Defined by love

by lyonessheart

Summary

If there is one thing that Harry knows beyond a doubt, it is that he wants a family with children. Breaking up with Ginny and coming out as gay only means he'll have to be unconventional once again, and adopt. After all, family is defined by love and not by blood. Struggling with a system that doesn't really do adoption, he takes on two foster children, and finally – via private adoption agency – a little girl. If only her eyes weren't so reminiscent of a crush that he hasn't shaken, even years later.

When Harry discovers something deeply disturbing about his daughter, as well as the private adoption scheme in the wizarding world, he is determined that he won't choose between his family and his budding romance with Draco. For once, he wants it all!

Now, he tries to solve the mystery surrounding Milas adoption, while someone clearly wants to keep the truth hidden, not even stopping at murder.

Notes

Mod Note: We'd like to remind all visitors that the art and fiction created for the Harry Big Bang is not to be copied, repurposed, or redistributed without express permission from the artist who created it and that we have exclusivity until 7 March 2015. You are welcome to recommend fics and art by linking back to the post on Ao3, but not to copy and repost elsewhere.
I can't count the number of moments when I wanted to give up on this during the year, but so many wonderful people believed in me and pushed me and so this story came to life. I can't thank my beta darkravenwrote enough for her help and encouragement and her patience. She needs a medal for putting up with my comma hatred! Another huge thank you goes to Ashindk for pre-reading, and sophie_french for always telling me to go on. And celestlyn who took the time to go over the full story once more.

And of course the artist who has made the wonderful illustrations for this story! I am more than honored that she worked with me, it is such a privilege to receive art and I am happy that she found inspiration in my work. Check out her other wonderful works here: coffeeisagoodstart

And I can't thank the mods enough for the yearlong support!!

So I hope you enjoy this story and let me know in a little review?

See the end of the work for more notes.
The screams that tore through the air on that sunny afternoon had nothing of a human sound in them anymore. Instead they sounded like those of a wounded animal, fighting for its life.

It was satisfying for the midwife to see even the purest and noblest witches reduced to their primal instincts, to see them like the commoners they so despised.

In labor they were all the same.

The woman on the bed arched again as another contraction took hold of her, the brown curls matted with sweat atop her head. She had grown weaker throughout the morning and afternoon. Her husband, who had paced a track into the hardwood floors by now, slumped on a chair, was anxious that something might have happened to his wife and hopefully, heir.

Finally, the woman on the bed seized up, caught in the age old rhythm of pressing to bring new life into the world.

The midwife began to encourage her, artfully distracting her patient.

After what seemed to be an eternity, the head of a child began to emerge. The midwife took her wand and began to cast surreptitiously.

"What are you doing?" The woman on the bed grasped her hand with surprising strength.

"Just making sure that your baby gets enough air." The reply was delivered in a neutral tone, after all it wouldn't do to make her patient even more nervous. So the calming charm washed over the exhausted witch, who didn't have enough strength left to resist.

A last mighty push brought the baby into the world, and as the midwife had already suspected, it was a beautiful baby girl. A quick silencing spell made sure that the baby's cries couldn't be heard. Another spell turned the healthy, squirming bundle into a limp puppet of flesh. An artful illusion
turned the head into something deformed and purplish-blue.
A moan came from the bed. The midwife smiled, ready to play the role of her life.

"How do you feel?"

"How is my baby?“ The woman on the bed tried to raise herself up, desperate to see her child.

"I am so sorry, it seems that the little one didn't make it.“

The wail that tore from the woman's mouth caused her husband to storm into the room.

“What’s going on? Has something happened to my heir?”

The midwife dropped into a curtsy.

"I am sorry, sir, but your daughter didn't make it. She was severely deformed and wasn’t breathing when she came into this world. I did all I could to make sure your wife stayed alive."

"I want to see the baby.“

She took the bundle from the bed and held it out.

The noble man took one look at the deformed face and said, "Take it out of my sight. We will try for another child as soon as my wife has recovered sufficiently."

The midwife felt something akin to sympathy for the sobbing woman on the bed, lying with the man of the house, with his cold, dark beady eyes and his hook nose surely was no pleasure; she knew how those pure-blood marriages worked. But it was only a small ember of sympathy, quickly subdued. She didn't get paid for kindness.

The sobs and cries of the desperate woman accompanied the midwife out.

The bundle in her arms began to squirm again. She smiled. The baby was pretty, it would fetch a tidy sum.

Her accomplice waited outside, ready to take over.

"Inform Peterson."

"Already done. He is waiting for us."

And they left, leaving behind grief and anguish.
Searching

Harry Potter, darling of the wizarding world, vanquisher of Voldemort, Boy Who Lived and winner of Witch Weekly's Most Charming Smile Award, is nineteen years old when he prepares for the most important dinner of his life.

Harry is nervous, his hands are wet, and he is sweating although it is cold outside. He knows that his girlfriend doesn't suspect anything. She doesn't know that he doesn't want to go out on a date just to spend time with her. Molly has been making noises regarding an engagement ever since Ron asked Hermione for her hand.

Harry knows that he doesn't have a choice anymore. He asked Ginny to meet him for dinner. They have been dating for two years now; he just hopes that Ginny doesn't expect the same thing that her Mother wants to hear him ask.

"There you are!" She is beautiful with red hair curling around her ears, brown eyes sparkling.

"Hi, Gin." He smiles nervously. "Let's go. I've got a table booked at the Golden Goose."

She is all smiles and loops her hand through the crook of his arm.

"Relax Harry, people might think I am leading you to the slaughter instead of dinner. She looks at him, concern evident in her eyes. His heart aches just looking at her.

When they reach their destination, they have a wonderful evening. Conversation flows easily between them. Harry is tempted to put off the confession he has to make until another day and to just keep everything as it is right now, but he is not a coward. He just hopes that he will be rewarded for that courage one day.

"Ginny, we need to talk about something." He fixes her with an earnest stare. She sits up a little straighter, smiling, and he is afraid that she expects a marriage proposal, but he can't back out now. She deserves his honesty.

"I want to break up." He can tell when the words reach her brain and register fully. The smile slides off her face and she turns to stone. Her back is ramrod straight as she pulls herself together. Harry has never loved her more than right now.

"Explain." Her voice is frigid, controlled, and trembling slightly. Harry wonders if she is waiting to unleash the infamous Weasley temper on him, but he takes the chance that she is offering him to make it out of this situation relatively unscathed.

"Gin." He scrubs at his face, trying to gather his thoughts. How does he explain this situation without making it worse than it already is?

"You have to believe me. I never wanted to hurt you, or see you hurt."

She snorts inelegantly at that. "Are you kidding me?"

"Please," he says, "just listen, and if you want to hex me afterwards then go ahead; I won't defend myself."

The miniscule nod he receives is the only other reaction he gets from her. He plows on.
"After the war, we got back together so quickly, and it was wonderful in the beginning.‘‘ His eyes grow moist. ‘‘But I wonder if it wasn’t too quick.‘‘

"What, did you want to fuck around a bit more?‘‘ She interrupts him again. Ginny is angry enough not to care that she sounds crude.

"No, Ginny. I think I got back together with you because you are wonderful. You are my haven, and you’ve become my best friend. I know you wondered why I insisted on taking things slow, but I wanted to do this right. I was terrified of messing this up.‘‘ His voice shakes badly now.

Ginny reaches out a hand and takes his. Harry marvels at her. Here she is, spitting mad but still anchoring him.

