiny dress robes. “Is he around?”

Gamp doesn’t answer, and when Harry looks up at the silence, he is gone. Well.

Already the girls are causing trouble, as Phaedra opens Voldemort’s desk and Aura takes a fistful of quills. “Put those down – hey. Listen. Ministry behavior?” he addresses the twins first.

Phae shrugs. Q nods. They’d bargained with Harry earlier, that if they were allowed to wear their sari-inspired robes (Padma’s daughter Madhuri had enough to play dress-up in, and when a journalist had gotten photos of all three girls dressed up and out with Padma, it had sparked interest in some British Indian designers, who had mailed Q and Phaedra their own saris. They adored them), then they’d behave tonight. Harry had shrunk a few books into a small purse Phae wore at her shoulder, so they could entertain themselves.

“Aura,” he says next. “Good behavior?”

She puckers her lips. “I’m hungry.”

“There will be food – actually, I don’t know what sort. Maybe they’ll have those dirigible plum tarts again, the ones you liked last time? But I need to hear that you’re going to be good.”

“Oh-huh.” She’s putting the quills out in a line across the desk.

There’s no point asking his 2 and 3 year olds, who will do as they please, but it doesn’t matter because the door clicks open then.

Voldemort enters, alone. “Harry.” He seems gratified if not surprised to see him.

“Hey.” Harry steps away from the desk, crossing the office to shut the door and then kiss Voldemort. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you.” And when Ivy toddles over to attach herself to his legs, he lifts her and props her onto a sofa, falling onto it himself afterward. “Tonight is a reception, not dinner. Should I assign an intern to mind our children?”

“Ew, no,” Q protests, though Voldemort hadn’t been addressing her. “We’re not babies.”

“Cori and Ivy quite arguably are. Come here;” he adds, and Q does, twirling as she comes since he’s clearly studying the sari. “People will write that I’ve become an imperialist,” he mutters, taking in the outfit.

“Who’s going to say that?” Harry asks dubiously. “Nobody else even thinks like that.”

Voldemort makes a tired gesture. “The election was contentious. I was accused of both fascism and anarchy, by some of the same – ”

The next word was going to be twats or something like it; he censors himself. “Wizards. And apparently I have effected both too much and too little change.”

The Minister really needed to maintain a good relationship with the Wizengamot. “Who said that?”

“People who will settle back into complacency within the month,” Voldemort assures him. “It is
Sometimes it drives Harry mad that Voldemort won’t tell him everything about the Ministry, but now is not the time. “Okay,” he says. “D’you need to change or anything? Or run home?”

“No.” He pulls open a coat closet, lifting a few ornate overcloaks off the rack. “Which should I wear tonight?” he asks their daughters.

They swarm, poring through the sumptuous fabrics. Harry lifts Ivy so she might look too. “Which one do you like, baby?” And he laughs when she reaches to grab at a velvet cloak and jolt back again at the unexpected sensation.

Aura picks out a black coat with a swirling green and purple pattern along the bottom; Phae picks out a luminous selenite clasp. They go.

Harry has gotten better – if not properly good – at handling formal events on Voldemort’s behalf, so he’s prepared for the bustling ballroom already filled with Ministry officials. He’s carrying Ivy so she doesn’t toddle off, and Voldemort’s got Cori’s hand in his, and the twins are whispering together in Parseltongue (which they really need to stop), and Aura’s mouth hangs open as she takes in the spectacle.

There’s the rapid noise of camera shutters as they enter, and Harry’s got to keep his face neutral, because otherwise all the papers run photos of him scowling, and it’s just not a great look. But Aura whirls around. “Who’s got cameras?”

“Ahh…” Harry looks. The Prophet’s correspondent and the Galleon’s. Nobody from the Quibbler, yet. “We don’t know them. I’m sure they’ll ask for posed photos soon.”

“I’m going to be famous,” Aura tells them happily.

There’s a moment of silence between them. Aura is their first extrovert, and neither Harry nor Voldemort know what to do with that. “You can be when you’re older,” Harry finally says.

Pout. “But you were.”

“Not at 6. We’re going to say hi to people now.”

They circle the room, and all the Ministry offers its congratulations. Harry gathers from these conversations what Voldemort has promised in his next term: trademarking magic for Quotidian manufacturing, integrating more Quotie tech in the magical world, changing policies on imports and tariffs, getting a magical university in Britain at last. Harry plays his part as the supportive husband, asking after people’s families and personal lives to soften everything Voldemort has to say about policy.

Finally the girls are hungry and bored, and Harry splits off to take them to eat. “I wanna stay,” Q protests, and Phae nods. They’d been listening fairly attentively, aided by Voldemort explaining what they’d been talking about between conversations.

So Harry looks to Voldemort, who shrugs. “If you’d like.”

Fine. Harry carries Ivy, takes Cori’s hand, and makes Aura walk in front of them to go eat.

And when they’re seated at a table later, with Harry cutting bits of fruit into small pieces for Ivy and Cori smashing a mini quiche to dust on her plate, Aura is bouncing in her seat. “Is Abba giving a speech?”
“Uh – probably, actually.” Harry pulls out toddler-sized utensils for Ivy. “In a little bit.”

“I wanna go with him.”

“He’s not going anywhere. He’ll do it on the stage here.”

“Yeah. There.”

“Oh. Mm, it’s probably best if we watch from the front row. I don’t think kids are allowed on the stage,” Harry lies smoothly. And so Aura sinks into disappointment, expressing it by dropping her remaining cauliflower fritters into their sauce.

At some point, Ron and Hermione arrive, with Lee Jordan in tow. “There they are,” Lee says happily as they pick their way through the crowd. “The heirs of Slytherin, looking as charming as ever.”

Harry grimaces and wipes off Ivy’s hands. “Don’t say it like that.”

“Has your daddy told you where the basilisk is hidden?” Lee addresses Ivy, who cocks her head and then offers him a strawberry. “Thank you.”

“Was hidden,” Harry corrects. “And no, absolutely not.”

“Pity. Where’s your twins?”

“Mmm….” He glances into the crowd. It’s a constant force in his life, the way his soul is strung together with Voldemort’s, so he scarcely needs to look for them. “There. Talking with – who is that?” he asks Hermione, who’s more connected to all the bureaucrats than he is.

She follows his gaze. “Chancellor Bright’s new assistant. I should speak to her too tonight, actually….”

Ron catches Hermione’s arm before she rises. “Time for that later,” he says. “Here.” And he intercepts a floating tray of prosecco in mid-air, setting a flute before her.

“The twins wanted to stay with him,” Harry shrugs. “They’re getting old enough to… care, I guess?”

Surprisingly, Hermione smiles at this. “I loved listening in on the adults’ conversation at that age. It felt grown up,” she pronounces precisely. “I’m not surprised.”

Harry should have considered this, but at 10 he only wanted to get as far from his relatives and their business associates as possible. “Guess we spent enough time trying to listen in on the Order,” he agrees. “It’s just new, their interest. Or I hadn’t noticed before. But now….” He gestures. “They get to meet everyone important.”

“Lucky them,” Ron says, swallowing prosecco in a gulp.

Aura has shoved her plate away, and she’s now eyeing Lee’s recorder. “Interview me,” she commands, reaching for it.

“Aura – don’t touch – “ Harry chides.

Lee takes up the recorder smoothly, speaking into it. “Tonight I have the pleasure of an exclusive interview with Aurelia – what is your full name?”

“Aurelia Faustine Bluebell Hedwig Strawberry Gaunt-Potter.”
“Beautiful,” he says. “An exclusive interview with Aurelia et cetera et cetera. Who are you wearing tonight?”

She plucks at her robes, a gauzy blue with inset panels like stained glass. “This is Grandma’s,” she says happily.

Lee glances at Harry for elaboration. “It is,” he says. “My mum’s. We’ve only altered a few of her robes, we’ll save the rest for when the girls are older.”

“Brilliant,” Lee says, in a way that makes Harry wonder if that detail really will end up in the Quibbler. To Aura: “You’ll be back in school soon. What are you looking forward to?”

“Mmm.” She’s playing with the mic cord, wrapping it around her finger. “Seeing the frogs in the pond, and the gnomes. We’re making them play with us.”

“The gnomes?” Ron cuts in in disbelief.

“Uh-huh. They’ll play tag, but we always win.”

“’Xpect it’s because you’ve got much longer legs.”

She shrugs. “As long as we win,” she reiterates, and Harry files that away for a conversation about fairness later. And another conversation about not playing with gnomes, because they probably carry some awful diseases.

Floating trays of canapes and puff pastries present themselves to the table; Lee lifts a plate easily as he asks Aura, “And what don’t you like about school?”

Aura scowls. “No magic.”

“Yeah? You’ve got a wand, then?”

“Uh-huh. Look, it’s – at home,” she amends, dropping her hand from where she’d been reaching for an inner pocket of her robes.

“Aura!” Harry is equal parts amused and exasperated.

“It’s at home,” she insists, and clutches at the wand even as Harry neatly accio it from her pocket.

“You,” he gestures with the wand – handle first because they drill wand safety into the girls from birth – “know better. This doesn’t leave the house unless we say so. What would you even need it for?” He pockets it alongside his own. “You can have it back tonight. Maybe.”

Lee clicks his tongue as Aura slumps in her seat, wrinkling the fine fabrics of her robe. “Interview over, then,” he says cheerily. “How about you, Cori? Anything to add?” He holds out the mic to her.

“Umm.” She chews on the straw of her fruit juice. “Abba – “

They look up because she was the first to see Voldemort approaching, shepherding the twins before him. “Hey,” Harry says, summoning a chair beside himself for Voldemort as the twins clamber into chairs on either side of Ron. “Do you need to give a speech?”

“Yes. Soon.”

“Should I be there?”
Voldemort pauses. “Would you want to be?”

“Yeah, sure.”

He nods and takes a glass from a floating tray. Harry flags down an elf to ensure he and the twins all eat, because by previous experience he knows Voldemort isn’t thinking about such trifling things as food at state functions.

Finally it’s time to speak. When Voldemort rises, so do the twins, because they’d apparently discussed this. And so does Aura, whose new interest in fame-or-whatever should probably be tempered at some point, but for now Voldemort shrugs minutely and takes her hand. “Would you stay with our youngest?” he asks Ron directly.

Ron still sort of blanches when Voldemort addresses him; it’s more typical that Harry or Hermione would mediate. But Hermione is now rising as well, about to join them. “Hermione?” Harry asks, curious.

She gives him a tiny smile. “You’ll see.”

So they leave Cori and Ivy with Ron, both girls scribbling in coloring books Harry had brought along. “Be good for Uncle Ron, yeah?” Harry asks, ruffling Cori’s curls. “Abba’s got to be important for a moment.”

“Kay,” Cori agrees, smashing a crayon into the page.

On the way to the front of the hall, they collect cabinet members and other Ministry officials who should be photographed on stage. The Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of the Wizengamot’s legislative chamber, Madam Bones for the judicial chamber, a half dozen department heads.

And then the final one is Cho Chang, seated at a table with some other officials from Magical Games and Sports. “Ms. Chang, would you join us?” Voldemort asks, offering his hand to raise her from her seat. It looks gallant. Cho’s face is unreadable as she takes it.

“Of course, Minister.” But she falls into steps beside Harry, and beside the twins, and he can’t think of everything they need to say to each other.

Fortunately, Cho can. “You heard I’ve taken over Games and Sports?” she asks Harry lowly.

“Yeah. Congratulations.”

“You too. For… all of this. Your life together.” She pushes her long hair behind her ear. “Harry, would you have time to – talk? About everything. We really ought to.”

“Sure. Yeah.” He feels foolish for leaving things from twenty years ago so unresolved. “Coffee next week?”

“I’d like that.”

“Great. – Oh, these are our daughters. Cybele and Phaedra,” he offers, because the twins are side-eying them. “And girls, this is Madam Chang. We went to Hogwarts together. She was a really great Seeker then.”

“I’m still a really great Seeker,” Cho says lightly as the twins dutifully shake her hand.

“… In that case, want to go flying instead?”
“You know, I would.”

Voldemort addresses the audience. It’s a typical speech, as he thanks the Wizengamot and magical population for their continuing support and confidence in him. He says he is proud of everything they’ve accomplished, that the magical and non-magical worlds have mutually benefited from their alliance and cultural exchange.

“In my upcoming term, we will further strengthen international relations. We will collaborate with Quotidian researchers for scientific and medical advancements. We will advance the education provided to all Britons. And for that, I would ask Justice Granger to speak.”

He turns, passing Hermione the enchanted mic. Harry is curious and a bit baffled – Hermione doesn’t write legislation on education reform, she serves in the judicial chamber and specializes in civil rights. But Hermione is crisp and confident as she looks over the hall. “Good evening,” she says. “My name is Hermione Granger. And I’ve just accepted a position in the Ministry’s Department of Education, as the Director of Higher Education. The Wizengamot has just approved a budget that will establish Britain’s first magical university.”

Harry is probably more surprised than anyone in the room. This had been a goal of Voldemort’s since the early days of the Unification, but it had never seemed to get any closer to fruition. And Hermione… no wonder she’d spent all summer in Voldemort’s office. Maybe Harry should have insisted on sitting in on a few of those meetings.

Hermione shares what she’s able to. (“They don’t want information, they want spectacle,” Voldemort had muttered before one previous Ministry address, but Hermione still clearly carries a torch for information.) The university will be in Cardiff. It will be operational within five years (and this does cause some reaction within the room). It will be fully funded and free to all British citizens, though they’ll also concentrate on accommodating international students. While the curriculum is still in progress, they anticipate degrees in charms, herbology, runes, and medicine.

And then Hermione steps back, ceding the stage to Voldemort once more. Harry tries catching her eye, but she’s saying something to Madam Bones as she retakes her seat. So Harry looks back to Voldemort, projecting an image of an attentive and proud husband instead.

At last Voldemort concludes: “May Circe’s fortunes favor Britain,” a traditional sort of blessing, and then he gathers Harry and their daughters to exit the stage behind his cabinet members.

But when the girls are returned to the table with Ron and Cori and Ivy, and Voldemort steps away to speak to the press, Harry leans in to Hermione. “I had no idea,” he says. “How did neither of you ever mention it – “

“Me either,” Ron says to Harry in a placating way. “I only know she doesn’t sleep and that nobody’s allowed to touch any books in her office. Was it mean to be a surprise, then?” he asks her.

Hermione smiles, even as she’s twisting a napkin between her hands with the residual nerves of public speaking. “It was a surprise because the budget was only just passed – closed session, it will be published next week. And because,” she makes a tired gesture, “it has fallen through so many times before. It still could, really, but this is farther than we’ve ever gotten previously.”

“It won’t fall through,” Ron says. “Not with you.”

Her expression softens. “Thank you.”
“But why *is* it you?” Harry adds, unable to keep his question to himself any longer. “That is – you’ll be brilliant at it, like you’re brilliant in the Wizengamot, but – “

She shushes him, and they lean in. “I wouldn’t have been able to do anything more in the Wizengamot,” she says. “Nothing significant, at least, not for a long time. I didn’t have the seniority or gravitas for any – *good* sort of work. We agreed I wouldn’t get any elves’ rights bill through. I *certainly* couldn’t close Azkaban.” (Crime was low and typically non-violent these days, so Azkaban wasn’t popular as a mechanism of the criminal justice system so much as a place to sequester all the Dementors. Still, it couldn’t be closed. It was a problem.) “So the university will be challenging but not – divisive,” she chooses the word carefully. “And maybe – in twenty years’ time – we may revisit some of the legislation that’s not palatable now.”

“Good,” Harry says. “I mean – good. He’s lucky to have you in the Ministry.”

Hermione is ambivalent, but she’ll come around. She sees an ambassador she needs to speak to, and excuse herself.

Ivy’s getting tired and fussy in spite of all the charms Ron is casting to entertain her. “Ivy, come here, baby.” Harry is digging through their bag, finding the pram and charming it full-sized. “Want to lie down for a bit?”

“No, no, no,” she’s babbling as Harry picks her up. “Won’t.”

“Yeah, you will. Here.” He’s handing her a soother, even though she’s really supposed to be weaning off it, and a soft enchanted puzzle block. When she’s distracted, he pulls the cover of the pram down and enchants it to muffle outside noises.

When he looks up again, Ron is pulled a half-chewed crayon from Cori’s mouth, Aura is lying flat on the floor to stare at the mosaic ceiling, and the twins have run off. Harry raises his glasses to press his palms to his eyes. “Aura, get up please.”

“I’m a stingray!” She spreads her robes around her in a circle. “See?”

“Nope. Nope, we’ve got to be humans for a little while longer. You can look at the ceiling from your chair.” He scoops her standing, and lifts a bell on the table that summons an elf. “I’m not above bribery,” he tells Aura, who’s about eye level with the elf and examining it curiously. “Do you want dessert?”

“Mmmmaybe.”

“The elves can make anything. I assume,” he adds by way of apology to the elf, who dips in silent acquiescence. “Can you tell him what you want?”

“Um. That one that goes – crack!” She smashes her fist to the table.

Harry stares, then laughs. “Crème brulee. That sounds brilliant. Enough for all of us?” he asks the elf.

“Yes, sir.” He apparates out.

People stop to talk to Harry, mostly about Voldemort but also a bit about the Aurors and the DMLE. Robards and Scrimgeour are both there, and really Ron’s got more interesting things to say to them than Harry does, so he listens to a couple conversations on tactical magic. Zacharias Smith, who now works in the Department of Transportation, comes to have a somewhat strained but politic conversation. Penelope Clearwater, who still works for Voldemort directly, comes to tell Harry that
he looks tired, and it will look terrible in photos so would he please stay out of the line of cameras if
he can’t make his face look any more pleasant? (Some days he deeply understands why she and
Voldemort get on so well.) And then she softens and tells him she’d just double-checked all their
travel plans, and everything is in order. And for that, Harry thanks her profusely.