"You were my first, and I don’t regret any moment we had together, but I have never felt that hundred percent rightness that Ron has with Hermione, and I wanted that so badly.‘‘ His throat is tight and his eyes sting, but he refuses to cry because he doesn’t want the Prophet to come across him like this. The press will have a field day with the news of their break up anyhow, and giving them ammunition is the last thing Harry wants.

"Gin, I think there’s something wrong with me. I know you’re wondering why I haven’t come by more often lately. I’m supposed to want to be with you all the time; isn’t that what they all say?‘‘

The anger has left Ginny completely. She sags a bit as if she has read between the lines already what he is trying to get out, but somehow can’t put into words.

"Harry, I’m going to make an assumption, and you can just nod or shake your head, okay?‘‘ He looks at her.

"When you slept with me the last few months, you weren’t really with me, were you?‘‘

"Gin, there has never been another person in my bed!‘‘ He bristles at the accusation.

She smiles sadly.

"I mean in your head. Did you think about a guy?‘‘

His silence is answer enough. He just can’t get it out, but the confirmation of her fears doesn’t need any more words.

"Right.‘‘ She grabs her purse. "I need to go, Harry.‘‘ She is looking everywhere but at him, and he feels like he is losing her. He grabs her hand and she looks at it, as if it doesn’t quite belong to her.

"Ginny.‘‘ It is a plea, though for what, he doesn’t really know.

She shakes her head as if to clear it. ‘‘I really can’t talk to you right now. Give me a chance to figure this out for myself.‘‘

He wants to ask if she’s okay, but he knows that the question is ridiculous. Of course she is not okay. She turns and looks at him. "I’ll owl you, but right now I need to get away from you for a while.‘‘

And then, he is left alone with the jumble of his thoughts and the gut wrenching fear that he has just lost one of his best friends forever.

Moving fully into Grimmauld place takes Harry’s mind off the breakup for a while. Molly sent him a howler on behalf of her daughter, but Arthur wrote him a letter stating that Ginny has almost torn her
Mum’s head off for doing so, and that she is “old enough to fight her own battles”. He ends with words that make Harry’s throat close up.

;Just know that you will always be part of this family. don't think that we will abandon you, just because things didn't work out between you two. Give it time, Ginny will come around. Love Arthur

He cries after reading it. It is okay to cry in the sanctuary of his own home.

It is also okay to think about the reasons why he has broken up with the only woman that he has ever had any kind of feelings for. He cooks in his now clean kitchen as if an army will visit him each night, and he has found a way, after a lot of research, to get rid of the old portrait in the hall.

But mostly he sits in the freshly renovated sitting room, decked in creams and dark woods. There, he stares out of the window. His thoughts are jumbled, and he forbids himself from thinking too hard about grey eyes and blond hair. It isn't as if the object of his fantasies would ever be a true option anyway.

Having held a truce over the last year, born from grudging respect, does not mean that he can entertain the notion that his confused feelings would be returned in any way. Not knowing exactly what he feels doesn't make it any easier. So he takes all of his confusion and buries it in a corner of his mind, intent on never letting it out again.

Hermione and Ron come over on some nights, but telling them what actually led to the break up is even harder than telling Ginny. Technically, he still hasn't told her, not really, so he can't confide in them.

Ron is angry with him; Harry knows that. The punch he received right after Gin had flooed home and Harry arrived at Grimmauld place, was a pretty strong indication. But having lived through all all manner of hardships while searching for the Horcruxes, also means that their friendship will weather this storm. At least he hopes that it will – somehow nothing is guaranteed in his life anymore.

Ginny puts him out of his misery two weeks after their disastrous dinner.

Harry has just returned home from Tesco’s and is putting everything away, when the Floo roars to life, and she steps through. She is every bit as beautiful as she was the night of their break up, and Harry wonders if he will ever find words that can make it clear to her why he can't give her what she deserves.

"Hey." The soft sad smile on her face makes his heart ache, and he wonders, just for a second, if it wouldn't have been possible to live a lie for her.

"Hey." His voice sounds gruff.

"Can we talk?“ She asks.

"Of course, Gin. Always!“ He stumbles over his own feet in his haste to get around the table, and then stubs his toe. The pain cripples him, and he swears loudly, but through the haze he hears a sound that makes it all worthwhile.

Ginny is snickering, trying not to laugh out loud, but barely holding it together.

He holds onto the table and looks at her with a wry smile.
"I guess I deserve that."

She shakes her head, looking at him fondly. Her wand rests loosely in her hand and she raises her eyebrow. "Shall I fix that for you?"

Harry smiles a relieved but cautious smile, and asks teasingly, "Will I regret letting you near me with a wand?"

Gin snorts and simply casts a numbing spell on his aching foot. Turning around and marching into the living room he hears her mumbling, "Should have hexed him that day, thickheaded Gryffindor that he is."

Louder, she yells, "I'd like a cuppa, if you're able to get that done without injury?"

Harry gladly acquiesces, making the tea and setting a tray with two cups. Milk and sugar helps to settle his nerves a bit. He smiles when it dawns on him that Ginny aimed exactly for this.

Stepping into his living room, seeing her standing there, touches something deep inside of him. She looks right here, in his life, and losing her entirely would break him. Startled, he realises that she is more important to him now than Ron and Hermione could ever be - caught up as they are in their own relationship and their continuous struggle to balance each other.

She smiles and indicates for him to sit down.

"I won't bite, Harry. You made it clear that you don't want that anymore." And there it is, that slight hitch in her voice that makes it obvious they are still on rocky ground.

"Gin, I'm so glad that you're here. I missed you." Harry knows that she can hear his sincerity. He has never been able to lie to her.

She quietly tucks a lock of hair behind her ear before she looks at him. Harry feels naked under that gaze, and he tries not to fidget too much. He doesn't quite know what to do with his hands, so he grabs the cup and takes a sip.

"You still owe me an explanation, don't you think, Harry? I always thought we were good together."

Harry sighs and nods. "Yes, Gin, we are good together. Comfortable." Her eyes widen at that. He knows she has picked up on that little detail. "I know many people think that I'm incapable of thinking things through, but when we got back together, I thought that the passion would come with time. I hoped that my longing for you would wake up again, and I'd be crazy about you." She nearly jumps up at this, but he forces her down. This needs to be said and she needs to be able to listen, otherwise they will never have the chance to be friends again.

"Gin, I love you." he continues "You know that's the truth. And if we were both only looking for someone we could live a comfortable and content life with, I wouldn't hesitate to marry you."

She looks at him.

"But Gin, we both want so much more from a partner. We need someone to challenge us, who is passionate about us. Someone who can't wait to get home to have their wicked way with us, at least in the beginning, and we don't want that from each other."

The blush on her face says more than she will ever admit out loud to him, but that is okay; he knows she understands.

"Ginny, I want that spark. That 'can't keep my hands off you' passion. And we're too much like brother and sister to ever have that with each other. To be honest, I'm still figuring out if you're right
and I really am gay." There he said it out loud for the first time, and it was not as hard as he thought it would be.

He continues getting it all out. Pouring it out for her, so she can understand once and for all.

Her voice throws him of a bit.

"Have you ever felt something close to that passion you are describing?" Her eyes are shut tight as if she can't bear looking at him, but can't run away either.

He sighs again. Lying really would be so much easier, but it won't get them anywhere.

"Yes, I have, and you also know for whom. But you also know that nothing will come of it, so don't torture yourself with 'what ifs,' okay?"

She nods sharply, a jerking motion that he would kill to ease.

Silence reigns once more, stretched thin.

"You always wanted a family. Have you thought about that?"

He swallows, his mouth is dry, and he feels a bit as if she has punched him in the gut.

"What do you want me to say, Gin? Yes, I want a family, but I don't want to use you to get one. I don't want to wake up one day, with kids that we have created with the help of too much alcohol. I don't want to wake up and feel wrong in my own skin, and I don't want to have a relationship based on lies. And, yes, it might cost me my wish for a family, but I have to live with that. Though if it costs me you, it might kill me."

The look that she gives him indicates danger, but just as he thinks about hiding behind the sofa, she throws her arms around him and breaks down.

Although it is strange, holding her like this, feeling her tears seep through his shirt, those tears make it clear to him that they will be all right. It might take some time, but they will be just fine.

Harry knows that he is heading for another breakup. It has been coming for a while if he is honest with himself, but he wanted to hold on to his ideal of what makes a relationship. It doesn't matter that Oliver has become more and more withdrawn lately. On the few occasions that they did see each other, they were good together.

The words that Oliver is uttering are not really coming as a surprise, but still as a very low blow. Harry wants to hold on to the idea of them, but if he is honest with himself, ‘them’ has been over
ever since he first said that he wanted to have a baby. They have just been good at lying to themselves for quite a while.

He forces himself to meet Oliver's eyes, such a wonderful, gentle brown. He knows this man inside and out. But, because he knows him, he also knows it is time to take a step back and stop being selfish.

"Harry, are you even listening?" Oli shakes his head in wry amusement, tinged with exasperation.

"I am listening."

"I have an offer to fly for the national Quidditch team. But if you ask me to stay, I’ll decline."

The words are there, balancing on the tip of his tongue, but Harry can't bring himself to speak them. Instead he sighs and says, "Oliver, you never wanted a family with me, right?"

Oliver looks startled. "We’ve talked this through, haven’t we? I just can't see myself with a baby. Especially not right now."

Harry's mouth curves into a tired, sad smile. "Well, Oliver, when I asked, I didn't say right now. I asked you to imagine us with a baby in a couple of years. And I need you to be honest with me. I’m pretty sure that lying to each other will only lead to an even uglier breakup in the future."

Oliver breathes in slowly, as if he needs time to formulate a way to say what he needs to without hurting Harry too much. "Harry, I..." His eyes moisten, and he shakes his head. His resolve is strong as he looks at Harry. "Harry, I don't want children. At least, not in the next ten years. I can't see myself settled. I don't want to get married, and I don't want to promise you something just to keep you with me."

Although Harry has known that this probably would be the outcome of the conversation, he feels numb. It hurts so much. He feels a bit like the boy he once was begging for love at the Dursleys, before he realised that he would never find love in that house.

"So this is it? You’re just going to let me go?"

Oliver pulls him close. Harry goes without a fight, allows for that last embrace. Part of him shrieks that he could just wait a while longer, that it isn't all that important to have a family right now, and that maybe Oliver will change his mind. But the larger part of him, the one that he would like to ignore but can't, knows how hard it is to admit that sometimes love just isn't enough.

"Harry," Oliver talks quietly. "You are a wonderful person, and I wish I could promise you that in a few years, I’ll want to have a family with you. But it would be a lie and you deserve so much more."

Harry almost crawls onto Oliver's shoulder. A shudder goes through him. Gathering his resolve to not make this harder on either of them, he pushes off. "Oliver, I love you. But I understand where you’re coming from. And you’re right.‘ Harry fights to get his act together. "I don't want to hate you one day in our thirties, and I have to break up with you because you’ll never want to settle. One day, I want to remember our time together, and be happy I had it. Preferably when I have my own family and baby."

He takes a deep breath and looks Oliver in the eyes. It takes more strength to cradle that familiar face in his hands and press a soft kiss to the full lips, than he ever thought possible.

"So, this is goodbye then?" Oliver hugs him tightly, buries his face into his unruly mop of hair, and sobs. He pulls himself together again quickly and asks earnestly, "Harry, do you think we’ll be
friends in the future? I don't want to completely lose you."

Harry cups Oliver's cheek with his hand. "Oliver, you won't get rid of me that easily. You'll need to give me some time though. You'll be leaving soon anyway, right? And I'll be there to cheer you on when you fly for England!"

Harry doesn't cry when he leaves the familiar flat. But it is hard knowing that he will never come back again as Oliver's lover.

He holds onto his composure until he is safe in his own house, until the doors are closed and the world can't see him fall apart, and then the tears come, the pain. Harry doesn't allow himself the weakness of falling apart often - too used to the expectations of a world that seems to think heroes don't feel the same pain as ordinary wizards.

Great heaving sobs burst from his chest, he can't get enough air and feels like he is making himself sick. Suddenly gentle hands are there, caressing his shaking back, a voice softly murmuring, "That's it. Come on, let it out. Cry all you want and need. I'm here, I'll always be here."

Harry doesn't know how long he cries into the sofa, but the comforting presence never wavers, never leaves. He cries himself out, exhausted and sore, nose clogged, and body aching all over.

"Let's get you to bed, darling. We will talk when you are awake again. I'm in the living room; you aren't alone. Okay?"

Harry falls asleep, exhaustion bone deep, but he feels oddly cleansed.

Much later, at least if he can trust the sun shining through his window with soft morning light, he awakens. For a fraction of a second, everything is alright, and he wonders how Oliver is doing and if they might have time for a date later on. Then, he remembers, and the tears well up again. Suddenly, he is angry at himself. He had known that this would happen sooner or later, so why does it feel like the world has ended?

He gets up and heads towards the shower. Clattering comes from his kitchen and he frowns. Had someone stayed in his flat overnight? He peeks around the corner and sees the bright red pony tail of his best friend.

"Ginny!" She whirls around at his exclamation and looks him over.

"Well you certainly look better than I thought, given the state I found you in yesterday," she states with the calm air that he needs right now to keep his composure. "Go take a shower, I'm fixing us breakfast and then we can talk."

Harry nods and leaves to do as she suggests.

He steps under the warm stream of the water, allowing it to wash away the lingering ache in his muscles. When he runs out of body parts to wash, he steps out of the shower and towels himself dry, puts on a pair of clean pants and an old shirt. His face in the mirror looks tired and drawn, but then again, he considers, that is to be expected after a breakup.

He pads into the kitchen, grateful when Ginny simply pushes a cup of tea into his hands and places a plate of eggs and bacon in front of him.

"Eat," is all she says, and for a while, it is comfortably quiet. The only sound is forks on plates.

Harry doesn't taste much, if he is honest. The crisp bacon feels like cardboard in his mouth, and the
eggs are more like rubber than the creamy goodness that Ginny has made for him before.

He gives up and pushes the plate away, even though it is more than half full still.

"I can't, Gin, I am sorry." She smiles, and touches his hand.

"It's okay, Harry. I didn't think I could get you to eat anything." And now the smile is mischievous. "Unless I channeled Mum. ‘You need to eat darling.’"

Harry is surprised to hear himself laugh, and then stops. Is he really so callous that he can just sit there and laugh, not even twenty-four hours after his breakup with Oliver?

Ginny appears to read his mind and takes his hand. "Now, Harry, talk to me. What happened exactly? Oliver's owl yesterday was more than confusing. He basically ordered me to go to your place. Do I need to hex the guy now after all? My Bat-bogey hex is still something to be reckoned with."