Finally, Voldemort circles back, to find Harry looking at one of Aura’s picture books with her. His
mouth tugs. “You’ve had enough of tonight?”

“No, it’s fine, go be important.”

“I have been.” He takes a seat beside Cori, who’s mostly asleep in her chair, and puts an easy hand
across her back. Harry melts. “We may leave.”

“Cool. Uh. Have you seen the twins recently?”

“Yes. They were with Hermione.” At Harry’s look, he lifts a shoulder. “Mere curiosity, I believe.”

“Huh. Were they good for you?”

“Quite. Though if they’re taking an interest in everything,” he raises a pale hand to gesture, “then
there are some books in our library that should be locked away.”

Harry refuses on principle to read any books about themselves, so he’s only vaguely aware of which
specifically are the bad ones. “Sure. Tonight?” he asks. “Otherwise they’re alone with Max for the
next five days, and he deserves better than that.”

“Yes, he does.”

“Right.” Harry swallows the last of his drink. “I’ll get Q and Phaedra and say goodbye to Ron and
Hermione. Oh, don’t touch the pram, I think Ivy has only just fallen asleep.”

“They have been remarkably well-behaved tonight.”

“Well. We’ve done alright with them. Oh – “ He spots Hermione, and the twins trailing after her.
“Okay, just a sec – “

Hermione gives him a weary smile when he approaches. “You’ve done your requisite socializing?”

“Looks like you have,” Harry returns. “And with two 10 year olds in tow.” He looks at Q and
Phaedra. “Have you had a good time as well?”

“Ms. Chang said we could go to the next Quidditch world cup, no matter where it is,” Q says.

“Yeah. When it gets a little easier to take all of you, when Cori and Ivy are a little older, we’ll go to
the world cup. What do you think, Phae?”

She twists a lock of hair around her face. “Has Abba got to talk to all those reporters?” she asks.
“Some of them were rude.”

He is delighted by this. “Yes – well, sort of, but he likes talking to them. He can be very, ah, sharp
himself, don’t you think?”

“Mmm.” She’s tired, they’re all tired. Harry turns back to Hermione. “Max is ready for tomorrow,
then?”

“Yes. He says he’s excited.”
“So are they.” His children idolize Max almost as much as they idolize Ron. “But he can be in touch – so can you – “

“Harry.” Hermione has put a hand on his arm. “Enjoy yourselves. We’ll be fine without you.”

“Right. Cheers.” He gathers his children to go.

Bedtime is a long process, since all the girls are a dangerous combination of overstimulated and over-tired. They need baths. Harry brings Ivy and Cori to the master bath, where he can put them both in at once and then climb in himself. Somehow this is easiest.

They leave the door open so Harry can instruct Voldemort on what to pack. “It’s warm,” he calls through the doorway. “And we’ll be outside a lot. Bring sturdy shoes.”

Voldemort steps into the doorway. “Not a beach, then.”

“Mm, beaches too. We may find some that are more remote, though.” Which is to say, they might get away with skinny dipping. Voldemort’s mouth quirks, and he moves away to his wardrobe.

When Harry is shampooing Cori’s hair (which she hates because it’s a long process, but when they offer to cut it shorter, she cries), Voldemort returns. “I’ve childproofed the library. Is there anything else that should be contained?”

“Uh – oh, in my robes is Aura’s wand. Can you put it away?” He watches as Voldemort goes through the pockets of his discarded robe.

“Clever,” Voldemort says, spinning the wand through his fingers. “She brought it tonight?”

“Uh-huh. Should we put Q’s and Phaedra’s away as well?”

“No. They’ll need them for the snakes.”

Voldemort had taught the twins enough of snake care that they could keep the climate-controlled cellar ideal for them. Harry lifts a soapy hand to his forehead. “We need to write out the instructions for all the animals. They probably know it, but in case…. “ He tips Cori’s head back to rinse her hair. “Should we oil your hair tonight too?” he asks her, tugging a curl straight. “Or do you want to wait a few days, after you’re back from Gram’s?”

“Tonight,” she says, and then she takes a squeezy bath toy from Harry as he pulls Ivy into his lap.

Voldemort goes to tell the twins that they are responsible for all the animals. He puts Aura to bed. And after Harry has put Ivy down for the night, they both end up with Cori sitting on their bed, as Harry shakes a bottle of hair potion mostly composed of coconut oil and pixie dust. He’d gotten a full-blown lecture from Hermione on caring for curly hair when Aura’s had grown in coiled and unruly, “and honesty you could do worse than also using it yourself,” she’d said, pushing a bottle on him. Thanks, Hermione.

Voldemort still has a suitcase open, and when he drops a plain black bag into it, Harry nearly flushes. Sex toys. Thank god. They are still deliberate about keeping sex and magic and touch within their relationship, but of course things change. Still, he may have to drop a few more pieces of paraphernalia into their bag later tonight.

By the time Harry has combed the potions through Cori’s hair, she’s nearly asleep. “You can’t sleep
in here, baby, we’re going to be awake awhile longer.” He lifts her out of bed.

“Will Gram have my own room?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe. You don’t want to share with Ivy?”

“She’s a baby.”

“Listen.” He scoops her up. “You’re going to have a great time, and you’re going to be so good for Gram and Grampa. Eat everything, and be gentle with Edison” (the Weasleys’ new kitten. Arthur named him, naturally) “and share your toys with Ivy. Okay?”

“Mmkay.” She’s too tired to fight by now, anyway.

“Good. Goodnight, baby.”

And when he re-enters his bedroom and shuts the door, he can only sink back against it. “Hey,” he says to Voldemort, now undressing. “Congratulations. Did I say that yet tonight?”

A look of amusement. “You have. Come to bed, Harry.”

“Yeah, alright.”

The next morning they’re up early, double-checking the girls have everything they’ll need for the next five days, that all the meals are labeled in the fridge, that Cori and Ivy’s bags are complete, that the animals are fed and Q knows how to care for them all. They find Hedwig just coming in for the day, and Fawkes just going out, as though they are sentries to their loft. “Hullo, good girl,” Harry says, stroking the softest feathers under Hedwig’s beak until she clicks with happiness. “Keep an eye on them, alright?” Another click.

And then Harry goes to drop Cori and Ivy off with Molly and Arthur, and then he gets back home in time for Max to arrive. Aura and Phae and Q are hugged. When Harry is bent over Q, she whispers into his ear, “Bring us back a snake.” He laughs.

At midday, they are ready to leave. Harry shrinks their luggage and produces a portkey. They take it. International travel is always a bit dizzying, no matter the method of transit, so they both need to take a moment upon arrival to steady themselves. And then they’re in a village built into a lush hillside, overlooking a sprawling city. “Vitoria,” Harry narrates. “Brazil. This is a wixie village, and all that—” he gestures below them, “is Quotidian. And we’ve got a cottage, ah, that way.”

They touch easily as they walk the roads. It’s obviously a magical settlement – there is some architecture that simply defies the uneven terrain, and household charms dry laundry and beat rugs and trim bushes outside of small houses.

They meet a housekeeper who hands them a set of keys. And when Harry lets them into the quiet home, a breezy place overlooking the river, he is grinning. “D’you like it?”

“Yes.” Voldemort is slipping their bags from Harry’s shoulder, placing them on the entryway’s sideboard. “Do we have any engagements now?”

“No. Not until tonight.”

“Good,” Voldemort mutters, and then pushes Harry up against a wall.
They explore the village that afternoon, and enter a small bookshop to pick up two guidebooks: one magic, one mundane. The bookseller has enough English, and Voldemort’s got an enchanted notepad that does some amount of translation, that he can tell them there’s a Parseltongue community on the other side of the river. Voldemort buys a few more books on history and magic and politics.

And then it’s nearly dusk, and Harry needs to show Voldemort something. “Bia told me about it,” he says, when he’s apparated them to a remote hillside. “It only happens about a month out of the year. Here.” He casts a sphere of lumos above them, and Voldemort transfigures his olive wand into a staff. There’s a path, but it’s hardly visible until Harry charms away all the scrubs.

At the top of the hill is an aperture, adorned with some flaking paint. It’s narrow, and when Voldemort gives Harry a dubious look, he reassures him, “It’s bigger inside.” Still, he takes Voldemort’s hand as they enter.

The space opens to a vast cave, one that isn’t closed at the top but rather flares out toward the sky. And as the sun drops and the sky grows dark, the cave itself gets lighter, bathed in a blue-green light. Bioluminescent moss hangs from the walls. It would only glow this time of year, and when it does, it attracts bats, who are now entering the top of the cave in their awkward swooping patterns.

“They’re migrating,” Harry says lowly, as they watch arm in arm. The bats settle into the moss, picking at fruits and bugs within. “They’ll be gone next month.”

Voldemort is watching thoughtfully. “I wonder what charms keep guano from accumulating.”

Harry laughs, surprised and exasperated. “You are impossible,” he says. “I bring you somewhere beautiful, and you want to talk about shit.”

“Practical magic is beautiful in its own way,” Voldemort says, and then he’s kissing Harry by the phosphorescent glow.

The next morning they rise late and sip coffee as they mark everything in the guidebooks that they want to visit. They find a mixed use cathedral adorned with icons of Merlin and Circe alongside Mary and Peter, and Voldemort is delighted. He buys a rosary with a saint’s medal of Merlin, one charmed to thrum in time with the user’s pulse, and over lunch he tells Harry why Catholicism is better suited to syncretism than Protestantism is.

Their magic guidebook has coordinates to apparate, but Harry brought his broom, and most places are near enough to fly. He offers that Voldemort should fly one night, even, and he’s surprised when he agrees. So Harry clings to his waist when, at dusk, they fly out toward mage ruins in the middle of the jungle.

The magic itself feels foreign, sparking differently than the sort that lay beneath Britain. When they’re at the ruined fortress, Voldemort can point out which enchantments are from the indigenous population, and which are later colonization. Before they leave, they each light a candle in memoriam at the entrance.

When they go to a show another evening, acrobatics performed by mages, afterward Harry slips backstage to meet the snake handler. “Ah, the Parselmouth,” she addresses him in the same as she lifts an anaconda into its tank. “Did you like our show?”
“Yeah. It was brilliant.” Her part had been aerials, dangling off hoops and wires, letting herself fall so the anaconda would coil and catch her in mid-air.

So now she’s running her fingers down the snake’s sides, checking for broken ribs. “If you can wait for me to take this facepaint off, you and your husband may come back to our place.”


Voldemort knew a lot of Parselmouth communities. He had made connections; he’d lived among them or taken shelter with them at times. They thought of themselves as a global community. And nobody even called Harry an interloper, even though he obviously was. He goes to find Voldemort.

He’s at the theatre’s bar, writing notes on his translation tablet to a hunched man seated beside him. There’s a bottle of very old-looking liquor between them; and when Harry raises his eyebrows in question, Voldemort gestures him close. “Mi esposa – no – “ Some quick writing – “marido. Harry, this is the professor of herbology at Castelobruxo.”

“Boa noite,” Harry says, and accepts a glass of their whiskey. He settles onto the barstool beside Voldemort.

They pass notes with the professor – he writes that he’s on a research sabbatical here; Harry writes that a fellow Auror had recommended wixen Vitoria and the migrating bat colony as an impressive holiday. The professor breaks into a smile when Harry writes down Bia’s name, and then he’s writing down where they should travel next, a hot springs with a waterfall tucked away in the jungle.

And when the professor has excused himself, Harry says to Voldemort, “I met their snake handler, too.”

“Good.”

“She’ll take us back, if you want.”

His non-eyebrows go up. “Yes, I would. Well done.”

“Sure, yeah.” He swallows his drink and then brings Voldemort backstage.

The woman’s name is Renata, and she doesn’t take them back to the Parselmouth neighborhood by any magical means, by rather by a sturdy jeep parked behind the theatre. “We are mostly left to self-governance,” she says as she drives down sloping roads, confident even in the dark. “Local police are scared to come any closer. We prefer it.” Arriving in a gravel parking lot, she pulls the jeep beside a low building.

A set of homes, with a shared courtyard in the middle. Renata gets called Ren as she enters, throwing open the gate behind her. “Told you they had come,” she says to another woman who might have been her sister.

It feels… familial. Harry loves meeting Parselmouths and he loves more the ease with which Voldemort meets them. They always have acquaintances in common, even in Parselmouth communities Voldemort doesn’t know personally. So after introductions, Voldemort is now surrounded by half the neighborhood as he passes along news from Wadha and the Jordanian Parselmouths.

The courtyard is teeming with snakes, as might be expected. A few boas dangle out of nearby trees, two coral snakes wind around the ankles of the Parselmouth elders, and an anaconda (smallish for its species but not small) takes up a chair of its own. A slender vine snake is circling Harry’s chair, so
he offers a hand. “May I hold you?” (Not do you want to be held, even though it obviously does, because the quickest way to offend a snake is to imply it needs anything from a human.)

The vine snake darts out its tongue, considering. “You are from elsewhere.”

“Yeah.” There’s no way this snake would understand where or even what Britain is. “We’re only visiting.”

“Good,” the snake says, even as it slithers into Harry’s grasp. He drops it easily around his shoulders.

They are fed; they are given drinks. Harry ends up telling stories of the Parselmouth nightlife he’d been exposed to in India, when Miraz and Suman (“Ah, our older daughters’ surrogates,” he says, wondering if people this far from Britain even knew enough of them to know they had kids) had taken him out.

And then an old woman produces an instrument that’s not quite a lute, strumming it. “Ren is the only proper entertainer here,” she says, with a fond look at Renata, “but we all know enough to distract ourselves.”

More drinks. They build the fire higher. More instruments are brought out – a sort of steel drum with deep reverberations, a flute enchanted to play several melodies at a time. The musicians settle into a proper song, and someone is singing – and Harry doesn’t even think the language is Portuguese, but something indigenous. It’s certainly not Parseltongue, or maybe he is just very drunk. As Voldemort moves past him, returning from taking a piss, Harry grabs his hand. “Dance with me?”

They enjoy it, these days, when Harry has gotten a little more talented and a lot less self-conscious. Voldemort lifts him from his chair, frowns, and plucks the snake from his shoulders. “Excuse me,” he says to it, draping it across the back of a chair. Something like a sigh.

They move closer to the fire, where others dance in great twirling kicking movement. And then Voldemort is drawing him close, swinging him wide and then in again so Harry’s obligated to press up against him, and then he’s got his face pressed to Voldemort’s collar because he can’t stop laughing. He is drunk and it is glorious.

And when they step away form the fire, a man is handing them a sparkling potion that he says is consciousness-expanding, and then someone else is giving them more food because they can’t drink this on an empty stomach, and they talk and they talk, and then somehow they end up both lying along a bench looking up at the stars they don’t see at home.

The crackle of a leaf, as a snake slithers by them. “Oh – “ Voldemort sits up, reaching to pick it up. “May I handle you? I haven’t seen your kind before.”

Harry looks over at this. He doesn’t know as much about snakes as Voldemort does, but it only seems to be some sort of boa, dark on top and pale on its underside. But then he’s sitting up too, curious.

“A voyager’s boa,” Voldemort says, holding out his arm so the snake may wind its way up. “The markings shift, like – that.” He gestures to the way some scales are fluttering, going from dark to light. “It will show the stars over a traveler’s home.”

“Oh. Really?” It is incredible. But the scales flash and shimmer, and then there’s an irregular pattern that Harry recognizes as Ursa Major. “That is brilliant,” Harry tells the snake, even though it’s simply magic rather than a controlled talent. The snake’s scales shift again, and Harry recognizes the bright spot of Arcturus anchoring Boötes.
Somehow, they end up bringing the snake back with them. It settles into the folds of Voldemort’s robes, and after a time Harry notices that the membranes that cover its eyes are shut. When Renata had found them later, to offer them a ride back to their home, she gestures to the sleeping snake. “That one, we’ve never been able to name,” she says. “Would you take her?”

“Yes.” Voldemort is pinning his cloak on carefully, so as not to disturb her.

“Great.” She’s pulling car keys from a back pocket. “Come find us again, if you’re staying.”

They let themselves into the cottage very, very late. Harry thinks he will fall asleep in the shower, so it can wait until the morning. All the more reason for morning sex, anyway.

Voldemort opens a living room window, drawing in branches of the nearest tree through the frame and draping the snake across them. It – she, Harry supposes – does not wake.

They rise, they fuck, they go out. There’s an art museum housed in an old castle – mostly Quotidian, with a few magic pieces newly acquired, since Brazil mages integrated only as recently as Britain did. Harry stops to watch an animated piece of modern art, a crafted hole stuck to the wall, with small sounds emitting from the darkness in the center. He can’t tell if it’s magic or mundane.

Voldemort comes up behind him. “We should bring the twins,” he muses. “Perhaps a trip – we’ll leave the younger ones at home – before sending them off to Hogwarts.”

Harry smiles. “I was thinking they’d like this, too.” Phaedra liked art, and she worked in multimedia, charming paints and decoupage and glue in unsettling shapes. And Q liked Phaedra’s art, anyway, and she liked weird things in general. The first time she’d brought home a bird carcass to make an articulated skeleton, Harry had had a low, urgent conversation with Voldemort about just how many dead animals their children could bring home before it registered as antisocial behavior. “More than one,” Voldemort had shrugged, and then gone to help Q disassemble the carcass. So. He expects she would like the weird antagonism of modern art.

They end up buying prints for all of their daughters’ rooms, vibrant and beautiful paintings that they pick out together. It’s the longest they’ve ever been apart from their family, really – they’ve gone away for a day or two at a time to celebrate their anniversary or their birthdays, but nothing longer – and Harry thinks he’s begun to miss them.

He’s going to be a wreck when the twins go off to school next year.

Late that afternoon, they apparate to the jungle outside the hot springs. It’s overgrown, and birds and lizards scuttle out of their way as Harry blasts apart the thickest underbrush.

And then the smell of water, and then they emerge at the edge of a salty spring. “Oh,” Harry breathes, completely taken by it. He inhales the warm spray.