Harry tries to sort his jumbled mind. "No hexing is needed. He got an invitation for the National Quidditch team, and I want to stay at home and have a family. We broke up yesterday." It sounds strange stated so matter of factly, but there is no good way to put it. They are both headed in such different directions in life that there is no way to combine their lives. Not without sacrifices that neither of them is willing to make, at least in their early twenties.

Ginny sighs. It is a topic that came up more than once between them.

"Oh, Harry." She doesn't need to say much more. Harry knows that she understands.

When she washes the dishes, looking right at home in his kitchen, he wonders when it happened that she became so important to him. He went through thick and thin with Ron and Hermione, but - somehow - somewhere between his failed relationship with Ginny, his travels to find himself, Ron's and Hermione's wedding, the building of their house, and Hermione's Ministry career, they had drifted apart. Now Ginny has become his rock, the one he leans on when life gets too rough.

The owl knocking on the window startles them both, but it is only the Daily Prophet delivery. Harry reads it more for a laugh than for real information, but the glaring headline throws him for another loop, as if this day didn't suck enough already.

Harry drops the paper as if burned him. Ginny looks at him with all too knowing eyes and he can't stand it.

"I need some fresh air."

"Harry, wait!"

"Not now, Gin." And with that, he leaves Grimmauld place for some much needed air. He has never really talked about the crush he developed on the blond Slytherin in their eighth year, and he reckons there is nothing to talk about anymore. They lost sight of each other after school ended. He was busy pretending to be normal, and Draco got sucked up into the Potioneer's Master Programme. The fact that Harry left England for a while after breaking up with Ginny didn't help.

Somehow, they just never got in touch after school ended, and now Harry doesn't have the courage to actually approach Draco again; he thinks it would look strange. School has been over for five years already, so why would he even consider sending Draco an owl? Something like – ‘Congratulations on getting married? Wanna go have a drink anyway?’ Could he be more pathetic?
After all, he has just broken up with his boyfriend and Draco – well Draco is getting married. If that isn't an indication for being straight, Harry doesn't know what is.

Instead of doing something really stupid, he wanders the streets and lets his thoughts fly. Maybe he just has to get used to the fact that the hero doesn't always get a happy ending. When he stares at the article later in the comfort of his home, he just hopes that Draco is happy wherever he is right now.

Malfoy Heir engaged to Greengrass Heiress!

Mr and Mrs Cuthbert Greengrass of Yorkshire announce the engagement of their daughter, Astoria Greengrass to Draco Malfoy, son of Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy of Wiltshire.

The future bride finished at Hogwarts with five NEWTS. She is employed as a Junior healer at St Mungos.
The future groom received a total of seven NEWTS. He has received a potioneer’s mastery at the renowned Potions Institute of London and has established a line of experimental potions.

A July 2003 wedding is planned and the couple will live in Malfoy Manor, Wiltshire

Harry can't believe that it is spring again and another year has flown by. Somehow, time seems to speed up once you reach a certain age. Draco's wedding has been the talk of the century and the Daily Prophet, as well as Witch Weekly have published photo spread after photo spread. So Harry knows all about the bride and groom, how happy the couple look, and what a radiant bride Astoria made.

Harry thinks she did look beautiful, but unfortunately she had nothing on her groom. And he will definitely not tell anybody that he nicked Ginny's copy of Witch Weekly and has hidden it in his bedroom. ‘Just to look at Draco being happy,’ he keeps telling himself.

Although he promised himself that the breakup with Oliver would not be the end of the world, he has still fallen into a funk that he can't really shake. Seeing Draco get married has, somehow, just been the icing on a cake he really doesn't find palatable. So, here he is, twenty-four and single, maudlin because he can't have what he wants. To be completely honest, for a long time he didn't really know what he wanted either.

Right after the war, whenever someone asked him, he always said he'd wanted peace and quiet. But soon after, he realized that he needed some kind of action, otherwise he would have gone spare. He shudders when he thinks back on his attempt at joining the Auror corps. Harry just isn't made for following rules and orders, and he has had more than enough of chasing dark wizards. Then, of course, there had been the small matter of the Elder Wand. After six months of being terrified that one day someone might just be lucky enough to best him in a duel, Harry made a trip to Hogwarts and destroyed it for good.

So that was that. Then, Harry had had enough of Ginny's insistent prodding at him to get off his arse and to do something, and since he had quit the Aurors, maybe he could try playing Quidditch professionally. Harry thinks she was projecting that idea on him a bit, after all she is now happily playing for the Holyhead Harpies and has stopped harping him about it.

He tried going into healing, but when he realized that even with magic, he would have to see people die – because magic can't fix everything, and although cancer and AIDS aren't problems for wizards, other illnesses are as deadly to them as the measles used to be to Muggles – he dropped that thought too. After seeing a little boy suffer for days because of Dragon Pox, he left St Mungos and hasn't gone back there since.

He has stumbled more over his calling than actively finding a job. If he thinks about it, one could say his job found him. One day, he had been walking through London as if something was calling to
him. He felt restless and had begun to explore the city more thoroughly, and he found the orphanage more by chance than an active search. He had rung the doorbell and had been welcomed in by Mrs Chase - she is the soul that keeps the orphanage running. Most kids were already of an age that made it less likely that somebody would adopt them.

He asked a ton of questions and was outraged to be told that no one really cared for the kids under eleven. If they had parents most of them got homeschooling, but the orphans were left to their own devices. The house currently housed twenty kids, and Mrs Chase was busy enough keeping up with the administration and collecting money for the upkeep. Harry had simply asked if she would like his help. And so he had started his crusade for the forgotten orphans.

He loves them all dearly, and he always has more than enough to do. He collects donations and teaches the young kids to keep their magic under control. He reads bedtime stories and tells stories about his adventures. He takes the older kids to the park and plays catch with them. The little ones adore him because he loves them so much, and the older ones look up to him because of who he is. Over time, his wish for his own family has only been emphasised by the kids. If he could, he would adopt all of them. They deserve someone to love them and, although Harry knows that it is petty, he feels as if his heart is ripped out every time one of the kids leaves the orphanage to go and live with a family.

Once a month they have potential adoptive parents come in and meet with the kids. Harry always takes special care of the older ones then, because he knows how much it hurts to be overlooked and pushed aside. He knows that the kids have the best chance of being adopted if they are still small – probably until age two. Then they still look enough like a baby to be cherished. Harry hates the potentials when they ask specifically for babies. He knows that babies rarely come into the orphanage. Nearly no kid is given up for adoption in the wizarding world, and orphaned babies without living relatives are therefore rare. Most of the smaller kids are snatched up directly in the private adoption process, and the Ministry only sends kids to the orphanage who don't find a willing adopting pair within the first six months of searching.

He tries to tell himself that he should be happy, because he is working with the kids on a daily basis and that they love him as much as they would love their real parents, but he isn't really their dad, and his ache for a family of his own grows day by day. Today they have four couples visiting, looking for a prospective child. He thinks about his little charges and his heart breaks a little, thinking that he'll have to let some of them go after today. The couples visiting the institute have the approval of the Ministry to adopt any child they choose. Their homes have been evaluated, and their relationships have been approved. Harry isn't bitter, not at all. But he's hated the Ministry ever since he approached them about adopting one or two of the older kids. He can still remember the day as if it was yesterday.

*The Ministry was still dark and intimidating. Harry shivered as he walked the long corridors. It was ages before he reached the office he had been searching for. He took a deep breath as he knocked. Being calm and collected was really important then. His hands were clammy and he felt a cold sweat on his back*

"Enter.“ The voice sounded saccharine sweet, and Harry disliked it instantly because it reminded him terribly of Umbridge and her kitten plates on the wall. Entering the office, he found his fear partially confirmed. The witch who sat behind the desk was an Umbridge lookalike. She wore a pastel green twin set that did nothing for her complexion. She looked pasty and sick, her perm a sad attempt to create volume in her hair. She was holding a lorgnon to her eyes - who did that at the beginning of the 21th century? She looked at him over the rim of the lorgnon and motioned impatiently for him to enter. "Young man, I must ask you to hurry up a bit. I don't dawdle around here."
Harry jumped a bit. He stretched his hand out, nervous. "Hello Mrs...“ She looked at him as if he was something disgusting that the kneazle dragged in.

"Ms Elderidge, Mr Potter."

He apologized hastily. "Of course, Ms Elderidge, I am terribly sorry!“

She snorted inelegantly. "So what brings you to my office, Mr Potter? I understand that you have been working at the Ministry's orphanage? Is there a problem?“

Harry shook his head. "No, Ms Elderidge, there is no problem. I merely wish to adopt two of the older children who have been with the orphanage for several years now. Tia and Marcus are eight and ten siblings, and I would hate to see them separated. I love them both very much and they love me, so I would like to adopt them. “

He could see the minute that she judged him. "Mr Potter, why would you want to adopt only those two and not the others? You are aware what kind of message you would send to the other children?“

Harry smiled at her, although it really cost him not to call her a judgemental cow. "The two are even more attached to me than the other kids. And, of course, I would not stop working with the other children. But since I have no boyfriend at the moment, I would like to start with those two. When it works out well, I am not opposed to taking more children in. I've always wanted a big family. “

He couldn't take her facial expression for anything but disgust. "Mr Potter, are you saying that you are homosexual?“ The way she said it, it sounded like a contagious disease. Her nose was scrunched up as if she had just smelled something bad. Harry was flabbergasted. He had thought that being single might pose a problem, but that his sexual orientation could be a hindrance was not something he had ever considered. He hadn't kept it a secret and had never got any trouble for it. People had always been tolerant.

"Mr Potter, let it be known that I will not grant a homosexual the right to adopt two children. I unfortunately cannot forbid you to foster them, but you will never get my approval for an official adoption. “

Harry was stunned. "Ms Elderidge, in the UK we have just passed the law stating that gay couples are allowed to adopt as well, are you telling me that the ministry will not adhere to that law?“ The smile she gave him was downright nasty.

"But, Mr Potter, correct me if I am wrong. You are not in a relationship, and haven't been since you broke up with Oliver Wood almost nine months ago. Let me tell you that our mental health experts say that the best idea is to place a child in a two-parent home with a mother and father who are compatible and loving. You are single and furthermore gay and will therefore never be able to provide these children with a stable, normal home life. I definitely will not provide you with a favorable recommendation. We are done here. As I said, you can foster the children, as you have been working with them for a while now and the reports that have been given by Mrs Chase indicate that you do care for them to a considerable extent. But the Ministry will retain the right to remove the children from your care should you prove to be unfit to provide for them in any way. “

She closed her folder with an air of finality. Harry could taste only ash and felt as if someone just hit him with a bludger. He left the office with the permission to take Tia and Marcus home with him, and he could try to foster more children later if it worked out well, but a tiny part of him still wanted to call a child legally his. Having the damocles sword hanging over him permanently would not
Harry smiles, that was three months ago. Tia and Marcus now live with him at Grimmauld place and he loves having them with him. It is not easy being a single parent, but to see their happy faces everytime he picks them up from school and takes them home with him, makes it worth it. They are visiting a local group teaching basic Magical skills to young wizards and witches, similar to what Harry is doing at the orphanage. The decision to let them go to a ‘normal’ school has not been easy, but Harry wanted to provide them with a normal family life and not a permanent reminder of their orphaned state.

He has been trying to convince Ron and Hermione to take on a foster kid or two, but they are reluctant, after all they are working on their own little family. Harry has to admit it has caused something of a rift between them. Mrs Weasley comes in regularly now too and teaches the little girls stuff like needlework and knitting, because they have the most fun with it. If he could he would just take all of them home and be their dad, but Grimmauld place has only four extra bedrooms and one is always reserved for Teddy, when Andromeda allows an overnight visit, and the last one? Well, that is his own guilty pleasure. As long as that bedroom is a guest room, he can still imagine having a baby with his own name one day.

Finally Harry has a goal in life. He wants to build something more reminiscent of a boarding school for kids under eleven than simply the lonely air of the orphanage. But it is hard to find the funds or even a house big enough to place twenty children. Although Harry is glad there are only twenty kids. His kids are all full orphans without relatives that could take them in. It makes Harry even madder that he is not allowed to provide Tia and Marcus with the security that they will always be with him.

Living with two kids has been a challenge, but he loves getting up in the morning, making them breakfast before waking them. Tia is an easy going girl and rarely fights with her big brother. Marcus is already excited and hopes to receive his Hogwarts Letter soon, but that will take another four months. Before that they still get to celebrate Tia’s ninth birthday. He will need Ginny’s help for that, because as much as he loves his daughter, he is pretty clueless about the things little girls want nowadays.

Hermione is pretty busy working for the ministry and Ginny is on leave as she had been injured slightly while pulling a dangerous stunt in her last game. Remembering his own Quidditch Games, Harry still smiles at remembering Molly’s fury. So, today he is dropping off Tia and Marcus at the Burrow and apparates to Diagon Alley with Ginny in tow.

"I’m so glad that you can go with me. I’d probably end up buying her a book, and although she loves books, I don’t want to bore her to death! It’s her first birthday with me and I want to make it special for her. Do you think she would like a pink cake?"

Ginny grins at him. "Leave the cake to mum; you don’t think she is going to let you anywhere near it, right? She pampers Tia and Marcus just as much as Victoire. She keeps hinting at wanting more grandbabies, but I’m really turning a deaf ear on that one still. I figure she is busy enough with the kids at the orphanage. Hermione and Ron can go first."

Harry smiles - more like grins - at her. It feels so good that his own adoptive family have taken his kids in like this. His heart is close to bursting with the love he feels for the Weasleys, and he is just so grateful that their breakup hasn't damaged the relationship he has with her parents. He still remembers how they made themselves very clear on that. Traveling had been fun, and he had kept in touch with his friends via owl, but he hadn't really dared to count himself a member of the family still. Until the first week after coming back to England.
"Do you remember how your mum send a howler to me, because I didn't appear at the monthly Sunday lunch?"

Ginny bursts out laughing. "Oh yes – you showed up half an hour late, hair singed and completely flabbergasted. And mum only said, 'It's about time, young man! I don't like to be kept waiting. If you miss one more lunch without a suitable excuse I won't hesitate to box your ears. The monthly Sunday lunches are sacred for our family-- all of our family. You understand?' and that was that."

Harry chuckles, "I am glad I have you.‘ He bumps his shoulder into her.

She smiles and sighs, "Well having seven brothers sometimes is a bother, but you, at least, are tolerable."

"Oi, I feel a bit insulted. I'm only tolerable?"