They’re both undressing down to their pants, and Voldemort is doubling up on waterproofing charms on a shoulderbag where they can shove their clothes and shoes. They wade in, toward the waterfall at the far side of the pool.

“There is magic here,” Voldemort says, taking a handful of water plants up for examination.

“Yeah?”
"Healing magic. Shamans may live nearby."

The way their thoughts spark against one another’s, Harry can tell he’s wishing for any of the books they’d bought. He grins. “Good. Everyone’s been really nice so far.” And his wand is still in their bag but he manages a wandless Impervious, diverting the waterfall for a moment so they can pass through.

The rock formations within this mountain are high and irregular, but there’s one clear way forward. And they’re still wading through a few feet of water, so Harry is looking down to avoid stepping on the bright fish that dart around their ankles. “Are we actually bringing that snake back?”

“Unless you think we shouldn’t.”

“No. I want to. I just thought there might be… laws? About bringing back foreign animals?”

“Mm,” Voldemort mutters, clearly of the belief that laws were of no consequence for them. “Q will be satisfied.”

Harry laughs. “She asked you, too?”

“Of course.”

“You’ve really shown a lot of restraint,” Harry says. “That we’ve gone the entire time without buying – or, well, acquiring – new snakes.”

“It’s been no hardship.” He casts a sphere of lumos into the dim tunnel before them. “Their sovereignty is important. I took in Nagini because she was going to be used in a street performer’s act. The sort of performer who sews the snakes’ mouths shut.”

“Oh. That’s awful.”

“She was a hybrid as well.” (Voldemort means as well as himself, and Harry is dizzy with the implications of that, but he stays quiet.) “A Quotidian cobra, crossed with a mage-serpent called a gossamer-venomed naga. They were chosen for spectacle, but it did make her exceptionally dangerous. So nobody would have been surprised to find the breeder dead and the clutch escaped one morning.”

“That’s – obviously not sweet, but – it’s something.”

Voldemort clicks his tongue in amusement. “You really haven’t got to be judicious about it.”

“I’m not. You used her for terrible things,” Harry assures him. “You’re lucky Arthur has – well, not forgiven you. You’re lucky he lived.”

“Arthur?” Voldemort says in faint surprise, and it’s so sincere that Harry must stop abruptly, water sloshing up his thighs.

“Yeah, Arthur. When you sent Nagini to the Ministry in my fifth year. Why wouldn’t you know that?”

Voldemort draws beside him, but they don’t touch. “I knew she attacked a Ministry employee. I hadn’t known it was Arthur. I am sorry.”

“Bloody ruined Christmas that year,” Harry mutters. “He’s probably still got scars, actually.”

“Should I apologize to him?”
And this, too, is sincere. “No,” Harry sighs. “I mean, yes, ideally, but it wouldn’t help to bring it up now. He’s fine with you now. Somehow.”

“Alright.”

Voldemort has offered to apologize to anyone who wishes to speak to him. Harry has offered it too, to sit in on any conversations and soften their tone. Nobody has accepted it. And maybe they’re too intimidated (though it’s been a long time since Voldemort has been properly dangerous) and maybe it’s just easier to leave the past in the past. In any case, Voldemort offers no, “I am grateful that they provided you with a family when you were young.”

“Yeah. Me too.” And Harry slips his hand into Voldemort’s, and they wade through the warm waters.

Harry doesn’t know what he expected to find deeper in this cavern. It seems to be widening rather than narrowing, lightening rather than darkening. He’s sure there is something on the other side, but the Castelobruxo professor had not mentioned it.

The water becomes deep enough that it’s simpler to swim. Harry floats on his back, studying the cave ceiling a hundred feet above them. “Did you ever swim in the prefects’ bath?” he asks idly, slipping off his glasses and handing them to Voldemort for safekeeping in their bag.

“No. Did you?”

“Not really. I was only in there once, you know.”

A quirk of Voldemort’s mouth. “What terrible friends you had, that they wouldn’t share the password.”

“I guess. Ron really deserved something of his own that year, anyway.” He does a lazy sort of sidestroke so he can look back at Voldemort. In this light, the bright reflections of the water, he looks otherworldly and beautiful.

And then the lake is growing shallower again, and then Harry can hear rushing water hitting rocks. The lake is sloping downward, and then the side of the mountain flares open, and the lake spills into a waterfall.

“Oh,” Harry breathes, standing and sloshing toward it. Voldemort follows.

They stand together, overlooking a deep blue lake and a blue-green jungle stretching beyond it. It feels deeply magical, one of those places that only present themselves to wixes.

Harry looks to Voldemort, grinning. “Want to jump?”

“Harry – ” He’s reaching for their bag, for his wand to charm them safe.

“No magic,” Harry protests. “We’re not so high up. At Hogwarts, we jumped into the lake from our brooms once, after the Quidditch final, and we were higher then.”

Voldemort runs an affectionate hand across the back of Harry’s neck. “Really, if I had just left you well enough alone, you would have simply gotten yourself killed eventually.”

“Don’t be a baby,” Harry chides. “Here.” He takes Voldemort’s hand. They leap.

_Splash_. This lake is cool and deep, and when Harry breaks the surface again, he is laughing, alive
with the rush. So is Voldemort, and in his happiness the severe lines of his face disappear, replaced with softer shapes. It is lovely.

Their final night in Vitoria, they go to a barbecue restaurant on the beach – they’re both fairly out of the habit of eating meat, but they agree it would be stupid to come to Brazil and not eat barbecue. So they get a booth in the last tendrils of the setting sun, and they eat charred pork and melting tenderloin and seafood that had only been caught twenty minutes ago, as they watch the tides roll out.

They decide to drop by the Parselmouth neighborhood once more. But first, back to the cottage, to change and to bring their new snake food. “Hi,” Harry says, and the boa peers out from beneath a side table. “Are you hungry?”

He sits on the carpet, pulling out packets of roast pork they’d brought home. “We’re going to visit them tonight,” he tells the snake, “but then we’re leaving, back to Britain, where we live. If you don’t want to come back with us after all, we can leave you here.”

“I will go with you,” the boa says.

“Cool. Our daughters will be thrilled. Here, this is pork.” He holds out the chunk of meat; the boa sinks her fangs in.

In spite of getting to bed late again after a night with the Parselmouths, Harry is awake early on the morning they are leaving. Slipping from bed carefully because Voldemort is still asleep for once, he pads into the loo to collect their things.

But Voldemort is awake too by the time Harry emerges, because he has always been a light sleeper. “Hey,” Harry says, dropping their bag on a desk and then crawling back between the sheets, where it is still warm. “Can we buy a holiday cottage?”

“Sure.”

“Hmm.” They both know he’s joking, that it wouldn’t be feasible for a very long time, for the sake of time if not money. “Maybe when you’ve graduated from taking all the shittiest Aurors’ shifts, and we actually have free weekends.”

“And when Britain runs itself?”

“Precisely.” He looks to Harry seriously. “You must tell me if you tire of my position. Ministers can govern for decades, as our world is hesitant to change, even now.”

“No, have fun. I mean,” Harry makes a gesture. “As long as you’re satisfied.”

“I won’t be, forever. It’s quite a small position relatively.”

Three thousand wixes in Britain. Magic made the constituents more complicated than governing Quotidians, but still. They both could see how Voldemort could become dissatisfied with this tiny bit of power eventually. “Tell me then?” Harry requests. A nod. “Good. And for now – “ He presses a kiss to Voldemort’s mouth and then grabs him by the throat, as he likes it.
Arriving home late that afternoon, they are both braced for whatever chaos that awaits them inside. “Hi,” Harry calls into their entryway, and then there’s shrieks of laughter and running and something heavy getting knocked to the ground.

He missed this. He’s grinning as Aura throws herself at him, hugging his midsection. “Did you like it? Did you do exciting things? Did you take photos? And get autographs?”

“Ah… yes and yes and yes and no. We brought you something. Hi, Max,” he says when Max enters behind the twins. “Were they good?”

“I dunno.” He tugs Phaedra’s braid, teasing.

“You promised you’d say yes!” she protests.

“We stayed up really late,” he goes on, poking the ticklish part of her shoulder. “And we ate a lot of sweets.”

“Funny, so did we. Here, Vol – pass me that bag? Cheers.” And he’s extracting the paintings they’d bought for the girls, and one more for Max. “From a museum we saw. You’d really like it. Maybe we’ll go back sometime.”

“Your children?”

The snake was only waking up from its place around Voldemort’s neck, beneath his cloak. Still, all the girls stop at the voice, and then Q is running to Voldemort. “You brought a snake!”

“We did.” He sets aside their bags to untangle her from his clothing. “Ask first,” he tells Q as she’s reaching.

“Can I hold you?” she asks the snake, studying its face.

It flicks its tongue, testing the air around her. “Yes.”

Voldemort places it in her hands. “A voyager’s boa,” he tells her. “So – “

“So these are stars,” she says happily, looking down it dark back. “Have you got a name?” she asks the snake.

“What is a name?”

“What we’re going to call you. How about… Polaris?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Looking to Voldemort, she switches to English. “Can I bring her to Hogwarts?”

“Officially, no.”


In the background, Phaedra had been translating for Max. “But we started teaching him Parseltongue,” she says when Harry follows them into the kitchen, putting away the paint set they’d had out.
“Yeah?” Harry looks to Max. “How did that go?”

He smiles, tugging on his fluffy hair. “We only got as far as hello and goodnight. But it was enough to make all your snakes like me. Or so they said.”

“They are all incredibly soft,” Harry assures him. “Domestication will do that to someone.”

Max’s smile is wry. “I know.” Gathering his bag: “Are you picking up Cori and Ivy from Gram and Grampa now?”

“Yeah. Want to come?”

“Yeah.” So Harry walks his godson to the floo, slinging an arm over his shoulder as they step in together.
Chapter Notes

When the Ocs become more people than children. I might have vignettes of them at Hogwarts later, I haven't decided yet.

It doesn’t go how Harry expected.

He is up early on the morning of the twins’ eleventh birthday. He wants to make this cake out of crepes he’d seen recently. So he puts on coffee, feeds Moira, says hi to the snakes in their cellar, and then pulls out flour and eggs.

In a bit, footsteps on the stairs. One of the twins. A pause to examine the gifts arranged in the living room (modest, a bit out of ideology and much more because Christmas had only been two weeks prior), and then Phaedra wanders into he kitchen. “Happy birthday,” Harry says, setting down his spatula to scoop her into a hug.

She wiggles in protest. “Can I open a present early?”

“Probably, yeah. You want your book?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Try the silver one, with ribbon.” And Phae skitters away as Harry returns to the stove.

Soon she’s sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee (mostly cream and sugar) and the new book she’d been begging for. Harry is happily constructing crepes into a cake.

Chaos on the stairs: Aura running down first, stopping at the presents. Cori is chattering about her dreams as Voldemort enters the kitchen carrying Ivy, who is old enough to walk now but apparently it’s just that sort of day. Harry shoots Voldemort a grateful look for getting them up, then tries to corral his children to the table. “Aura, here, do you want juice? – Oh, and say happy birthday to Phae.”

“Can I read your book?” Aura asks instead, studying the shiny cover.

“No. You’re not old enough.”

“I am!”

“You’re not.” Phaedra puts the book before Aura. “Can you even read all those words?”

And Aura, triumphant, snatches the book and runs with it.

“Aura!” Harry’s throwing down his spatula, but Voldemort is quicker: he casts a squishy barrier across the doorway, so Aura runs into it and half-bounces off.

And instead of being furious that she’s been foiled, Aura is shrieking with laughter. “Again,” she
cries, shoving the book back at Phaedra since she’s lost interest in it. And then she throws herself into the barrier again.

When Q walks up, she looks surprisingly okay with the scene of chaos before her. She pokes a finger into the jelly-like barrier, and then Voldemort drops it so she can pass through. “Hi – ooh.” She tries reaching for Phaedra’s book.

“Noo,” Phaedra moans, clutching it to her chest. Q gives her a wry look and goes to pour juice instead.

Finally, breakfast, where Harry can proudly slice the glazed stack of crepes surrounded by berries. They eat. Phaedra’s got her book in her lap, and Harry doesn’t even tell her to put it away, today. He’s too busy keeping Aura and Cori from flicking berries at each other anyway.

A rap at the window. Two snow owls, male and a great deal larger than Hedwig, flutter outside.

Harry is grinning as he lets them in. “There you go – they’ll sort out who gets which letter – “ He’s taking owl treats and a letter opener from their respective drawers. The latter, he passes to Q.

And she sets it, and her Hogwarts letters, aside. Phaedra has tucked her sealed envelope into the cover of her book.

“… Don’t you want to open them now?” Harry sinks back into his kitchen chair.

They both sort of shrug. “We knew they were coming,” Q says. “Since forever.”

Harry reaches over, tugs a lock of her hair. “Does 11 come with new sassiness?” he asks. “That’ll be fun.”

She gives him something of a pitying look. “Do you want to open it?”

“Yeah. Very much.”

She slides him the envelope and letter opener. Phaedra hands her own to Voldemort.

Dear Ms. Gaunt-Potter.

We are pleased to inform you that you have a place at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry....

It is immensely satisfying to read, though Q is right, they’d known their daughters would be going to Hogwarts since they were 2. “Well,” he says, refolding the pages, “you won’t need all of this until later, but should we get your real wands now at least?”

At this, their faces do light up. “Yeah,” Phaedra says. “This one is boring.”

“Good, useful, safe magic is very boring,” Harry agrees. Phae sort of rolls her eyes and feeds a piece of crepe to the dog.

It’s only that afternoon, when the twins and their friends had been dropped off at an arcade and indoor playground (one of the first times out alone, because Harry worries) and their younger kids are in their rooms for quiet time, can Harry and Voldemort speak. “I thought they’d be excited,” Harry sighs, sinking onto the sofa in Voldemort’s office.
“Yes. But they’re not….” Voldemort stops to consider. “They weren’t saved by it.”

Harry smiles, a little weary. “I know. It’s better that way.”

“I hope they will still be sufficiently charmed by the castle. Even having seen it before.”

“Don’t tell them anything special,” Harry begs. “Let them – well, I hope their time is less tumultuous, but let them have their adventures.”

“Oh course.”

“And definitely don’t tell them about the chamber, because it’s a safety hazard.”

“I still can’t believe you jumped into a hole,” he mutters. “Of course Slytherin left a staircase.”

“Yeah, well. Also I’m stashing the cloak and map somewhere very safe.” He sort of laughs. “I assume they’ll find other ways to get into trouble.”

“I certainly hope so.”

Their daughters don’t need to be saved by Hogwarts. Thank god. Harry tries again in the next few days – the girls get to go to Quidditch matches, and they’ll make new friends (though of course they’ve already got most of their classmates at their primary school), and they’ll have all the feasts, and all the magic they’ll learn. “You’ll have to write,” he says one day as he meets them at the floo, arriving home from school.

“We’ll send you photos,” Phaedra promises. “And some of the feasts’ foods. And a house elf. And Professor McGonagall.”

“Okay, okay. I’ve just been nostalgic.”

“Uh-huh.” She sheds her cloak and wanders into the kitchen after Q, who’s currently sticking a biscuit into her mouth. “We are excited, though. Promise.”

Q swallows. “Leo says at least one of us has got to be in Slytherin, so we can see the mermaids from their common room.”

“I’m sure there are better reasons to be in Slytherin.”

“Maybe.” They’d both become coy about it recently, which houses they wanted or thought they’d get in. Harry and Voldemort refused to say anything preferential in any direction. There were rumors that some betting sites ran bets on where their children would be sorted, which was just obnoxious. So.

Finally, a few weeks after the twins’ birthday, there’s a day when they can all go to Diagon Alley. Harry says they should leave their younger kids with Molly; Voldemort says it will be educational for them to come along. Voldemort wins, with the caveat that they bring a pram to stick Ivy into if she gets fussy, because 2 ½ is the age of hellions.

(Among the many useless articles critiquing Harry and Voldemort’s parenting, none of them have ever mentioned the practice of dropping silencing spells around crying babies. Apparently it’s extremely acceptable, for everyone’s sake. Sometimes the magical world’s norms still surprise
They go to Gringott’s first, mostly just so Voldemort can make a political appearance and the rest of them can say hi to Fleur. Then they pass Flourish and Blott’s and must promise the girls they’ll circle back later, because Ollivander is actually expecting them now. Into the wand shop.

“Minister,” Ollivander greets Voldemort. “And family,” he adds with a searching look not only over the twins, but all of their children. Harry doesn’t recognize the expression on his face.

“Our oldest have turned 11,” Voldemort says. “And have outgrown their training wands as well.”

“Have you brought them with you?” Ollivander address the twins, and now it’s time for Harry and Voldemort to step back and let them see themselves through this process.

They hand over their well-worn training wands; Ollivander mutters something to himself and then begins pulling out boxes.

Q looks over her shoulder. “You can go.”

“We could,” Voldemort agrees. “But I would prefer to stay. Do you expect to be here long?”

“Maybe.”

As Harry watches, he is reflecting that the process is rather personal. Wandmakers were sometimes spoken of as having a seer’s gifts, put to more practical use. Ollivander may know things about their children that Harry and Voldemort don’t yet know.

In any case, keeping their younger three from touching anything is enough of a production that they can’t watch the twins for long. They all want to look at things, at the wands themselves or at the components stacked neatly in the backroom. So Ivy goes in the pram to at least contain her to a particular space, and Cori’s not allowed to let go of Harry’s hand. Voldemort’s got Aura, and he’s trying quite hard to show her how Q’s applewood training wand casts differently than Aura’s own elm one.

Bang! They all jump, Phaedra most of all. She shoves the dark wand back into its box. “Sorry.”

Ollivander accepts the box back. “You have trouble with dueling, then?”

She blinks at him. “I’ve never tried.”

“Hm.” He turns back to his shelves.