"Stop fishing for compliments, Harry. We need to find a wonderful birthday present for your daughter.‘ Ginny pulls him towards Margery’s Magical Toy Store where he is overwhelmed with the amount of toys little witches and wizards can have. There are puzzles and ponies, talking dolls and little animagi (dolls that turn into an animal and back on command), magical castles and miniature quidditch games (he has to buy one of those for Marcus, but not today.) Today is all about Tia. And his Tia is his little princess. A doll with blonde hair catches his eye, and he picks it up. She is wearing a beautiful dress with an built-in charm to switch colours on command.

"Ginny,‘ he calls her and she turns towards him. Her eyes widen at the doll in his hands.

"Oh, she is just gorgeous! I think Tia would love it! Get her a magical colouring book and magical pencils to go with it and you should be all set."

They buy the items and head for an early dinner at the Leaky Cauldron. Harry is content, he misses the two already but knows that Molly enjoys feeding them, so he can hold out a bit longer. They order dinner and a pint, and Ginny looks at him for a while before bursting out. "Are you happy, Harry?"

Harry swallows the piece of meat he is chewing and thinks about the question for a bit. "Yes, I am happy. I would still like to adopt those two or have another child that can carry my name, but it’s not of the utmost importance. I am happy to have them with me, and they need me and my full attention."

Ginny nods. "It's just because of something I saw in the Daily Prophet today."

Harry raises his eyebrow in question. What could it be that triggered such a reaction in her? Normally he doesn't give a damn about the gossip in that rag.

"Astoria Malfoy is pregnant. She appears to be in her fifth month or so. The robes don't hide it anymore and I wondered if you'd seen it already.‘ She looks at him, concern in her brown eyes.

Harry swallows, the food tastes horrible suddenly, but he will not allow that to show on his face. "I'll write an owl with congratulations then,‘ he gets out after a while.

Her hand covers his. "Honey, what is it that makes this so hard for you? The fact that Draco has a baby before you? You have two wonderful kids living with you. And even if you haven’t been approved for adoption yet it is probably only a matter of time?"

Harry shakes his head. He has never told Ginny or anyone really about his numerous attempts to get approval for adoption. Ms Elderidge hates him and his lifestyle, and she has made it clear in her
department that no one is allowed to give him a positive evaluation, which would make it possible to officially adopt any child really. Now it spills out.

"So, I cannot adopt a child."

Ginny cocks her head. "Well you can’t adopt a child that’s under Ministry care, that much is true, but even in the wizarding world we have the possibility of private adoption. It’s very hush hush, because people frown upon giving a baby up, but even we have witches that cannot care for their babies and allow adoption. Since there is no way to do that through the ministry, most people go through one agency. It is called Peterson and Partner Adoption Agency."

Harry looks at her, mouth open. "And you know that how? Ginny, please don't tell me you had to use them?"

She is angry now. "Of course not! But I had a teammate, a close friend of mine, she got pregnant at eighteen and left the team for a while. The guy who knocked her up had long since disappeared, and her parents were pretty ignorant Muggles who were not happy to see their daughter play quidditch, so they broke off all contact. We talked a lot of options through, but she didn't want to give up her job to keep her baby under the circumstances. With our crazy schedules a newborn just didn't fit into her life and she didn't see another choice. So, she went to Peterson and set up a contract. She selected the family, who got to adopt her baby, and that was that."

Ginny looks at him imploringly. "All I am saying is that you could check them out and make an appointment with them. Otherwise the offer still stands to carry your baby in a couple years and raise it with you."

Harry is overwhelmed, on the one hand he knows that he really wants to have a child of his own and it irks him to no end that he can’t get the official approval. On the other hand, having a real baby with Ginny sounds so surreal, and he is not sure if he wants to burden their friendship like this.

"I appreciate the offer, Ginny, I really do, but I think I have to pass on it, at least for the next few years. Tia is only turning nine, and I think I need to see how good I am with raising her first. But I will check out the private adoption agency and see if they are more accommodating than the ministry. Maybe in a year or so when Marcus is off to Hogwarts I can think about adopting another child."

They finish their meal in silence and head back to the Burrow. The kids run up to him and Harry catches them both. He feels warm and happy seeing the blond and the dark head pressed close to his chest, as if they can't quite believe that they have him. He knows the feeling – he used to have it every time Molly hugged him when he was growing up.

Heading home and tucking them both into bed fills him with a sense of calm. As long as he lives, he will fight for his family. No one will ever take them away from him.

The night-lights are on in Tia's room. Marcus claims he is way too big for that, but he still revels in the good-night ritual and Harry leaves the door open – just a tiny bit. Downstairs, he pours himself a finger of Odgen's and writes a polite letter to 'Peterson and Partner' just to get to know them and to keep the option open for a later time.

The next days pass in a comfortable routine. Harry prepares everything for Tia's birthday even though it is still a couple weeks to go, he just wants everything perfect. Friday night finds them at the dinner table, where Tia and Marcus animatedly talk about their day while they are eating a simple but delicious meal of shepherd's pie, when all of a sudden an owl knocks at the window. Harry lets her in and she drops her missive. She takes off again without waiting for a reply and the thick creamy
parchment bears a sigil, stating "Peterson and Partner". Harry puts the letter aside and smiles at his kids. "It is just work related. Something dreadfully boring I'm sure."

They go back to talking as if nothing has happened, and Harry enjoys the domesticity of their evening. Only much later, after he has cleaned the living room and put the board games away, tucked them in and fulfilled the usual evening routine, he drops into his favorite armchair. The letter is clear and to the point.

"Dear Mr Potter,

We are delighted to offer you our services. If you would like to partake in an informal meeting, wherein we can introduce our agency and our specific services for you better, we would be honored to receive you in our office, at any time tomorrow Saturday April 24th from 9 – 12.

We are looking forward to meeting with you, to see how we may be of assistance in your case.

Kind Regards

James Peterson"

He lets the letter sink. That was fast, is he ready to really look into this? He has promised himself that he will only look, and of course even if they can help, it is not certain that he will be able to adopt anytime soon. He is sure that there are a ton of other people waiting to adopt. So, yes, why not? He’ll drop Tia and Marcus off at the Burrow tomorrow, they love playing with Victoire, and he will only be gone for a hour or two at most. And probably nothing will come of it anyway.

So he does as planned. Ginny braids Tia’s and Victoire’s hair when he leaves and Ron plays Quaffle Catch with Marcus in the backyard. Harry resolves to buy the miniature Quidditch game on the way back, then that is another thing of his mind.

The house in which Peterson and Partner is situated is a bit off to the side, and not very obvious. Suspicious people would say it is situated in manner to be overlooked unless you know what you are looking for, and Harry is still a bit suspicious. Stepping into the house is a surprise though. Instead of the dark woods that Harry halfway expected reminiscent of an unrenovated Grimmauld Place, the entry hall is decorated in soft cream tones. The hardwood floors gleam like liquid honey and the windows have been charmed to look out on a green meadow.

Harry is ushered into a spacious office where he is offered tea with sugar and milk, and a tray of tiny sandwiches. Although he had breakfast at eight and will have lunch with the kids later, he takes one and is pleasantly surprised. Five minutes later, the young receptionist tells him that Mr Peterson will be along shortly, and that he is very sorry to keep him waiting.

Harry wanders a bit through the office, finding the books on the shelf particularly interesting. He wasn't aware that there was a book on pureblood genealogy, ‘Pure-Blood Directory,’ or on how to deal with squib children, ‘So Your Child is a Squib?’, ‘Magicless in a Magical World’, and ‘Care for Non-Magical Children.’ Harry feels more and more uncomfortable, is this an agency that only places squib babies with adoptive parents? If so he had better leave, not because he doesn't want a squib baby, but he hates to think about the prejudice that he will face in a few minutes. Just then Mr Peterson enters the office and greets him emphatically.

“Welcome, Mr Potter. Please don't misunderstand the books. We do not discriminate against anyone who wants to adopt or who comes to see their child in good hands later on. Unfortunately, some of the older families still have trouble adjusting to squib children and thus decide to give them up for adoption. I personally think that everybody should have the right to live
life the way they want. But this way, at least I can ensure that the family who receives the child will be well prepared for a baby without magic.”

Harry is still sceptical. “So, you tell magical parents to give you their child?”

Mr Peterson smiles at him. “Mr Potter, how many squibs do you know?” Harry thinks hard about this, but apart from Filch and Ms Arabella Figg he doesn't remember anyone. He names them and looks at Mr. Peterson questioningly.

“Before I actively began to promote the idea of placing squib children into families prepared to accommodate their special needs, many squib babies died in their first year, because of magical overexposure. If you care for a squib baby through house elves, it will accumulate in their nervous system and that is harmful if the body is not able to expedite the magic on its own like small magical babies can when they spit colourful bubbles or make their mobiles spin.”

Harry’s head hurts. He’s never heard of such a thing, but then again the kids in the orphanage are all magical and he doesn't know any baby squibs. “So, now all the baby squibs are given to parents that are aware that their child has a magical background, but won't be able to do magic and can't be exposed to too much magic in the beginning?”

Mr Peterson smiles. “Yes, but of course we do not only help Squib parents. We are here for any desperate witch who needs to place her child in good hands and can't keep it.”

Harry is a bit relieved at that. “So, how would the process go? Do I need some kind of assessment? Do you need to know that I can provide for a baby?”

“We would set up a series of interviews with you and would make one or two visits to your homestead to see how well you are equipped to handle a small child. I understand that you are without a partner at the moment?”

“Yes, I am single right now, and I have two children in foster care. They are eight and ten.”

“That is admirable, Mr Potter. So, I take it you have always wanted a family?”

Harry smiles. “Yes, I have. And I’d love to have the chance to care for a child whose parents are unable to do so. I have so much love to give that I can provide for more than my two children at home. If it takes a couple years, that would be okay too. Then I can take care of my two kids until they go to Hogwarts.”

Mr Peterson nods at that. “Well, Mr Potter, sometimes it can take years, to be honest. As soon as we have evaluated your homelife and your ability to care for a child, we will place you in our pool, and as soon as a child needs a home you can meet with the mother or we will inform you about the background of that baby. Then, you have a two month period in which you and the child can find out if you are compatible, or the mother can request her baby back, should she reconsider. In some cases, it just doesn't work out. Afterwards, we will sign a contract and file all of the necessary paperwork with the Ministry.”

Harry has to ask this. “So, even if the ministry refuses to give me a positive evaluation, you would be able to get a legal adoption through?”

“Of course, Mr Potter! The parents or guardians sign away all rights to the child and transfer it to you. It will be as if you are their parent by blood, the baby will have your name and no one can deny you a right to the child in question. What do you say? Would you like to start the process for evaluation?”
Harry nods. It might take years before he is chosen for a child, and he still has enough time to talk this through with Hermione and Ginny. He needs their confirmation that he is doing everything right.

“Excellent, now here are the forms that you will need to fill out before our next meeting. I would suggest two weeks time, because you will need to gather quite a lot of information.”

Harry takes the papers and bids Mr Peterson farewell. On the one hand, he is elated because he is making a step towards a child of his own. On the other hand, he has his doubts, because he might hurt Tia and Marcus through this. Will they feel as if they matter less to him then? When it comes down to it, he will need to talk to them before he makes a final decision. They are his kids too, after all.

Passing a newspaper stand on the street, he cannot avoid the picture of Astoria Malfoy with a gentle babybump under her robes. She looks radiant and Draco next to her looks happy. Harry swallows and reminds himself that all he ever wanted was for Draco to be happy. Now if he could only convince his own traitorous mind of this.

Coming back to the Burrow always feels like coming home to Harry. No matter how friendly Grimmauld Place looks by now and no matter how comfortable he is at the orphanage, being here centers him in a way that no other place on earth does. The Burrow is suffused with love and laughter and fond memories of family members gone. Molly is his mother in almost every way; he is glad that he is still welcome here, his kids taken into the fold just like he had been so many years ago.

He takes a minute or so to collect his thoughts before he steps into a familiar chaos that always makes him smile. Molly is making food as if a small army want to be fed and Tia is helping her as much as she can. Outside he can hear the shrieking laughter of Victoire and Marcus, who are degnoming the garden with their Uncle George. Bill and Fleur had to spend the weekend in Egypt on an emergency trip and their daughter loves being here. Sometimes, though much more rarely than he wants to, Harry brings Teddy here, and he loves the sound of happy, carefree childish laughter.

Hermione and Ginny sit a bit apart from the others and watch the wild chase, drinking tea and keeping an eye on the others - always prepared to heal scraped knees or noses. He feels warm inside just looking at them all.

"Hey, girls." He drops on the bench, not quite sure how to approach the topic thats going on in his mind, somehow it seems ungrateful towards his other kids to even consider applying for adoption, because won't they feel like he is putting them second best?

Hermione reads his mind like always, narrows her eyes at him and simply commands. "Spill it."

Ginny jumps up and head inside. "I'll be back with tea in a jiffy; get started but don't go into too much detail without me."
Harry sighs. His two girls, what would he do without them? "Well its like this. I can't adopt Tia and Marcus officially and it's been bothering me for quite some time now. It is just so damn unfair! I love the kids as if they're my own, but I can’t ever guarantee them that Ms Elderidge won't take them away if she has her panties in a twist."

Hermione nods, encouraging him to go on. He knows what she thinks about the system and as soon as she is done with her legal apprenticeship, she will tackle the archaic wizarding adoption laws. Harry is almost sorry for them, but only almost. "Then Ginny brought the idea of private adoption up, and today I went there and met with Mr Peterson for the first time. He seems to be a decent guy and it’s not something I can put my finger on, but something is bothering me."

"Hmm, do you think it would bother you to adopt a baby that is not magical? Because adoption itself clearly isn’t your problem here."

"No, I think I have more of a problem with the fact that I could adopt one baby and Tia and Marcus would only be my foster kids. I don't want them to feel worth less." He looks at her, a pained expression on his face.

"Harry, it doesn't matter if a child is fostered or adopted with you. You love all or nothing, and you would do anything for those two. It shines out of every pore."

Ginny pitches in, putting a steaming mug in front of him, "It would be nauseating if it weren't so darn cute to see you all together. So what did they say?"

Harry shrugs. "Not much to be honest, they gave me a huge stack of forms I have to fill out. Then I have to have another interview and then they'll evaluate Grimmauld Place to see if it is suitable for a baby, or young child. If I pass all of that, I get put into a pool and then I’ll get a call if a baby needs a daddy."

Hermione smiles at him, an enigmatic smile. "Harry, a child would be lucky to have you as his or her dad. The most important thing in a family is that you love each other and support each other. Love is what defines a family, not blood. After all you love us like you would love family, right?"