A few more small explosions, a lot more inert wands. They figure out Phaedra’s wand first – English oak with dragon heartstring. “An unusually subtle wood for its core,” Ollivander says as Phae replaces it in its box. “You will find it talented in charms and transfiguration, if you harness that subtlety.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you.” Taking the box in both hands, she steps back to watch Q.

She’s worrying her lower lip between her teeth as she tries out wands – aspen with phoenix, oak with phoenix. “Heartstring for you as well, I believe,” Ollivander says when the oak and phoenix wand launches itself out of her hand.

Sycamore, walnut. When Ollivander lifts a wand of cypress from a high shelf, Voldemort makes a noise of distaste. “Not for her first wand.”
Ollivander’s gaze is cool. “The magic of wands cares nothing for human desires. Not even those of the Minister.”

“Why?” Q asks Voldemort, her hand hovering over the wand.

“Because it is the wand of a martyr.”

“What’s a martyr?”

“Someone who dies for a cause.”

“Oh,” she says, and picks up the wand.

However, it’s not this wand that works for her. Q starts getting restless, even as she’s trying to explain her magical aptitudes to Ollivander. She likes flying and animals; he hands her chestnut and pine. Her first accidental magic was all transfiguration, including meat back into animal; he hands her ebony. Nothing.

At last, Ollivander hums to himself and reaches for a high shelf. “Yew,” he says. “As your father’s first wand was made of.” He doesn’t need to clarify which of them; they know Harry still carries the wand he got at 11.

When Q grasps the twisting handle and swishes the wand before her, it emits a shower of lavender blossoms. “Cool,” she says, at last pleased.

“A subtle wood, that likewise will temper the dragon,” Ollivander says. “It also carries connotations of death,” he adds, with a glance in Voldemort’s direction. “It grows in cemeteries. It is a wood of introspection and protection. It will serve you well.”

Phaedra looks up from where she’d been using her new wand to charm Cori’s hair a rainbow of colors (carefully, not pointing it near her face, while Voldemort holds a mirror charm before Cori). “I wanna see.” She reaches, offering her own wand in exchange.

“Twins often have coordinated wands,” Ollivander says as Phaedra waves Q’s wand before her. “But almost never identical.”

“I like mine better,” Phae decrees, passing it back. Q slips it back into the same pocket where her training wand had gone.

They pay, they leave, they go to lunch. It’s only when they’ve split up within Flourish and Blott’s, and they’re watching Cori and Ivy paw throw children’s books do Harry and Voldemort have time to talk. “We’ve raised people,” Harry marvels. “I thought I knew everything about them, but maybe not.”

He intends it to be light-hearted, but it’s clear Voldemort is worrying at something. So he waits.

“I’m quite sure I deserve children who are just as I was,” Voldemort says. “I’m grateful to have – well-adjusted children instead.”

“You – “

“Harry,” he interrupts, because they both know, they know Tom Riddle had been maladaptive in ways that were and were not his own fault, and Harry hasn’t got to defend him against himself now. “Dragon heartstring is the core best suited, on the whole, to dark magic. I hadn’t expected it of either of them.”
“Me neither, really.” The twins are quiet, and they are curious, and they are good. “It doesn’t mean they’ll be….“ He pauses for a word, because clearly evil is a bit dramatic. “Interested in dark magic. But if they are – god, though they should be older than 11, at least – just keep an eye on them, yeah? So they understand what they’re doing.”

“I will.”

“Thanks.” He smiles up at Voldemort. “They’re good kids, regardless. We’ve been lucky.”

“We’ve been dedicated,” Voldemort corrects, with some asperity. “It’s hardly luck.”

“Mm, yeah.” Though really, his kids surprise him every day. Speaking of – “Cori!” She’s trying to levitate the chair she’s sitting in, and really doing a pretty good job of it. He snatches her up. “You are a monster,” he tells her fondly, squeezing her.

“I need wings,” she says, spreading her arms wide. “To jump.”

They’d given her a book of myths recently. “I think you missed the point of that story,” Harry says. “We need to stay on the ground. Well, except for broomsticks. And the bike. But that’s it. No wings.”

“Like Moira. And Hedwig. And Fawkes.”

“Sadly, you’re a person and not an owl. Can you choose a book to buy?”

“Mm, yeah.” She dives into her stack of books.

When they’re rounding up their children to check out and go, they find Q and Phaedra poring over what will be their Hogwarts textbooks. “Don’t,” Harry protests. “You’ll ruin the surprise.”

It’s facetious and it’s also true. Q makes a face, holding up the charms textbook. “Wingardium Leviosa. Some surprise.” She laughs at Harry’s expression. “We’ll still be very surprised with Hogwarts. Promise.”

“Yeah, alright. We may as well buy those now. Don’t read them all beforehand, Hermione did and she was so bored some weeks of class….“ And then it takes both him and Voldemort to shepherd their kids toward the front of the shop again.
“Quit touching my trunk!”

“I’m not!”

“You are! Where’s my ink!”

“I’ll give it back!”

“Dad!”

Harry has been listening to this exchange from the safety of Voldemort’s office; he looks upward as though praying for strength for a moment before getting up. Recently Q and Phaedra had sometimes found Papa and Abba too childish, and Dad just meant whichever of them were closer. Right now, that is him.

It’s August 31, and the twins have nearly finished packing, but obviously it’s got its challenges. Aura is 7 and she doesn’t know entirely how to deal with the twins going off to school, so she has spent the past week being obnoxious instead. Harry goes to mediate.

Phaedra’s room still looks like an explosion of clothing and books. They’d told the twins that they can’t pack everything, that they may not have much time for hobbies, and anyway nobody has ever been bored at Hogwarts – but still, Phae’s got a box brimming with paint and fabric and canvas. She’ll have to ask Voldemort to shrink it down later; sometimes canvas stretches or warps if it’s shrunk wrong.

But at this moment she’s holding a set of inks, one conspicuously missing. “Where is it?”

“I said I’ll give it back!”

“Aura – Aura – “ Harry has to raise his voice, and he hates it. “Go get Phaedra’s ink. Please.”

Aura shoves herself off the ground, storming out. Well.

And Harry takes the moment of peace to look over Phaedra’s packing. “Have you got your mittens?”

“Yes,” she snaps, still needled.

“And your cloak from the downstairs closet?”

“I’ll get it later.”

They both know they won’t be thinking about it later. “Accio Phaedra’s cloak.” The bang of the cupboard door opening, and a moment later the cloak swooshes in like a bird. Catching it, Harry drops it atop her trunk. “You’ll probably need new winter clothes when you’ve grown, so these just have to last until the holidays….”

“Okay.”

“Phae.” He sinks sitting on the floor beside her. “I’m really excited for you.”

The first smile he’s seen on her today. “We know.”
“And we’ve got going-away gifts. But you can’t open them until you’re at school.”

“Why not?”

“Because I wouldn’t be able to bear it if you hated them.”

She scrunches her nose, then laughs. “Okay.”

“… You know, Aura’s been gone too long. I’m getting worried.”

“She took the purple ink. It was the most important one.”

He’s very curious what made it the most important, but instead he heaves himself off the floor. “Let me go check on her.”

He finds Aura sitting in the bathtub, picking flower petals out of a bottle of purple ink and lining them along the edge of the tub.

“Aura!” He brings a hand up to slap his forehead, because Christ those stains will never come out. “Give me that.”

“I’m almost done!”

“You’re making a mess and you know it.” The pollen must have curdled the ink, because it looks distinctly lumpy. “Just – stop touching things, you’re getting ink everywhere.”

“They look better this way.” She holds up a dripping flower to him.

“You know not to take things that aren’t yours and you know not to make messes like this. Put down the ink and hold out your hands. Without the flower.”

She looks up with the most defiant gesture and drops the flower in the middle of the gleaming tile floor.

The only reason Harry isn’t losing his mind is because he’ll need magic to clean her up, and casting on his children while he’s angry with them is just invitation to disaster. Deep breath, centering thoughts that they learned in Aurors’ training. He Scourgifies her stained hands again and again, until her skin is clean and her fingernails are only the slightest bit tinged with violet.

“Come here. Leave the flowers there. God, that’s never coming out of the tub….” He brings her into Voldemort’s office, opening a cabinet behind his desk to look for new ink. “Is this one closest?” He holds it up to the light.

“Ooh – “ Aura is peering into the shelf of ink bottles.

“You can’t touch those. You know you’re in trouble. You’re going to give this to Phaedra, and you’re going to apologize.”

“Why?”

“Why do you think?” he asks, before marching her back to Phaedra’s room.

Aura shoves the new ink bottle at Phae. “I made purple carnations,” she informs her.

Phaedra is more intrigued than angry. “Really?”
“Yes,” Harry says. “And they’re all over the bath. No, no – I need to clean them up,” he protests when her eyes light up. “And Aura needs to say sorry.”

“Sorry,” Aura says, heaving a sigh as though she’s being inconvenienced.

“For?”

“Using your ink.”

Phaedra is putting the set of ink into her trunk. “’Kay.” She’s fine. Harry doesn’t insist on anything further. But now he’s got to go scrub the fucking bathtub.

He’s nearly finished when the floo whooshes open. “Harry?”

Voldemort had dropped Cori and Ivy off at Luna’s for a playdate with her twins, and then gone out with Q for a haircut (her, not him, obviously) and to lunch. They don’t get a lot of time with their daughters individually, but they try. “Hi,” Harry calls back. “Just a minute.”

“We brought home croquettes!” Q calls cheerily.

Given how much better croquettes are fresh, Harry decides the tub can wait. He goes downstairs.

Voldemort and Q are in the kitchen, just setting down paper sacks. “Your hair looks great,” Harry tells Q, and he means it – she’s got a new, shorter bob that looks quite stylish, for her.

She runs a hand through it. “Like Tonks had last week. But not purple.”

“It looks good without the purple, too,” he says. “Where did you go to lunch?”

“O’Hanrahan’s,” Voldemort answers. “We saw Lisa and Daphne there.”

“Nice. Did they seem alright?”

“Yes. Here,” Voldemort says, not fully containing a wince as Harry takes a croquette from the bag and eats it over the sink. He conjures plates on the table. “Where are Phaedra and Aura?”

“Mmm….” He swallows. “Upstairs. Phae’s still packing, Aura’s causing trouble.” He takes another croquette; at Voldemort’s exasperated look he actually sits at the table and eats this one over a plate. “Q, how much packing have you still got to do?”

“Just clothes. Just winter clothes,” she amends when he looks at her skeptically.

“Cool. Phae’s room still looks like a war zone – “

“Does not!” comes Phaedra’s voice from beyond the kitchen.

“Don’t hover on the stairs,” Harry calls back, grinning. “It’s weird.”

Phaedra comes in, clutching a handful of pens from the study. “Can I take these?”

“Yeah,” Harry says. When Voldemort makes a slight noise of protest, Harry rolls his eyes at him. “They’re useful. Wixies need to get over their entire aesthetic.”

Phaedra has stopped to examine Q’s bobbed haircut. “Now we can’t go to class for each other,” she says, pulling on her own long sleek locks.
This is hilarious, because they’re fraternal twins anyway. But it also gives Harry pause to think they might not be in the same house, taking the same classes. “Here, Phae – sit down. Was Aura behind you?”

“No. I dunno.”

Sighing, he conjures his thestral Patronus to herd Aura from whatever trouble she’s getting into.

At some point Voldemort excuses himself – he’s got the day off before the Ministry reconvenes for the autumn in earnest, but he never stops working, really. And then Aura comes down, her hands suspiciously speckled with paint, and Harry makes her wash up before she can eat. “You are very bad at seeming innocent,” he tells her, and she looks at him wide-eyed and precious.

Eventually, Harry and Voldemort both end up going between the twins’ bedrooms, shrinking down puffy winter coats and adding featherlight charms to stacks of heavy books. “Can I take those owl treats with me?” Phaedra asks, because she’d gotten a great horned owl after Harry and Voldemort had said Hedwig and Fawkes would love and miss them very much, but they couldn’t go to Hogwarts. She’d named her Hathor, and she was currently asleep in the loft alongside Hedwig.

Voldemort summons a bag of animated mice treats; Phaedra tosses them in her trunk. “Thanks.”

“You’ve got to tell Hagrid I say hi,” Harry says.

Phae sort of rolls her eyes. “Tell Q. She’s already planning to go ride hippogriffs together on weekends.”

This didn’t sound safe, but obviously Harry had no room to object. “Sure, yeah. Do we need to brew anything for you tonight? Shampoo, face wash?”

“Nuh-uh.” She tosses a blanket atop a layer of books. She looks quite self-sufficient.

And then there’s Q, who’s lying fully sprawled on her bedroom floor, surrounded by everything she owns. Voldemort falters in the doorway. “Q?”

She looks up. “I’m fine.”

“Are you?”

“Yeah.”

Voldemort has his wand out, enchanting her textbooks to tuck themselves away neatly in her trunk. Q sits up but doesn’t move to pack anything else.

“Can Leo come over?”

“Now?” Voldemort asks, skeptical.

“Uh-huh.” She catches their expressions. “He says he’ll help me pack. And that he’s already done.”

Voldemort looks to Harry, since of course Ron and Hermione are his friends. “Let’s floo them.”

She makes a face. “We already texted, see?” She holds up her mobile.

“Sure. Let’s floo them anyway. Come here.”

Q falls in step between them as they descend the stairs. Tentatively Harry puts a hand on her
shoulder; she shrugs him off. “I’m not sad.”

“Okay. But it’s okay if you are.”

“I’m not.”

It’s been one of the harder things Harry has learned about parenting, that he can’t save his kids from every hardship and heartbreak. The twins are old enough to no longer entirely emotionally rely on Harry and Voldemort – and even when they’d been younger, they’d been quieter and more independent than most children. Harry and Voldemort still watch them, worried that they’re emotionally repressed in some way. But – well, it’s good that they’ll have friends to rely on, in any case.

Harry looks to Voldemort. “We’ve got it. Can you go check on Aura? She said she’d be with the snakes.”

“Yes.”

“Thanks, love.” They part, and Voldemort moves for the cellar, and Harry and Q to the floo.

They leave their floo’s open to one another – actually, Ron and Hermione are the only people Voldemort has consented to leave their floo open to – but Harry still puts his head through first. “Ron? Hermione?”

Footsteps. “Hi, Harry.” Portia, their 16 year old daughter and Harry’s oldest goddaughter, has come in. “Come through already.”

“I’ve got Q with me, is that alright?” She gestures them in.

Harry gathers Portia in a hug. “Ready to go back to school?”

“Pretty much, yeah. And you, Q?” Portia looks past Harry to where Q hovers in the corner.

Both of the twins love and idolize Portia, she’s just old enough and cool enough to mesmerize them. So Q straightens and puts a smile on her face. “Yeah, I think so.”

“Cool. Leo’s upstairs. And so’s Mum,” she adds for Harry’s sake.

“Great. Thanks. See you at King’s Cross tomorrow?”

“Definitely.”

They find Leo brushing his new kitten as Crookshanks looks on in disdain. “Hi, Leo,” Harry says, staying in the doorway even as Q enters and throws herself on Leo’s bed. “Ready for school?”

“Uh-huh. But Throckmorton isn’t,” he says, holding up his kitten.

“… Throckmorton?”

“It’s a good name.”

“It’s a very good name,” Harry agrees. “Know what house you want to be in?”

“Slytherin’s got the best common room,” Leo says. “But Mum says that’s not how it works.”

“… Yeah, it really doesn’t.”
“Can you get into the Slytherin common room with Parseltongue, anyway?”

*Yes, and everywhere else in the castle too. “No,” Harry says instead.*

“Maybe Gryffindor then,” Leo says. “But Portia said we could never be in the common room at the same time.”

Harry grins. “That’s quite rude of her.”

“I *know.*”

“Want to ask your mum if you can come over? If you have actually already packed.”

“Yeah. Here, Q.” They both slide off the bed and out of Leo’s bedroom.

Hermione’s working from home today, up to her ears in parchment. “Come home for dinner,” is all she says, and then Leo is released into Harry’s care.

As soon as they’re back, the twins and Leo shut themselves in Q’s room. Harry says he’ll see them in a couple hours, and to come get them if they need anything brewed or enchanted.

He finds Aura in Voldemort’s study, driving him a bit mad as he’s looking over a diplomatic letter of some sort. “Hey Aura,” Harry says, picking her off the sofa. “Want a ride on my bike?”

“Ooh, yeah.”

*Thank you,* Voldemort mutters, only mostly under his breath.

It will be easier, Harry thinks as he straps goggles on over Aura’s face, to spend time with their daughters individually with the twins at school. This probably isn’t fair to the twins – but, well, they had Harry and Voldemort all to themselves throughout their toddler years, and that must count for something, right? Still, already Harry is wondering how bad it would look to take the twins out from Hogwarts for an afternoon or two, take them to lunch or into Hogsmeade.

He really, really hopes they will love Hogwarts, even if they can’t love it in the same way he and Voldemort do.

By the time Voldemort goes to collect Cori and Ivy from Luna, and Harry is putting on dinner, and Aura is down for a quick nap – somehow the twins and Leo have packed Q’s trunk full. Even better, she seems in a remarkably better mood than she’d been in all day. “Nice,” Harry says, surveying the gutted remains of her wardrobe and bookshelves. “Have you got space for one more thing? About… this big.” He makes a gesture of a cubic foot or so.

“Mm.” She shoves a mirror and hairbrush to one side of her trunk. “Yeah.”

“Cool. We’ve got going away gifts. I’ve got to wrap them tonight, you can have them tomorrow.”

“Kay.” She’s got her boa constrictor, a sleepy snake named Polaris, around her shoulders. “Can you send us mice?”

“Ahh… if we need to? I guess going to Hogsmeade’s pet shop is a little too conspicuous.”
“I could, if you tell us where the secret passage is,” Q offers charmingly.

“Nice try. You wouldn’t even want us to spoil all the secrets, you’d like it better when you find them on your own. But feed Polaris tonight, and then if there aren’t enough mice and lizards around the castle – though there always were – then write to us.”

Leo gives Polaris a pat on the head as though she’s a cat. “If you’re in different classes, you can use her to pass off exam answers.”

Harry isn’t even scandalized. “You could try,” he says. “But the snakes mostly like to talk about food. Sleep. Heat. Less history and the like, you know?”

“What a waste,” Leo says. Polaris flicks out her tongue.

“Your mum wants to have one last meal with you,” Harry tells Leo. “So let’s get you to the floo. Coming?” he asks the twins.

“Uh-huh.”

They’ll see each other again in about twenty hours. Leo departs.

And Harry’s only just returned to the kitchen, to finish putting dinner together, when Voldemort returns with their two youngest. Cori’s got ribbons twisted through her hair, and Ivy is holding… some sort of squash. “What’s that, Ivy?” Harry holds out his hand.

“Mine,” she says. “We picked it.”

“You don’t want to cook it?”

“Mmm….” And she decides to hand it to him.

Voldemort enters behind them. “You’ll need a mallet to open it.”

“What is it? And is it edible?”

“Yes, it is. It’s a piñata squash.”

Well, that’s hilariously weird. It becomes a spectacle, as their daughters all gather round to bash the squash with a mallet until it breaks open, revealing bright spotted innards. Of course this is what Luna grows in her garden.

It roasts up beautifully, too.

They end up outside after dinner, watching bats swoop low in search of insects. Aura is splashing her bare feet in the fountain, and Cori and Ivy (who have never played so well together recently, because 3 and 4 ½ is an awkward gap, so Harry is profoundly grateful) pick painted peapods off their plants. Then the twins pull out their brooms. “It’s stupid we can’t bring them,” Q mutters. “Like we don’t know how to fly.”

Voldemort makes a vaguely sympathetic noise. “Put on goggles,” he says. “And mind the bats.”

Q grins at him, mischievous. “You don’t want me to catch one for you?”

“It’s not what I want, it’s what the bats themselves would want.”

The twins stay close in the air, doing a lazy circuit across the field but really just taking time to talk.
Eventually Harry sends a patronus up to tell them to be in before it’s dark, and then they take the youngest three inside. And then they end up sprawled across the living room, their daughters on the floor watching a film (Disney, somehow their home has been infected by Disney like every other home with small children, even though Voldemort does his best to tell them magic does not work the way it happens onscreen) and Harry and Voldemort sharing a fluffy blanket on the sofa, half-reading and half-watching their kids.

“Penelope texted earlier,” Harry says, holding out his phone for Voldemort’s perusal. “I told her to send the most boring Aurors tomorrow.”

Voldemort had been able to fend off almost all of the standard Minister’s security. But with their entire family going to King’s Cross tomorrow – well, it’d be visible and chaotic. Robards and Scrimgeour had both insisted on a driver (Harry had protested he could drive, he wasn’t bad at it, and gotten flatly shut down) and an Auror escort. Voldemort had acquiesced when Harry said he’d be making Harry’s relationship with Robards and Scrimgeour, his two immediate bosses in the DMLE, more difficult than it needed to be.

And now, hilariously, Voldemort is pecking out a text to Penelope on Harry’s mobile. “D’you want me to do that?” Harry asks, watching in wonderment.

“Of course not.”

“Should I know what it says?”

“I’m asking about security at all the other entrances to King’s Cross.”

King’s Cross had become a Quotidian destination since the Unification. They would end up going to see the spectacle of magical families seeing off their children, and really it was more of a headache and mess than anyone wanted to deal with. So in the past few years, to great Quotie sulking, the magical Ministry had closed off part of the station to wixies only on September 1. Entrance with a Hogwarts letter or not at all. It wasn’t perfect, but it was better. Anyway, while Voldemort is figuring out his phone, Harry settles in to watch Ratatouille. Again.

They insist on early bedtimes, but end up staying awake too late themselves. Harry’s not even worried, properly, he’s just – something. He’s just excited for them.

The morning of September 1 is chaos, as it was always bound to be. Harry gets Ivy up and Voldemort gets Cori, and they’re both shouting at Aura down the hallway to find her shoes and bring a book because they’ve got an hour in the car. And then they tell the twins to go eat if they want to and Phaedra says she’s going to be sick, so Voldemort goes to warm a stomach-settling potion because they can’t deal with one more problem this morning. While Voldemort is in the lab, Q comes distraught to Harry because she can’t find their snake Sarai, and she needs to say goodbye to all the snakes before she leaves. “Oh,” Aura says, getting up from where she’d been lying on Ivy’s floor.

“… Did you bring Sarai inside last night?” Harry asks, before Aura can run out.

“She said she was cold.” And then Aura is taking Q back to her bedroom, and Harry can only call after them, “Put her back in the cellar afterwards!”

The wards on their front door chime.

“I’ll get it!” Phaedra calls from somewhere within the house, and Moira is barking, and there’s at
least three sets of footsteps on the stairs. Harry scoops Ivy up before she can run out of her bedroom too.

By the time Harry gets downstairs, Voldemort is letting a Ministry driver and Auror Dawlish into the entry hall. “Hi, John,” Harry says from the bottom of the stairs. “Come in – hi – “ he says to the driver, ushering him in as well. “Let me get you coffee, we’ll just be a few minutes longer – “

Ivy is squirming, but Harry knows if he puts her down they’ll have to find her again, so he holds tight as he paces the ground floor. The twins’ trunks are already by the door, and so is Phaedra’s owl. The girls are both carrying bookbags. Voldemort is pulling out traveling cloaks from the cupboard.

“Phae – look at me – “ Harry says as she’s petting her owl. “Do you want to pack food or buy some on the train? It’s all day, you’ll need lunch. Or if you want to pick up something on the way to the station, we’ll have to leave – “ He fumbles with his pocket watch. “At least a quarter hour ago. We’ll give you money. Vol, here.” He tries to hand off Ivy, but she shrieks, her patience finally worn down. “Fine, fine – just keep her from running off, please.” He finds his coin purse from within his robes, dropping two galleons into Phaedra’s waiting hand. “Split that with Q, and for the love of god don’t eat an entire galleon’s worth of sweets apiece – “

“You did,” she says, because both he and Ron have recounted their first train ride to their children often enough.

“I know,” he agrees. “But I didn’t have two loving parents to teach me any better. Can you levitate your trunk to the car yourself?”

“Yes,” she says, as though it’s obvious and a bit of an affront.


Somehow, somehow, they get all five children out to the dark SUV parked before their home. The trunks are loaded in the back. Ivy and Cori get strapped into car seats. Moira runs out behind them, barking as though indignant she wasn’t coming along. (And honestly, Harry might have let her come if it weren’t a Ministry car, but she shed too much fur and too many feathers for that to be reasonable.) Both the twins are holding their animals as they all settle in, and the car pulls away from the Slytherin estate.

The trip can be truncated with magic, taking shortcuts through twisting bits of magical portals not marked on Quotidian maps, but it’s still an hour’s drive. “Ooh,” Phaedra says, pushing her face to the window as a road blossoms out of an overgrown marsh, their first shortcut. “It’d be even faster if the car flew,” Q says, mischievous because they’d heard that story as well.

Voldemort faintly sighs. “The Department of Transportation has enough trouble managing traffic in just two dimensions. It would cripple them to add a third.”

They point out birds and plants along the way. Ivy is fastidiously picking the fur off a stuffed hippogriff; Cori’s got a bright flashing tablet that Harry and Voldemort both hate and rely on. Aura is trying, over and over, to charm her hair purple.


“Purple’s easier,” Aura says, whatever that means, and she stretches one long curl straight to charm it.
Finally they reach London proper, and the SUV slows to a crawl. “There aren’t different roads here too?” Phae asks, obviously disappointed.

The driver glances in the rearview mirror. “If only.”

She sits back. Then: “Abba, where did you grow up?”

Voldemort is slow to look up from the portfolio he’d been reading. “Much farther south. Across the river.”

“Can we see it sometime?”

“There is nothing to see. It’s all been torn down and redeveloped.”

“Still.”

“… No.”

Of course having children has been cause for Voldemort to revisit some childhood memories. Some more willingly than others. But it will never not hurt, in some ways, and there is nothing Harry can do for it. Before he can intercede – on Voldemort’s behalf? On Phaedra’s? – she frowns. “Oh,” she says in a final way, and that’s it.

They do not burden the children with their own dysfunctions. The girls know Voldemort had grown up in a London orphanage. They’re vaguely aware of World War II. But they’d never asked how Voldemort had felt about it. Apparently Phaedra’s gotten to this conclusion on her own. And then she’s quiet, gripping Hathor’s cage tight in the abrupt traffic.

And finally they pull into the King’s Cross parking lot. It’s full of wixes in robes, and children hauling trunks, and owls and cats eyeing each other nervously. Harry is looking for any of his friends, as he unbucks Ivy and Cori and pulls them from the car.

Meanwhile Voldemort is – negotiating with Dawlish and the driver, both of whom insist Robards said they’d get a ride back home, which Voldemort thinks is stupid and Harry’s inclined to agree. “You think we’re not capable of apparating three children home?” he says, drawing himself up because he can still intimidate people when he wants to.

“Unless we follow you, we can’t be sure you actually reached your destination safely – “ Dawlish is saying.

So Harry draws up beside Voldemort, a hand at his elbow. “Could you drop us off at the Ministry?” he asks Dawlish. “We’ll take the private floo back, then. That’s safe enough.”

Dawlish considers him. “Fine.”

Harry’s still got it. They shepherd the kids toward the station.

They’re approaching the crowds at the doors, where Aurors are checking that only wixes are getting through, when Harry hears a distinctive voice. “Of course I’m meant to be in there, my grandchildren are starting Hogwarts today – really Oscar, you and Bill used to play together when you were little – “

“Molly,” Harry murmurs to Voldemort, who’s scanning the crowd now.

“Excuse us,” Voldemort says when he’s spotted her, though he’s clearly itching to just use his wand
to displace everyone. When people take note that it’s *them*, they get out of the way with muttered apologies.

Harry reaches Molly and Arthur first. “Hi, Oscar,” he says to the Auror at the door. “Look, they’re here with us – Q, where’s your Hogwarts letter? We need it – “

But then Voldemort is behind them, and the Auror straightens abruptly. “These are our children’s grandparents,” Voldemort says crisply. “Let them through.”

“Yes, Minister.” The Auror falls back.

It will forever divide Harry and Voldemort. While Harry doesn’t want special treatment, Voldemort will never settle for being treated as ordinary.

When they reach the open part of King’s Cross, Molly looks to Voldemort. “Thank you.”

“Of course.”

Harry lets go of Aura and Cori’s hands so they can throw themselves at Molly and Arthur in fierce hugs. “D’you know if Leo’s here yet?” Harry asks Arthur. “I heard from Ron ages ago, he said they’d be getting here around now.”

“It’s probably better to find them on the platform – “ Arthur begins, but then Q interrupts.

“He says they’re just parking now.” She holds up her mobile.

“Oh, right.” Harry holds out his hand. “You won’t need that for the next few months.”

“No,” Q says in something of a whine, shoving it back in her robes. “We’ll send you photos from the train.”

“And how well is your phone going to survive being in the castle’s magic?”

Q looks to Arthur in pleading; he smiles back. “While I’m sympathetic to your cause… no, your phone won’t survive months at Hogwarts. We’re working on it.”

Pout. “Until we get on the train, then,” she says to Harry.

“Okay.”

“And you can’t look at them while we’re gone.”

“Oh,” he says, amused now, even though he likes to think he knows his children’s lives well enough to know there’s nothing truly *bad*, or even truly interesting, that they’re keeping from him.

And then Ron and Hermione arrive, plunging through the crowds, and everyone is distracted again.

They move through the station as – well, a family. And when they get to the barrier, Q squares her shoulders and pushes her trolley into place. “I wanna go first.”

“Sure,” Harry says. “See you on the platform.” And so Q pushes the trolley forward and disappears.

They’ve got to go one at a time, and somehow, Harry and Voldemort end up being last. “You haven’t been back here, have you?” Harry asks, looking to him, because he’s contemplative.

“For you,” Voldemort says. Harry’s belated graduation, twenty years earlier. “Not otherwise. Not to
see the train off.”
“T’ain glad you came.”

“Of course I would.” He looks down at Cori, who’s gripping his hand as she watches Portia, just before them, pass through the barrier. “We need to walk through that wall,” he tells her. “Without stopping.”

Her dark eyes are distrustful. “Nuh-uh.”

“Yes. It will only hurt if you stop.”

“But where are they?” She’s looking past the pillar now, as though everyone might have walked out the other side. And once again Harry is sympathetic to the mindfuck of growing up with magic, before their object permanence and sense of cause and effect are solidified.

Voldemort sighs. “Close your eyes, and hold tight.” When she acquiesces, he pulls her through.

“Ooh – “ Ivy holds out her hands, wanting to push them through the barrier.

“Yeah, here. Hold on.” Harry brings her through.

By the time Harry is through the barrier, the twins and Leo are going to drop off their trunks; and Hermione is flagging down Padma and her husband, who have just arrived with their daughter Madhuri; and Imogen is sobbing into Molly’s dress because she’s 10 and everyone else is leaving and can’t she go too?

And then Harry catches a glimpse of white-blond hair. Of course Malfoy is here; it had been something of a production to schedule him and Harry off from the Aurors’ department on the same day. And Scorpius is trailing behind him, carrying the front half of his trunk. But following him, levitating the back half, was the locket Horcrux.

He looks good. His features had always been just different enough to distinguish him from Tom as people had known him, bringing them more in line with aquiline faces of the Black line. He went by Corvus Black now. And apparently he was a parent as much as any of them were.

Harry must have made a sound, or maybe his magic shifted, because Voldemort followed his gaze.

“I don’t know why you would be surprised.”

“Do you need to talk to him?”

“… No?” At Harry’s look, he raises a shoulder in a shrug. “We are less involved in one another’s lives than one might expect. You may talk to them, though.”

An eyeroll. “Thank you.”

He didn’t, though. Q and Phaedra return with a newmage classmate of theirs, and her parents looking a bit overwhelmed behind them. “Hi, Jessa,” Harry says. “Excited?”

“Sort of.”

He looks up at her parents. “Excited?” he asks them with an understanding smile.

“We are so proud – “ her father says immediately, “but the school is so – remote. There aren’t even roads up there! How are we supposed to get to her, if something goes wrong?”
Luckily Hermione jumps in before any of them have got to. “My parents are Quotidian, too,” she assures them, and then steps in to deal with this.

And now it’s near enough to 11 a.m. that students are beginning to board the train, shouting out the windows to their families before ducking back inside with friends. Harry looks for the twins – they’ve now got Jessa and Leo in a tight circle, giggling about something Harry wouldn’t understand anyway. He approaches. “Have you got everything?” he asks when Q looks up.

“Oh, is it time?”

“Well. We wanted a minute to say goodbye.”

“Okay.”

Voldemort has corralled their youngest three onto a bench, which is really quite a feat these days. And when the twins have approached, he drops a silencing spell around them all. He is paranoid even when it seems like everyone else also on the platform is here to say their own goodbyes. And he doesn’t even have anything urgent to tell them, he’s just – bad at open affection. “Enjoy your time there. The castle will cherish you. Treat it well.”

“What does that even mean,” Harry mutters, amused.

“You’ll see when you arrive,” Voldemort tells the twins. “And don’t speak Parsel tongue around others, it will raise suspicions – “

“And it’s just rude,” Harry adds, reasonably.

“And stay away from Parselmagic, as it will hurt you. Your portkeys will still work within the castle, if you encounter any true threats – “

“Or you could just summon a teacher, like normal – “

“Or we could not be snitches,” Q says, wrinkling her nose.

“Q,” Harry sighs. This is a mess. “You know what we mean. And you’ve got to write, we want to hear everything – “

“Not everything,” Voldemort interrupts.

Glare. “You’re not helping.”

“The castle’s secrets are much of its charm. The secrets of adolescence – “

“Shut up, shut up.” Harry moves as though he’d like to clap both hands over Voldemort’s mouth, even as he’s laughing. “Just because you were dysfunctional – we want to hear everything,” he reiterates to the twins. “Have fun. Make new friends.”

“We’ve got friends,” Phae points out.

“I know. Make more. And say goodbye to your sisters.”

“Bye,” Ivy chirps, because they’d explained this to her already.

“Can I have your broom?” Aura asks Q.

“No!”
“You’re not using it!”

“You’ll break it!”

“No, I won’t!”

“Aura,” Voldemort interrupts, exasperated. “You’ve *got* a broom.”

“Theirs are faster.”

“No, they’re not. Anyway, their bedrooms are locked, so no, you can’t.”

“*Ha,*” Q says, until Voldemort gives her a look too.

“Don’t be obnoxious.”

It is a very un-precious moment. Harry hadn’t expected it would be precious – he knows exactly what sort of kids they’ve raised – but still. “Hugs,” Harry says, gathering Q into his arms to distract her. “Have a good time. We’ll see you at Christmas.”

“*Kay.*”

Then Phaedra, then together they walk the twins to the train. “Bye!” Harry calls before they disappear into the train’s corridor. “We love you!”

“Love you, too,” Phae says easily, and then they are gone.

And so they reconvene with the Weasley family. Leo and Portia have boarded the train, and Imogen is still sulking but no longer sobbing. “Hey,” Harry says, rubbing her narrow shoulders. “Want to go out to lunch together?”

She scrubs at her face. “Can we?”

Harry looks to Ron and Hermione. “Have you got time? We’re taking the floo home from the Ministry, and Gin and I went to that new Turkish restaurant just round the corner the other day, it was great….”

As they negotiate this, Voldemort takes the sleeve of Harry’s robes. “I need a moment.”

“What? – Oh,” Harry says, following his gaze to where Draco and Tom are standing, with Scorpius hanging out of the train window above them. “*Ha.* I told you.”

“The mouth on you,” Voldemort marvels, and goes.

And then the train whistles, a jet of steam rising. Excited chatters. Harry lifts Ivy up so she can better watch. “Wave, baby,” he says, and she does.

As the train pulls out of the station, they wave to Q and Phaedra, who have got a cabin near the rear of the train with Leo and Madhuri. Voldemort returns, looping an arm around Harry’s waist.

“Good?” Harry asks.

“Quite.” When Harry is clearly waiting for more, he clicks his tongue. “I only told him he should look older by now.”

“… Oh. Yeah, he should.” Harry shifts Ivy to safely remove her from his shoulders. “What do you think, Ivy? You like the train?”
Her dark eyes follow the caboose out of the station. “I wanna,” she says.

“I know. Give it another eight years. This many.” He folds down her fingers into an appropriate number.

And Cori, bored now that the train is gone, is tugging at Voldemort’s sleeve. “Gram and Grampa are coming out too?”

Voldemort looks to the congregated Weasley family. “I certainly hope so. Would you go ask them?”

“Yeah!” – “Me, too!” Aura protests, and then Ivy, who hated being left out of anything, runs after them both. Harry slips his hand into Voldemort’s as they follow.

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Their parents had given them each a gift, a going-away present, with instructions that they couldn’t open them until they’d reached their dormitory. And as soon as the Hogwarts Express has pulled out of the station, away from the cheering and tearful parents, Q is climbing onto the seat to pull her trunk down from the luggage rack. “Want yours?” she asks Phaedra.

“… Yeah.”

With a bit of magic and a bit of maneuvering – Madhuri provides the levitation charm and Leo climbs onto the seat beside Q to heave down the trunks – they’ve got them both on the floor. “Check the door is locked, Madz?” Phaedra requests, glancing to the cabin door, where Madhuri stands. She locks it, and pulls down the shade.

“Why, some sort of dark magic?” Leo asks.

Q makes a face. “I wish.” When Phae shoots her a questioning look: “They worry too much, is all.”

“Oh. Yeah.” Phaedra inserts her wand into the lock.

The gifts are wrapped in thin gold paper, with red ribbons. It must have been Harry, because their fathers have never quite managed to be neutral on Hogwarts houses, even as often as they insisted otherwise. Phae picks up her gift, a lot smaller and squishier than Q’s, and undoes the ribbon.

Inside is a blanket, with pockets of all shapes and sizes stitched onto it. The fabric is soft and iridescent, shifting from green to purple and copper with the lighting. There’s a note sticking prominently out of a center pocket; she takes it and shakes it out for them all to read. In Voldemort’s handwriting:

Dear Phaedra,

We made you a blanket as a practical gift. The castle can be quite drafty, so it should serve you well in the library, out at Quidditch games on cold mornings, or by the lake in free moments. It is waterproofed with heating charms

And Harry has stricken out these words, scrawling **indestructible** in their place. Phaedra smiles.

*Don’t open all the pockets at once,* Harry writes beneath this. *You need a few more surprises. Even though you’ll probably open this on the train.*
Voldemort’s writing again: *We love you, and the castle will love you. Have a good term.*

Phaedra opens a pocket then, pulling out her favorite dried mango. “Nice,” Leo says, petting her blanket, like a cat. It is very soft.

And Q’s opening another pocket, extracting a card game called Chalices they would play over the summer sometimes. “Ooh.” She’s peeling off the wrapping.

“Open yours,” Phae says to her, taking back the card deck.

“They don’t give you the same thing?” Madhuri asks.

“I hope not,” Q says. “I mean – they never have. For birthdays or anything.” She’s pulling her gift from her trunk.

It’s quite solid, and it would have been heavy if it weren’t wrapped in a featherlight charm. She peels off the paper to find a carved wooden box, about a cubic foot, and a note lying atop it. She’s touching the leather inset – a complex pattern of snakes winding through fruit trees, and her full name written along the bottom – as she opens the note.

Voldemort’s handwriting, again. *This is for Polaris. Do not open it among people who are not meant to know about her.*

As she’d already entrusted Leo and Madhuri with the secret of her snake, she reads on:

*This is a walk-in terrarium. The password is sanctuary, spoken in Parseltongue. Plants and substrate have already been placed inside, and the climate spells should hold throughout the term. We will renew them at Christmas.*

And then Harry’s handwriting: *We’re happy you’ll have Polaris for company at school. Make human friends too. And don’t hide in the terrarium unless you really need to (though it is big enough for it).*

*We love you. Have a good first term.*

When Q looks up, her friends, who had been reading over her shoulder, are now eyeing the box with a mix of skepticism and awe. “It must get bigger,” Leo says.

“I don’t think so,” Phaedra says with a frown. “Not on the outside, at least. Like your mum’s handbag.”

Leo gives her a blank look. “My mum’s handbag?”

“Yeah. She couldn’t actually fit that many books in unless it was much bigger inside than outside.”

“… I’d never thought about it.”

Q sizes up the space in the cabin. Hopefully the terrarium didn’t expand. “I’m gonna try.”

“Teach us how to say it, too,” Madhuri requests. Because even though Harry and Voldemort had warned them that Parseltongue would scare people, more of their friends thought it was funny than anything.

“Yeah, sure. But Polaris gets to see it first.” And then she’s reaching into her trunk, pulling out the box in which she’d intended to see her snake. Polaris whines when she’s exposed to the light, even
as she settles immediately around Q’s shoulders when placed there. “You get a much better home,” Q tells her, and Madhuri and Leo giggle at the Parseltongue.

Then she opens the chest, peering in. It looks like a normal terrarium: substrate along the bottom, some branches and hiding spots, water. “Sanctuary,” she says, and there’s a sound of surprise from them all as the bottom drops low inside the chest, seeming to expand as it hits a spot about ten or fifteen feet down. “Nice,” Madhuri says, but no one reaches in.

Q sets the chest on the floor. Voldemort hadn’t written instructions for getting in, but he wouldn’t have made anything that could hurt them. She puts a foot inside and feels the rung of a ladder below it. “Cool,” she says, looking down, and then she’s clambering down it.

The terrarium is amazing, almost the same size as her bedroom and populated with an array of bright crisp plants. “You like it?” Q asks Polaris, lifting her off her neck onto a low branch.

“Are there mice?”

“Mmm…” She peers into the underbrush but doesn’t see anything moving. “Dunno. I’ll bring you some if there aren’t.”

“Good.” And Polaris wraps herself around the branch, tucking her snout into the loop of her body.

And then Q looks up, toward the chest’s opening. Somehow it looks even farther away. “Want to come in? There’s a ladder.”

And then all her friends climb down into the terrarium, laughing at the size of it and the absurdity. “This is why they wouldn’t let us into the study,” Phaedra says, tugging on a low vine.

“They made this?” Leo asks, peering back up at the entrance.

“Well, yeah. Probably together. Their magic together….” She shrugs, because they haven’t explained it fully. But they can do magic better in tandem. Like their Patronus. “Anyway, Voldemort says he’s jealous of all the new magic Harry gets to do as an Auror.” (She doesn’t say Abba and Papa to everyone else, it means nothing to them. Anyway, Voldemort is still Voldemort to most of the public, even when he’s Minister Gaunt, Lord of Slytherin in print. It’s easier that way.)

Leo’s examining the edges of the room. “Like Gram and Grampa’s house,” he says. “Where it’s been expanded.”

“A lot, yeah.” (Q and Leo debated before if sharing grandparents made them cousins, and reached the conclusion that it did not. But it’s nice to share family and childhood with him.) “Want to keep Hathor in here?” she asks Phaedra, mostly kidding.

Phaedra makes a face. “Hathor needs to make friends in the owlery.”

Q laughs. “You sound like them,” she says, “Make friends! Make more friends! Not just animals! Oh,” she adds, perking up. “Come with me to Hagrid’s this week? He hasn’t seen Polaris yet. And Abba said if anything goes wrong with her, to bring her to Hagrid first.”

“Sure, yeah.”

Eventually they climb out of the terrarium, leaving Polaris to sleep. They buy pasties off the trolley and play the game of Chalices from Phaedra’s gift. They cross into Scotland. The sky dims.

And at last they pull into the Hogsmeade station. The prefects are bustling down the train: “Robes
on! Leave your trunks, they’ll be brought into the castle separately.”

Portia, who’s one of Gryffindor’s prefects, pokes her head into their cabin. “Hey,” she says to Leo. “Good luck. Remember you can be in whatever house you like, but Gryffindor’s won the Quidditch cup four years now.”

“You don’t even care about Quidditch,” Leo tells his sister.

“But you do. See you inside.”

It happens gradually, as the students are led by Hagrid from Hogsmeade to the edge of the Hogwarts grounds. The castle’s magic swirls and sparks beneath their feet. Voldemort had told them the castle would love and welcome them, and this is how it feels.

Of course the twins had visited Hogwarts before – Harry would visit Hagrid almost monthly, and he’d take any of the girls with him if they wanted – but this was different. The castle is so pleased to have its heirs back, where they will be living for the next seven years.

The magic beneath their feet feels so natural and complete – of course it is their castle, by virtue of lineage. So it is warm and satisfying, as though they are already coming home as they step into the boats bobbing at the lake’s shoreline.
Dear Papa and Abba, reads Phaedra’s neat handwriting at the top of the scroll,

We like Hogwarts, even more than when we’ve visited before. Q petted the squid before we arrived, and it made her very happy, even though Imani said she was going to get stung.

And Q’s interjection: I had to explain the difference between a squid and a jellyfish to her. The squid was soft. We’ll probably go back to the lake tomorrow (Sunday) while the weather is still warm.

The first week of classes was a little boring, but I thought it would be. Professor Flitwick is funny, and Professor Bulstrode is scary, and Professor Slughorn won’t stop talking about you both.

Q takes the quill again: I told Professor Bulstrode that all my earliest accidental magic was transfiguration, and she said that’s not helpful, even though it obviously is. So I transfigured my matchstick into an entire knitting needle, and she took away points for not following instructions, even though she never said it had to be a sewing needle. I told her I’d prefer detention, but she said she hasn’t got the time.

This is fine, it will make everyone believe I’m the good twin. – But you are, Q scrawls in the margin. – Professor Slughorn said it was obvious I got both your talents in Potions. Even if I don’t know that he really believes it. I “diced” the bloodroot instead of “chopping” it yesterday, and my potion came out gooey.

Potions is boring and Professor Slughorn is weird. But we finally got to start flying lessons yesterday afternoon, and Madam Hooch let Leo and I race at the end. I miss my own broom, though.

We’re going with Leo to see Hagrid this afternoon. We’ll tell him you say hi. Please hug Aura and Cori and Ivy and all the snakes from us.

Love, Phaedra and Q

Phaedra’s owl Hathor had arrived with the letter early Sunday morning, before any of the girls are up, so Harry and Voldemort are reading it in the quiet kitchen with mugs of coffee, as Hathor excuses herself to the roost where Hedwig is now asleep.

“They didn’t say what houses they’re in,” Harry says, rereading the letter to be sure he hadn’t missed anything.

“Of course they didn’t.” When Harry looks up, Voldemort shrugs minutely. “We told them – repeatedly – that it didn’t matter.”

“Hilarious,” Harry says, looking back to the parchment. “What clever, funny, cheeky children we’ve raised. Could you write Slughorn, by the way? I don’t want them – poached within their first week
of school. And probably not for a couple years after that, either.”

“I could. It would be better-received from you, though.”

This is fair. Voldemort knows he’s intimidating, and Slughorn is particularly – susceptible to it.

“Sure. Could you tell me what to write, though?”

“Yes.”

They’re summoning ink and parchment to write back when there’s noise on the stairs. One of the younger two. Harry’s getting up, but then Moira flutters in, tugging the other end of Ivy’s blanket as she shrieks and laughs.

“Hey.” Harry catches Moira in midair, setting her on a chair, and scoops Ivy into the adjacent one.

“Morning, baby. Did you sleep well?”

“Uh-huh.” She’s reaching for an ink bottle on the table, curious.

“Want to practice holding a quill?” Harry asks, putting one into her soft child hand. “You’ve got to hold it at an angle – Thanks,” he says, as Voldemort casts an unspillable charm on the bottle of ink and passes it over with a scroll. “There, like that. Want to draw something for Q and Phaedra?”

“Moira?” Ivy asks charmingly.

“Yeah, sure, if she’ll sit still for you long enough. Here, Moi,” and Harry’s summoning a chew toy for her to settle in with.

So Ivy scribbles as Voldemort and Harry write back: that the squid is there to keep students out of the lake, and that Q would do well not to make enemies of any professors in the first week of classes, as they probably have seven years together, and that Phae might not be the better twin, only the one more concerned about getting caught.

“Do we get notices when they get detention?” Harry says, lifting his quill. “These people get to discipline our children without our input for years – god, I’d never thought about how weird that is.” Scrubbing his forehead: “I expect not, or else the Dursleys would’ve had one more reason to punish me.” He picks up the quill again, missing Voldemort’s look.

At the bottom of the letter he writes: You are very cute, omitting which houses you got sorted into. We’ll find out by Christmas, or maybe we’ll come by to see the opening Quidditch match next month. I am not above embarrassing you in front of your friends.

He pushes the scroll over to Voldemort; he signs it with a flourish. “Empty threats,” he says, reading Harry’s final line.

“Yeah, I know. The only parent who ever visited was Lucius Malfoy, so.” He scrunches his nose. And then Ivy, growing bored with her drawing, chucks her quill on the floor decisively. “Hey,” Harry says, capping the ink before she can throw that too. “Pick that up.”

Pout. She stretches out her hand as Harry and Voldemort could, in order to accio it wandlessly. And there’s a moment of anticipation, but nothing happens. They didn’t really expect it to. “You may have a wand next year,” Voldemort tells her, because 4 was about the age that all their children had begun to need at outlet for their magic, lest it become destructive. “Until then, please pick it up.”

Slipping off her chair, she does, handing it back to Voldemort. “Thank you. What would you like for breakfast?”
“Mmm….” She sucks on her fingers. “Berries. In cakes.”

Pancakes. The berries specifically were dawnberries, and the last of the summer crop was currently ripe in their back garden. “An excellent idea,” Voldemort says, standing. “You need to be dressed to go outside. And we’ll ask if Cori and Aura want to join us.”

“No,” Ivy says, pulling her hand away. “Only you.”

Something quite soft flickers across Voldemort’s face. “Go out,” Harry says. “Ivy, just put on shoes, okay? It’s fine if your pyjamas get dirty, we’ve got to wash them anyway. I’ll get Aura and Cori up to join you in a bit,” he tells Voldemort.

“Thank you.” On the way out, he catches Harry’s chin, tilting it upward, kissing him. Something still sparks between them, even now. He takes Ivy outside.

And before Harry goes to check on the girls, he brings their scroll to their owl roost. “Stay for awhile,” he says to Hathor, patting her between her feathered horns as he sets the scroll on a shelf.

From her higher perch, Hedwig hoots a bit reproachfully. Harry grins. “You want to see Hogwarts again? – Is that okay?” he asks Hathor. She tucks her head beneath her wing, tired from a night of flying. “Cool. Come here, Hedwig.” He ties the scroll to her leg.

And then he gets the girls up and dressed, and they’re also enthusiastic about pancakes, so. But when they’re approaching the back garden, there’s a moment when Harry looks out the glass to watch Voldemort, seated on a low bench and holding a basket for Ivy. And she’s not doing a great job at picking berries – most of them are going into her mouth, and a few more are fed to Fawkes who is perched nearby – but she’s babbling happily about whatever it is 3 year olds babble about. And there’s ease in Voldemort’s posture that Harry just rarely sees, even now.

And then Aura throws open the door, running out, and the peace is broken. And as the girls ravage the creeping dawnberry vines, Harry sinks onto the bench with Voldemort, content to watch in the morning light.
“Last bet,” Harry says, as they’re both pulling on cloaks and boots.

“Q is in Gryffindor, Phaedra is in Slytherin.” Voldemort slips his wand into his holster. “Yours?”

“Uh, the opposite. Unless they’re in Ravenclaw? Well, one of them, at least.”

Their daughters had entered Hogwarts three months ago, and in every letter they’d cleverly avoided mentioning which houses they’d been sorted into. At least they’d implied they were in different houses. And Harry probably could have asked his friends with fellow school-age children which houses Q and Phaedra were in, but – well, it was embarrassing he didn’t already know.

(“At least Hogwarts is sufficiently insulated, that gossip rags aren’t circulating news about them,” Voldemort had said quite fairly.)

And now they were departing to King’s Cross, to pick up the twins a few days before Christmas. Harry casts one last shoe-shining charm and follows Voldemort to the floo.

The train’s already in the station, but students are only beginning to disembark. They take a place along a wall, watching.

Voldemort sees them first. Phae’s half-hanging out a train window, watching the crowds beneath her. When Voldemort lifts a hand, she grins back at them, and then ducks inside.

A few minutes later, Phae approaches, levitating her trunk. “Ha,” Harry says, at her Ravenclaw tie.

“What? Oh.” She slaps her hand over her tie, laughing. “And then Q….”

But Q is behind her, walking with Leo Weasley-Granger, and they’re both in Hufflepuff colors. “Hi,” Q says brightly when she approaches. “Portia said we’re going to see Gram and Grampa tonight. Are we?”

It takes a moment for Harry to shift gears. “We are, yeah. Hi, Leo. Good term?”

“Oh-huh.” He’s got his cat wound around his shoulders, a bit precariously. “Q and I are both gonna be on the Quidditch team next year, they need the help. But it was good otherwise. Professor McGonagall says hi.”

“That’s nice of her. Your dad said Max was going to come pick you up?”

“Yeah, he’s back – that way.” Leo gestures. “With Portia already.”

“Can we walk you over?”

“No, I’ve got it. See you soon.” He lets Q pat his cat on the head, then goes. Harry watches him weave through the crowds until he reaches the other end of the platform, where Max’s cloud of dark hair is just visible.

And then it’s the four of them. Q hands Voldemort the chest in which her snake lives. “The humidity charm isn’t really working anymore. I couldn’t find anything on it in the library, though.”

“… That’s quite diligent of you.”
“I put a pool inside, but it’s not the same.” When she sees them both looking at her, she goes a bit pink. “What?”

“Nothing,” Harry says. “Just marveling that you’ve both gotten older. Get used to it.”

“That’s sort of how it works. Here, Phae.” She lifts the cage holding Phaedra’s owl off her trolley.

“We’re taking a car to pick up dinner,” Voldemort tells them as they move toward the exit. “And then taking a portkey to Molly and Arthur’s. Or would you rather go there now, and we’ll meet you?”

“No, we want to come,” Phaedra says. “What’s for dinner?”

“Greek. A new restaurant across from the Ministry…”

There’s a Ministry car waiting for them; they secure the trunks and get in. “Can Hathor fly beside us?” Phaedra asks, reaching for the window.

“No,” Voldemort says, and when Phaedra’s hand droops, he adds, “She has never lived in an urban environment; it would probably scare her. Or overstimulate her, at least. We will let her out over the Burrow.”

“Sorry,” Phaedra says to Hathor directly, who blinks back at her.

And when they’re pulling into traffic, Harry can finally say, “So… Ravenclaw. And Hufflepuff.”

They’re both fighting back smiles. “Yeah,” Q says. “Why, didn’t you say it didn’t matter?”


Voldemort clicks. “That one of them may be in Ravenclaw, spoken with no conviction? No.”

“Okay, but I didn’t lose.” He looks back at them. “Do you like it? Did the hat – what did the sorting hat say?”

“We thought it would be funny,” Q shrugs. “The hat thought so, too.”

“Q,” Voldemort sighs. “Really.”

“Really! Last time we saw George, he said there were people taking bets. And they all said Slytherin or Gryffindor. It’s boring.” When she sees their expressions, she goes on, “And I got to decide between Gryffindor and Hufflepuff. I like it more here. And it’ll be easier to get a spot on the Quidditch team.”

“Nice. Is Professor Spiraea still the head of house?” Harry asks. “We taught together one year, you know.”

She makes a face. “Yes. He said you look happier now than you ever did then.”

He’s startled into a laugh. “I am,” he says. “But not because of him, or Hogwarts. Do you like him?”

“Uh, enough. He’s very strict.”

“Good,” Harry says, and Q rolls her eyes. “Phae?”

“Yeah?”
“You like Ravenclaw?”

“You like Ravenclaw?”

“Yeah. Most of it. Jessa’s in with me, and so’s Imani.” (Two of the twins’ newmage friends from primary school.) “Scorpius thought he would be, but he’s not.”

“… You know, I never asked Malfoy where Scorpius ended up.”

“Aren’t you friends?” Phaedra asks, her brow furrowing.

“It’s complicated. Where is he?”

“Slytherin,” she says in a sigh. “But he says he’ll get in trouble if he lets us into the common room, so we haven’t seen it yet.”

Well, at least they haven’t figured out yet how to get in with Parseltongue. That will only hold out for so long.

“And you like Professor Flitwick?”

“Yes, I think he’s funny. He gave me a chocolate frog for doing the best on our last exam.”

“Hey, nice job.” They knew their daughters were smart, they were all clever and more inquisitive than was sometimes prudent, but – well, neither Harry nor Voldemort wanted prodigies. They would prefer just happy and well-adjusted children; to the extent that Voldemort got irritated when the papers wrote that he must want brilliant children who’d take after himself.

So Phaedra shrugs this off. “None of it was hard. He gave Madhuri extra points when she made her teacup scream, he said it was the funniest thing he’d seen all year. And – he said Grandma had been one of his best students.”

Grandma meant Lily. “He told me that too, once,” Harry says. “And I bet Professor Slughorn said so as well?”

A frown. “No. I mean. He hasn’t said anything about them.”

Slughorn. He was not as intimidated by Voldemort as he’d once been, but maybe this was a bridge too far. “He will, eventually,” Harry says. “He loved my parents. That’s most of the reason I did well in his class. Along with a lot of luck.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, potions was hard for me in school. You can’t be good at everything, you know?”

“Yeah.” She’s gotten Hathor out of her cage, balancing her on her knee to pet her.

“How is the castle?” Voldemort asks carefully.

The girls look to each other, considering. “Good?” Q offers. “It feels – like home feels. Like you said it would.”

“Nothing deteriorating? Nothing wrong?”

“The usual, I guess. But no.”

The castle was Voldemort’s by blood; and the founders had cast it such that peril to their descendants would erode the magic of the castle itself. It was a major reason Voldemort called off any sort of war.
But hopefully their daughters, also the heirs of Slytherin, would never need to know this.

They take a portkey to the Burrow, where Ron and Hermione’s kids are already running around with Harry and Voldemort’s three youngest. Harry barely catches Aura. “Hey, go say hi to Q and Phaedra.”

“Why?” She’s got two armfuls of squawking rubber toys.

“Because you’re family and you love each other.”

“Oh. At dinner,” she promises, and then sprints upstairs after Imogen.

Harry slips into the kitchen to find his twins and Leo recounting the term to Molly and Arthur. “– and then Hagrid showed us the tea set he would give to the mermaids, that they wanted even though mermaids can’t even drink tea – “ Leo is saying, throwing his hands up so dramatically that he nearly upsets the juice glass before him.

“They could, though,” Phae says, and it’s clear they’ve had this argument before. “Just not out of cups. They can just float the tea in front of them – “

“Cold?” Leo says, scandalized.

“Let them do it how they want.”

By now Harry has slipped into a seat beside Molly, smiling when she runs her warm hand across his back. “Are Fred and George coming by tonight?” he asks.

“Not tonight. You’ll see them at Christmas. But tonight they were all going to Angelina’s parents’ for dinner.”

“And George is bringing Ursula?” (George and Lee had been together forever, they’d never gotten married but they had adopted a newborn last year. When Harry had asked if they’d named her Ursula so she could one day spell out rude words in her jumper, Lee had only laughed and not denied it.)

“Oh, yes. She gets into everything, she’s just the right age.”

“It’s gratifying,” Arthur says, smiling. “That they’ve seen at least a fraction of what they put us through.”

“That sounds fair,” Harry agrees. Then there’s a crash and a shriek – a happy one, he thinks – and Harry flinches and Molly and Arthur do not. “Ah, let me go round everyone up,” he says. “You three, stay there. Help set the table,” he addresses the kids. To Molly and Arthur: “I expect Voldemort and Hermione slipped off somewhere?”

“As usual.”

Really, it was a good thing they were both so dedicated to their work, it gave them plenty to talk about. Harry goes to find them.

Hermione and Voldemort are behind a silencing charm in the sitting room; Ron and his oldest son Max are outside, drinking beers and watching bats; the kids have somehow within twenty minutes created an elaborate trap stretching from Percy’s room to Ginny’s. “Step there,” Imogen tells Harry,
pointing to a spatula charmed to stick to a bucket.

“And then what happens?”

“You’ll see.”

He steps on the spatula; the bucket rolls forward and knocks over a single milk bottle. “Oh,” Aura says, disappointed, and then she’s wrapping a string around the top of the bottle.

“Hey. Later, okay? And we’re not leaving a mess for Gram and Grampa to clean up. Right now we’ve got to eat.” And before anyone can protest, he picks Ivy off the floor and takes Cori’s hand. They file down to the kitchen.

The next few days are spent getting the estate ready to have everyone over for Christmas. Voldemort checks all their babyproofing charms, Harry washes all the drapes and pillows and towels and sheets. Phaedra is allowed to bake scones that actually turn out pretty well. They send the twins off to Diagon Alley one morning to do their own Christmas shopping, with the caveat that they need to carry portkeys in case of emergency and they may not stray into the Quotidian part of London. “We know,” Q says, waving them both off. “We’re nearly 12.” When Harry opens his mouth to protest, she asks, “What were you doing at 12?”

*Getting locked in my bedroom for days and nearly getting murdered by a giant snake* were equally bad answers. “Cute. Can you be home by noon?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Cool. Have fun. Don’t bring home any animals.” And then Harry takes Ivy to watch him clean the downstairs toilets, and Aura is already running in front of Voldemort and Cori to clean up the last frozen vines in the garden.

Christmas. They open all the wards and the floo. (Voldemort still grumbles about security breaches, and Harry tells him that even the most irreligious wizard would be hesitant to slaughter a house full of people on Christmas day, and anyway like all the adults in attendance were war-forged, so.)

Molly and Arthur arrive early, to share the kitchen space. “Why haven’t we put in a second oven?” Harry complains as he shuffles three different pans inside. There are charms to hold them at different temperatures, but there’s just not enough *space* for it all.

“We could,” Voldemort offers. “Where would we put it?”

“Mm, where the sink is. And we’ll put in another island for the sink instead. This is,” he shuts the oven door for dramatic effect, “ridiculous. Oh. When we were designing this, there was a ton of magic that could all conflict, like the hearth couldn’t face the front door and the sinks couldn’t be perpendicular to the largest window…. I don’t know. But yeah, if we can fit another oven in without disrupting whatever – ecosystem of magic there is now…."

Voldemort is stripping copper-colored leaves from a stalk, salad greens called niffler’s fancy that they’d toss with berries and pine nuts. Arthur’s just lifting the goose, stuffed with apples and figs, into the hearth. It crackles before he casts a spell to seal in the heat.

“Harry?” Hermione calls from the entryway.
“Hi,” he calls back. “In here!”

She comes in, and Max behind her, so Harry grabs a dish towel to wipe off his hands before hugging them both. “Hi. The others are still out?”

“Ron’s parking the car, the kids wanted to watch even though it’s not that interesting,” Hermione says. “Where’s your girls?”

“You know, I have no idea. They’ll turn up before dinner.”

“Harry!” But she’s amused. “How can we help?”

“Mm….” He looks to Voldemort.

“Can you make risotto?”

“Yes.” She goes to wash her hands.

The rest of his friends and family file in. Ron brings their three younger children in with him. Ginny and Tonks come bearing a cheese tray arranged in a glorious layered cake.

When George and Lee arrive, it’s with their 1 ½ year old, who’s fighting to peel George’s hand off her own even as they step through the floo. “Hi, Ursula,” Harry says, holding out his arms. “Those braids are new. I like them.”

“My mum did them,” Lee says. “It took three hours, so we watched Frozen. Twice.”

“Oh no,” but Harry is laughing. “Everyone’s that way, into the sitting room.”

George takes Ursula. Lee sighs. “How do you do it?” he asks. “I don’t know how to raise a girl. I told Angelina we’d trade her for Jules, but she said no.”


“That’s what we’ve heard, yeah. I’ve got my doubts about the toddlers, though.”

And then Remus arrives, bringing both Hagrid (overjoyed to see Harry and their daughters, apprehensive as always to be around Voldemort, but it’s reached a manageable level of awkward by now) and Snape (who’s still sulky about being dragged along at all, but as he and Remus had gotten married this past summer, it was now mandatory that he’d come along). Harry pushes a beer into each of their hands. “Hi, hi. Happy Christmas.” Hug from Remus, hug from Hagrid, definitely no hug from Snape.

“Where’s your girls?” Remus asks, levitating gifts to the stack beneath their Christmas tree.

Harry gestures him toward the sitting room. “I think. Haven’t checked yet. Here, Hagrid, let me bring that to the kitchen – “ He’s lifting a bottle of mead from Hagrid’s hands.

“And where is the Minister?” Snape asks.

Harry grins, to Snape’s chagrin. “The Minister,” he says in a posh way, “is making a tagine now, I think. If you don’t want to be forced into helping, go find him in like an hour.”

But Snape shrugs, entering the kitchen. By the time Harry has followed, Voldemort and Snape are talking intently behind a silencing charm, even as they each slice vegetables and herbs. It’s… cute, even if they would both balk at the designation. Anyway, it’s probably about something in Severus’s
work as an Unspeakable, so Harry leaves them to it. He steps into the sitting room.

“Papa!” Aura thrusts Moira into his arms immediately; she wags her tail against his chest, apparently okay with being manhandled. “Hold Moira, so she doesn’t spoil our castle.”

On the far side of the room, for some ungodly reason, Aura has gathered every single block she owns. “How did you get these downstairs?” Harry asks, even as he feels a headache start behind his eyes.

“I just – poof!” She swirls her wand; some of the blocks lift themselves into the air momentarily, then fall again. “I got it from Verbena.”

Verbena was an actress on the magic version of Sesame Street, essentially. Even good, educational magic was chaotic. “I wanted these to stay in your room,” Harry says, drawing his wand to banish them upstairs.

“Noo.” Aura tries to grab his arm. “Leave them here.”

“Aura…. Here.” Instead, he draws a glowing barrier, confining the blocks to a corner. “Keep them inside the circle. Oh, and this will keep Moira out, too.”

“Okay.”

“What do you say?”

“Thank you,” she says, even though she clearly doesn’t consider this concession a favor.

“And tell Abba about your spell later. He’d like to know.”

“Uh-huh.” She runs off.

When Harry turns, he nearly jumps, finding Luna watching behind him quietly. “Luna, hi. Happy Christmas.”

“And to you,” she says instead. Her twins are just running from hugging Arthur’s legs; she holds out a hand to catch each of them. “Grainne, Finn, say happy Christmas to Uncle Harry.”

“Happy Yule,” Grainne chirps instead.

“You and Voldemort both,” he tells her. “Cori was still getting dressed, can you go up to her room and bring her back down?”

“Yeah.” “Yeah!” Their white-blonde hair flutters behind them as they run off.

So Harry turns to Luna alone now. “How’s your dad?”

“In Zimbabwe for another month. He’s quite happy. I asked him to send photos but,” Luna sighs, “recently he has come into the belief that a camera will steal his soul.”

Harry could not be more delighted to hear the things that even Luna doesn’t find credible. “Nice. Get you a drink?”

He leaves her in the kitchen with Voldemort. Percy arrives with Audrey and Lucy, and Charlie following them. “Harry,” Charlie says, clasping his hand warmly. “We got a brood of Antipodean Opaleyes in last week. Want to bring your girls?”
“Parselmouths?” He couldn’t keep track of which dragons were.

“So we’ve heard, but we’ve never had a chance to try.” A grin. “Sorry for making you into an experiment.”

“Not at all. Phae will probably cry with joy. Just let me take a couple days to make clear we’re not bringing one home with us.”

“Where is Phaedra?”

“In the sitting room, last I saw.” He gestures Charlie off. The twins adore Charlie as much as Hagrid, and Harry thinks it’s only a matter of time before they’re all trekking into the cellar to see the snakes together.

Bill and Fleur arrive, with their younger daughter Mireille. “Victoire sends her best,” Bill says, taking Mireille’s coat and boots from her. “But she’s spending Christmas with her boyfriend.”

“That serious, huh?”

A tiny sigh. “We never thought so, but apparently.”

“He’s very sweet,” Fleur protests as she’s setting silvery-white wrapped gifts beneath the tree. “My parents know his, zey find him quite charming.”

“Yeah, well.” But Bill wraps his arm around Fleur’s narrow shoulders, squeezing her. She laughs.

Harry wanders back into the kitchen, picking up a butterbeer on the way. He finds Hermione across from Voldemort at their island counter, where she’s plucking brussels sprouts from a stalk as she’s saying passionately: “Of course the centaurs deserve sovereign territory. They should’ve had it decades ago.”

“There’s only so much I can offer them, without citizenship.”

“So just – impose citizenship on them, on the books. It’s really irrelevant whether they want it.”

A small quirk of Voldemort’s mouth. “Is it?”

Harry comes to settle beside Voldemort at the counter, offering his butterbeer. The rest of the kitchen is half-listening, but this is just how Hermione and Voldemort talk about politics, so they don’t find the raised tones alarming by now. “Why don’t the centaurs want citizenship?” When he sees Hermione’s expression, he amends, “Why do they say they don’t want citizenship?”

“Hypothetically, it also imposes the Trace on them,” Voldemort says, swallowing a mouthful of Harry’s butterbeer before handing it back. “In practice – well, given their historical treatment, they’re right to be wary. We would need to pass new laws with the department of magical creatures, and as nobody is wiling to do that, the centaurs won’t agree to anything else.”

“They deserve an apology,” Hermione mutters.

“Yes.”

“An apology that comes with sovereign territory.”

In response, Voldemort hums and takes the bowl of brussels sprouts from her, charming it to toss itself.
Luna wanders up, mobile in her hand. “May I invite Pansy over in a bit?”

“Sure,” Harry says, curious. They were sort-of dating, so Pansy and her daughter were always defacto invited, but it was rare to actually see them at any gatherings. “I thought she was with her husband’s family today?”

“She is, but she’s having a very poor time.”

“Yeah, bring her here. If it’s not going to destroy her family, I mean.”

“Oh, the hippogriff’s out of the paddock on that,” Luna sighs, typing back to Pansy rapidly.

Speaking of extra-marital lovers, Harry nudges Hermione’s elbow with his own. “Where’s Viktor today?” The maybe-third in Ron and Hermione’s marriage, who’d still spend the summers with them.

Hermione’s anger from earlier dissipates with a smile. “We’re seeing him for the new year, we’ve got a hotel in Prague together. Had you heard he’s moving to coaching next year? He’s very excited, and it’s a better schedule.”

“That’s great. One last chance to get into the World Cup then this year?” Bulgaria still had a great national team; Krum had been in about a dozen World Cups since Harry first saw him play Ireland.

“Yeah. I hope you can make it to this one? Ivy will be four, that’s not too young to enjoy it.”

Harry and Voldemort and the twins had gone a few years back, when Scotland had been in the World Cup, as Voldemort was patriotically obligated to be there in support. Maybe it would be easier to keep all their kids corralled in a private box, but Harry is ideologically opposed. The only real way to watch Quidditch is among the cheering masses, not those sterile boxes, he’d had to explain to Voldemort. “Yeah, I hope so. Though the last time they came to a rec game, Cori apparently spent the entire game watching birds.”

Hermione smiles. “Well, birds are an important thing to watch out for, in Quidditch. It’s good instincts.”

He laughs, and goes to bring a tray of hors d’oeuvres to the sitting room.

Max is sitting with Remus and Snape, telling them about his job at a wixie botanical garden. (“The Quotes can visit but not alone, there’s just some plants that need to be fended off with magic.”)
Tonks is sitting between Fleur and Phaedra, making her hair go green and sparkly as they attempt to pin it in the shape of a Christmas tree. All seven Weasley children are in a corner, conspiring over something on Ginny’s mobile. Harry is deathly curious, but he’s got the sense he’ll find out the surprise soon.

His own mobile buzzes against his hip.

*Hi Harry, happy Christmas,* Neville has texted, along with a photo of his husband and their two kids, 16 and almost-2. It’s a cute family.

So Harry looks around the room, finally taking a photo of most of the kids constructing what he thinks is Hogwarts in blocks. It looks like chaos even as a still photo. *You too. You want to come over, if you’re done? George brought Ursula, she’ll like seeing Gus.*

Yeah, in a bit. Can we bring something?
We have so much food here, please don’t.

:) Neville types back. Harry smiles at it.

“Oh, you’ve seen the news, then?” Luna chirps, seeing his expression as she comes to join them.

“No, just – Uh, what news?”

“The International Council of Weather Patterns decided they would give us snow tonight,” she says happily.

“… Oh yeah. That’s great. Good of them.”

He goes to sit with Tonks, squeezing Phae’s shoulders as he joins her. Meanwhile Fleur is charming shiny bobbles into Tonks’s green hair. “Looks good,” he tells them.

Tonks has been texting as she sits still for them; she holds up her mobile now. “Mad Eye says happy Christmas.”

“Does he?” Harry can’t think of a person in his life less likely to own a mobile.

“He’s with Kingsley now,” she says, grinning at his confusion. “They’ll be by later, I’ve made them promise.”

“Cool. It’ll be good to see them.”

Phae bounces in her seat. “We’re doing my hair next,” she informs Harry.

“You haven’t done green before. Are you sure you can charm it over red?” He knows Phaedra’s good at charms, and she’s been doing her hair bright colors for as long as she’s had a wand, but this will be a new look for her.

“Uh-huh. Or maybe gold, in a star.”

Harry looks to Fleur, who’s currently putting an eight-strand braid into Tonks’s hair. “You haven’t got to, when you get bored.”

A smile. “I would do Gabrielle’s hair before school every morning. It is relaxing.”

“You’re great,” Harry marvels. Getting up, he addresses Phae, “Be good.”

“Uh-huh.”

Appetizers swapped out. He goes to pour warm mead, and finds Voldemort in the kitchen, alone for the moment. “Need anything?”

Voldemort lifts his gaze from the steamed window, through which he’d been watching Fawkes among the frozen scenery. “No. Thank you.”

“Tagine smells good. So does the bread.” Harry brings him a cup of mead; they watch out the window together for awhile, their sides pressed together so their magic flares. Fawkes is pecking at an evergreen, seeking out some berries or bugs. “Is there anything that needs to be watched now?”

“Everything is on a timer already.”

Harry should say something about Voldemort hiding out in here. Instead, he takes his cool hand.
“Good. Come stay with everyone for now.”

They bring out mead and butterbeer. Q pouts when Voldemort says she’s too young, and Harry is certain she’s going to conspire with Portia later to get slipped a butterbeer, if he’s not vigilant.

Tonks’s hair is pinned in an explosive green approximation of a Christmas tree, and Phae ends up charming hers golden blonde, with plaits in the shape of a star. “Did you say thank you to Fleur?” Harry prompts, when Phae turns around to show them.

“Yes,” she says with mild scorn.

“Good. It looks really good,” Harry addresses Fleur, on the adjacent sofa. She hums, lifting her wine glass to her red mouth.

Most of the children have run off upstairs, but none of the child minding spells have tripped, so presumably they’re all fine for now. Harry settles deeper into the sofa, mead warming him from the inside, as he listens to Hagrid and Hermione discuss the new centaur foals in the forest. He’s sort of pressed along Voldemort’s side, their magic sparking, while Voldemort is saying something in French to Fleur, making her laugh.

Eventually, Harry notices the Weasley children and spouses slowly but steadily disappearing. Given their secrecy earlier – well, he’s curious. He takes his drink with him as he goes to explore.

He finds them in the library, with Angelina ushering him in hurriedly. “We’re taking photos,” she says, gesturing to where the five Weasley children are arranging themselves on a sofa.

“This one is classic,” Fred says, tugging his jumper straight. “But we’ve got some new ones, too. Here, Perce, that vase – “

So Percy is holding a vase in his arms, obscuring half his jumper, and it’s only then that Harry understands what they’ve done, as Fred, Ron, Percy, Ginny, and George have lined up their jumpers to spell FRIGG. “Mum didn’t name us with enough vowels,” George says. “So we’ve had to improvise.” He nods to the vase obscuring half of Percy’s jumper.

“Cute,” Angelina says, snapping the photo. “What’s next?”

George hands Ursula to Fred; he lines up with Max and Fleur to spell MUFF. “We’re holding onto those until whichever age you’ll find them most embarrassing,” Fred tells Ursula, setting her down on wobbly toddler legs. She promptly shoves her stuffed hippogriff in her mouth.


“She’s old enough to know what a clit is, and also Hermione would kill me,” Ron says. “Where’s Ivy?”

“Just because she can’t read yet,” Harry protests. *Also Voldemort would kill me* may not sound so light-hearted as he’d mean it.

Eventually Portia pins her jumper to make an I. “Just don’t show Mum,” she shrugs to Ron, tossing back her hair and smiling wide for the camera.

“That’s my girl.”

Harry gathers that Hermione has been put on duty to distract the adults – or, well, the people he’d forever think of as adults. But more of his peers find their way into the library. “Oh, how droll,”
Luna says as she walks in.

Lee’s eyes light up. “If you spell BALL with me, I’ll let you be the L in LABIA.”

More photos. A bottle of firewhiskey is passed around. Harry casts a sound dampening charm because their laughter has become a bit too raucous to avoid attention. When he lines up beside Charlie to spell BITCH, he’s nearly doubled over from laughter already.

The library door swings open, and they whirl around, some more guiltily than others. Voldemort takes in the scene, and then moves to go. “Don’t let me interrupt your – project.”

“No, Voldemort, come here.” Fred is looking through the notes on his phone. “Have you still got your jumper from last year?” (Unlike the rest of them, Voldemort wore dress robes today, as usual. But Molly still knits the adults jumpers every few years, even if there are now enough children to make her knitting a full time job otherwise.)

“… I do.”

“Go put it on. Victoire flaked on us, we need a V for VAGINA.”

Harry’s up, fist pressed to his mouth to stifle his laughter. “Here – don’t bother saying no, it’s only one photo – “

“We’ll keep it out of the papers,” George promises.

“I don’t care about the papers,” Voldemort says – still careful, still a bit awkward, his hand still on the door. “It is only vital that I stay in your mother’s good graces.”

“God, me too,” George sighs. “Hermione is supposed to be distracting her, though, with the merits of vegan baking or something.”

Harry’s got his wand out – the library is two stories high, so he charms open the upper door and casts in the direction of their bedroom. “Accio Voldemort’s jumper,” he says, thinking very hard on the one he means.

And a minute later, the jumper flutters into Harry’s grasp – a pale green, with the V set apart in diagonal cables instead of a separate color. It’s as subtle as a Weasley jumper could be. “Put it on.”

This is a bit more orchestrated than anyone else knows – Harry and Voldemort have found together, that everyone is most at ease when Voldemort says no before Harry says yes on his behalf. This might be the most ridiculous instance of it though. So Voldemort pulls the jumper over his head, and Harry’s stepping in to smooth the robe’s collar over it, and then pressing a kiss to Voldemort’s jaw when he thinks nobody is watching. “Thank you,” he mumbles in Parseltongue, a little warm and drunk and in love.

“Of course.” Voldemort tugs the sleeves straight. In English: “You’ve got neither an I nor N.”

“We are improvising.” Portia and Max are both on the sofa; he looks up with a grin after pinning his jumper back to an N.

“And really, you could do that with magic.”

“We know. It’s funnier this way.”

And so Harry presses Voldemort into a corner of the sofa. Angelina, Ginny, and then Audrey at the
“Cheers,” George says, when Voldemort gets up deliberately enough to not look like he’s desperate to get out. “Next year we’ll make sure Victoire comes, and you can both spell VULVA.”

“Next year?” Voldemort echoes, allowing Harry to slip an arm around his waist. “I haven’t been so unobservant to overlook a – tradition?”

“Nah, not yet,” George says easily. “But it will be. There, now you can take Harry for whatever you actually needed him for.”

There’s a snort from Ginny; Harry makes sure to roll his eyes at her. So they go, closing the library doors behind them.

“Thank you,” Harry says again, leaning into Voldemort’s touch. “Mm, this is soft. Leave it on, it will make Molly really happy.”

“Yes.” They’re approaching the kitchen, full of warm bright smells. “I had come to ask if you wanted to feed the younger children first, or together.”

“Uh – I think Ivy can feed herself. Can, not will,” he stresses, because he assumes all the children will be too distracted to eat much anyway. “Should I ask George and Lee what Ursula wants? We can put out a high chair…” Now that he’s in the kitchen, he’s peering in the oven, where brussels sprouts are roasting with glowseed, and a stuffed piñata squash bakes in foil. Voldemort is tossing everything on the stove above.

Then there’s the chime of the floo and the sound of someone arriving. “Neville, I think,” Harry says, listening to Hagrid’s exclamation and Molly’s coo. “And Otto. Do you need…?”

“No, please go.” He’s squeezing a lemon over a pot of lentils as Harry runs out.

Neville is at the floo, holding up Gus, his toddler, for Molly to fuss over. His husband Otto smiles, holding out a bottle of wine to Harry as he enters. “Hi, happy Christmas. Thanks for having us.”

“Yeah, happy Christmas. Hi, Nico,” Harry says to their 16 year old. “Get anything good this year?”

Nico’s got a book clutched to his chest; he smiles and gestures with it. “Yeah. If it’s okay….”

“Sure. Portia’s in the library, she’ll be happy to see you.” And then Nico already knows all the quiet parts of their house, because he was shyer even than Neville had been at that age. Harry found it sweet.

But the library chaos had broken up with the sound of the floo, and Neville is getting slapped on the back by quite a lot of Weasleys, and Lee is holding Ursula up to Gus for them to examine one another, and Ginny is immediately arguing with Otto about professional Quidditch.

Then the floo whooshes open again, and Pansy steps through, with her daughter’s hand clasped hard. “Oh,” she mutters, taking a half-step back from the crowd before her.

Luna pushes through. “Pansy,” she says, running a hand down Pansy’s arm in sympathy, because her nose is red and it’s just very obvious she’d been crying. “Hi, Ruby. Happy Christmas.”

Everyone moves to give them some space, but Harry is stepping in, dropping a little lower so he can address Ruby. “Hi Ruby. You’re in Ivy’s class, right?”
“Uh-huh.” She’s sucking on a bright ring, eyes wary as she takes in the crowd.

“She’s playing upstairs, and so are Grainne and Finn.” Because presumably Pansy’s daughter is friends with Luna’s twins. “You want to go see them? Or do you want to stay with your mum?”

Pansy had been half-listening. “Go, Ruby. Ask them what they got for Christmas. You can tell them all about the jewelry maker Daddy got you.”

Harry accompanies Ruby, because he should check in on the kids anyway. And he finds – well, chaos, with half the toys they own dragged from the girls’ room onto the landing. Cori and Ivy are sitting with Luna’s twins, pounding multicolored clay into magic shifting molds. “Hey, Ruby’s come to play. – Ivy, please don’t put that in your nose, we’ll never get it out.”

“I don’t need a nose,” Ivy says happily, slapping a pancake of clay onto her face.

If she’s pretending to be Voldemort, Harry is going to lose his shit. “You really do, though. If you need glasses later, you need a nose to hold them up. Here, Ruby – “ He conjures another cushion for her. Grainne hands her a mold in the shape of a scalloped shell. And Harry leaves them.

His twins are absent, so is Leo; but Q’s bedroom door is locked. Harry knocks. “Are you in here?”

“No,” Phae calls back.

He *alohomora* the door. “Cute,” he says, when all three of them burst into laughter. They’re huddled on Q’s bed, looking at photos. “Leave the door open. Everyone wants to see you.”

Q makes a face. “They’re all babies. And they mess up my stuff.”

“Like what?”

“Like all my books. And my dolls. And my jewelry.”

Harry’s not unsympathetic to feeling like his possessions could be taken or used or destroyed in childhood, really. Drawing his wand, he drapes glowing *protego* over the bookcase and vanity. “*Finite incantatum,* if you need to. I can teach you later,” he adds at their looks of interest. “Do you know where Aura is?”

“With Imogen and Mireille,” Leo says. “Imogen got this Quidditch game, a handheld one – they went that way,” he gestures.

With a bit more checking in, all the kids are accounted for. Harry steps into their bedroom to kick off his shoes, returning downstairs in fuzzy socks instead.

Luna’s got Pansy and Ginny both in the tearoom, where they’re splitting a bottle of wine. Neville’s with Hagrid and Max, telling them that his mother cares for her own garden of succulents now and she’s quite fond of them. And Hermione, hilariously tipsy, is saying something a mortified-looking Snape as Remus holds him in place so he may not flee. “ – some of the girls thought you were fit, even though you were *clearly* just an arsehole – “

And Harry steps away from that disaster in progress, grinning.

Molly and Arthur are both in the kitchen now, plating things as Voldemort levitates all their dishes from the cupboards. Others file in to help – Bill is taking out a rice dish and Fleur is taking pumpkin and Luna’s brought a salad covered in small iridescent berries. When Ron comes in, Harry raises his eyebrows. “How’s Hermione?”
“Ah, she’ll be horrified tomorrow, I ‘xpect. Remus thinks it’s great, though.” He’s tossing trays of yeast rolls into baskets nestled with towels. “Have you seen my children recently?”

“Yeah, want to help get everyone downstairs?”

“Yeah.” He hands the last of the rolls off to Charlie just as he enters; Harry and Ron go upstairs.

There’s too many people in the house for all of them to gather at one table or even all in the dining room, so they put out plates and people will wander where they wish. Voldemort has offered Harry an actual ballroom once, borrowed from the Ministry, but he prefers this sort of improvisation. The kids are all put around the dining table; the adults return to the sitting room or tearoom or even just at the kitchen’s island counter.

So Harry ends up at a table with Ginny and Tonks, where he eats squash and croissants as Ginny recounts her last raid and Tonks feeds bits of goose to Moira, whom Harry suspects has gone around begging in turn all day. “Don’t be a nuisance,” he tells her, and then she wags her tail hard enough that he drops a piece of squash before her anyway.

Cakes, puddings, butterbeer, rum. Kingsley and Moody arrive, and Kingsley will eat cake as Moody accepts a cup of coffee, which is quite good, for him.

Then everyone does manage to crowd into the living room where the tree sits. The adults don’t really give one another gifts, but all the kids receive things. So Phaedra gets books and Cori gets construction paper that animates itself when it’s cut and Ivy gets a bubble gun that shoots animal shapes. By now Harry has hung back at the corner of the room, his arm around Voldemort’s waist. He’s quite warm, and quite content.

And then the evening is spent with the kids opening their toys, and a few naps and a few meltdowns, and most of the adults end up picking at leftovers in the kitchen while the children sleep on every available sofa and cushion. And at some point, Voldemort and Moody peel off to talk – security, it seems, though Harry is not privileged enough to know – and Ginny and Tonks and Kingsley are all huddled in another corner, drinking coffee. Harry joins his fellow Aurors.

“– So I’m reading him his rights and he tries to chat me up,” Tonks is saying, slinging back a drink. “Says, like, _those handcuffs will look better on you than on me._” They all groan; she shrugs. “So I turned into a bloke. A really hairy one. And he doesn’t stop! Which is – ah, progressive of him I guess. But still, just a bloody awkward night.” She scrubs her face. “Oh, Mad Eye,” she says as he approaches. “What’s your worst night?”

Moody’s eyebrows arch under all the scar tissue. “My worst night,” he repeats dryly.

“Yeah. You know, the cute anecdote sort. Not the murderous, gore, nightmare-inducing sort.”

“Ah. Well, in _that_ case – did I tell you about the witch who tried to transfigure herself into a pie?” He kicks out his bad leg and takes a pull off his flask before continuing.

And eventually everyone goes to rouse their children and collect their coats. Harry and Luna find Ivy and Cori and Luna’s twins behind a sofa in the living room, surrounded by scraps of multicolored paper cut into stars. Cori beams up at them. “We did a spell,” she says. “So Finn’s a boy now!”

Finn and Grainne had always dressed eclectically, without much concern for gender norms, so Harry wouldn’t know otherwise. He looks to Luna, who shrugs. “Finn is a boy now,” she agrees.
“Neat,” Harry says, to Finn more than anyone. “What does it feel like?”

Finn scrunches his nose. “Warm. And red. And purple.”

“Cool. You wanna take home some scones for breakfast?” He steps back so all the kids can crawl out from behind the sofa, then catches Cori and Ivy’s hands. “Hey. After you say bye to everyone, can you go put on pyjamas? Your new ones?”

“Mm, maybe.” Cori pulls her hand out of Harry’s, running after Finn and Grainne.

So Harry squeezes Ivy’s shoulder. “Did you have fun?”

“Yeah.” She’s still got a handful of the animated construction paper, wiggling itself into star shapes. “For you,” she says, holding it out.

And Harry takes the handful of scraps, putting them in his jeans pocket. “Thanks, baby. Let’s go wish everyone a happy Christmas.” And Ivy’s getting big by now, but not so much that Harry can’t oblige when she raises her arms to be picked up. Swinging her over his shoulders, they go to say goodbye.

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