Harry is still torn. "But what if I’m not good with a baby?"

Ginny and Hermione exchange a look. Ginny takes his hand. "Harry. Look around, we would all love to help you out if needed!"

Hermione says, "To be honest, there are few men I would encourage to try and raise a child alone, but, Harry, you have always been driven by the need for a family, and you will give that child all the love and care their biological parents couldn't provide for whatever reasons. I am going to tell you something that I usually don't talk about. Not because I am ashamed of it, but because there is no reason to talk about it. My parents are my parents and they love me to death, but they are not my biological parents."

Harry's mouth drops open. "Really?"

"Yes, they adopted me when I was only a few days old. My biological mother passed away during my birth and I didn't have any living relatives. So, my parents took me in and adopted me and loved me like they would have loved a biological child. I think adoption is a wonderful thing, especially for someone who is as loving as you are. You deserve a chance to give that to a child who carries your name."

She looks at him with loving eyes, and Harry feels a few of his doubts drain away. Now, he feels a
bit better about going this way, although he will continue to fight for his right to adopt his two other kids as well.

"If it really becomes an issue, then I will talk to them about it. Tia and Marcus need to know that they might get a little brother or sister, and if they really can't deal with it, we need to find a way."

He smiles and leans into Ginny's side. She is a staunch supporter and together with his family, he will manage the path he is now determined to follow.

When he puts Tia and Marcus to bed that night, he feels lighter. Tackling the mountain of paperwork won't be fun, but he feels sure that it will be worth it.

The next morning finds him bleary eyed, making scrambled eggs and bacon for breakfast. He worked long into the night on it, but at least all of the questions he has to answer are done. Now, he has to make a trip to Gringotts to get a bank statement on income and assets, as well as a trip to St. Mungo's where he will receive a thorough checkup to make sure that there are no illnesses lurking in his body that would rob the baby of yet another parent or could impair him severely in the future. Harry reasons he would have needed to do that anyway, and he needs to set up a trust fund for Tia and Marcus in the unlikely event that they should need to be provided with money before they can finish their education.

The kids come into the kitchen, Marcus a bit less enthusiastic than Tia who is a ray of sunshine in the morning, but they both give him a hug and a "morning Dad!" that warms his heart.

"So, who’s up for a trip to the zoo today?" They both cheer and Harry cherishes the moment, because who knows how long they’ll still want to go to the zoo with him? They have a wonderful Sunday together; Tia loves the large cats, she is completely enamoured with lions and tigers as well as the elegant leopards. She chatters nonstop about them, whereas Marcus smiles at her indulgently. He is a bit more withdrawn than her, but when they enter the reptile house he warms up instantly and talks a mile a minute, asking Harry a ton of questions, and Harry is pretty sure he knows just which house the hat will favour for Marcus. But then he gets sullen again and Harry takes a wild guess as to what is bothering his son.

"Tia, do you want to get an icecream for us? The stall is right there. Don't wander any further and come back to me immediately. I just need to sit down for a minute!" He takes Marcus by the arm and pulls him down next to him, brokering no argument. "Okay, spill, champ. What has you in a strop all of a sudden?"

Marcus curls into his side and it is such a rare display of need for reassurance that Harry wraps his arm closely around his boy. "Tell me. I’m sure I can help."

"What if I get sorted into Slytherin, Dad? Voldemort was in that house, and the kids in the orphanage said that only bad wizards go there. But I am not brave or smart or loyal, so what’s left for me? I love snakes, so is that my house?"

Harry takes a deep breath. "Honey, when I was eleven, the sorting hat wanted to send me to Slytherin too. It said the house would help me achieve greatness, and who knows how I would have decided if I hadn't made friends with Uncle Ron on the train before. It is really brave to voice your fears and it proves that you’re smart when you think about issues like that already. And I personally do think that you are pretty loyal to your little sister. And to be honest one of the greatest men I ever knew was a Slytherin, and he was the bravest, loyalest man I ever had the honour of encountering. Wherever the hat places you, that is not all that there is to you; every Hufflepuff is a bit Ravenclaw, Gryffindor and Slytherin as well, and every Slytherin is Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Gryffindor. I will always love you no matter what house you are, okay?"
Marcus relaxes a fraction and Tia comes over, two additional ice cream cones in hand. She hands them to her brother and Harry, and snuggles into him on the other side. Quietly, she announces, "This is the second best day of my life!"

Harry ruffles her hair. "Only the second?"

They both look up at him with their blue eyes and say as if they are one, "The best day was when you said you would take us home with you." Harry blinks away the tears and just cuddles them close. If the adoption doesn't go through he already has more than he ever thought he would.

Monday, he finishes the appointment at Gringotts, talking to the Goblins about his financial affairs and setting a trustfund up for his kids. He puts 10,000 Galleons in for the moment and sets up a monthly transfer of about 250 Galleons for each of them, to be continued until they reach the age of seventeen, when they will receive the money for their personal use.

The trip to St. Mungo's is uneventful and he drops all of his assembled papers off by the end of the week. Mr Peterson isn't in, but he gets told that they will be in touch for the next interview soon.

During the next week, Harry is busy preparing for Tia's upcoming birthday. He can't wait to see her face when she receives the doll. He is rewarded with a shout of joy and a hug when she unwraps her treasure before going to the Burrow for the birthday cake. The doll will be carried with her everywhere for the next few weeks, and afterwards it will sit on the bed and wait for Tia to come to sleep every night.

Harry passes the interview process and is informed that they would like to visit Grimmauld Place next Saturday. For a second it crosses his mind to send the kids to the Burrow and do this alone, but then he reconsideres. If they should ever have a baby here, they need to be prepared and even more important he wants them to be happy and well adjusted to the idea. So on Friday night he orders pizza and cuddles down on the sofa with both of them.

"I need to talk to you guys about something. It is nothing bad, I promise!" He sees that they both are wary of what is to come. "You know that I love you both very much, right?"

Identical nods, but no other reaction.

"What would you say if I were to try and take another child in?"

Tia is the first one to react. "Like us? Because there is an empty bedroom next to yours! So if you promise not to love them more than us, they could sleep there!"
Harry chuckles. "I could never love anyone more than you! But I have enough love for another kid as well."

Marcus jumps in. "Is it because I am leaving for Hogwarts in September? I can stay if you get too lonely just with Tia." His voice lilts a little, betraying the insecurity.

Harry pulls him close and says. "It’s not because you’re leaving, and of course I will miss you. But I am also so very excited to know that you will make a ton of new friends. And I will look forward to Christmas and Summer and lots of letters that let me know what is happening! But I would like to do this for another child too. If you guys are completely against it, I won’t pursue the idea, but I had hoped you would be excited to have a baby in the house."

It is Tia again who answers and surprises Harry. "We can share you, daddy. Does this baby not have a mommy and daddy either?"

Harry smiles and feels a lump in his throat. "No, darling, this baby doesn't have a mommy or daddy either."

Marcus doesn’t say much anymore, but he doesn't speak out against the idea either, so Harry hopes that he will adjust to the thought.

"Tomorrow, a team will visit our home, just to see if we would even have enough space for another baby, and if I can provide a home for all of you." Harry is anxious, but he hopes that he can project a sense of calm.

Marcus smiles at him. "If they decide that you aren’t good enough for another baby, they’re nuts." And that is all his son says. Harry feels something melt inside of him. Another baby or not, he is happy right here and now.

The next morning finds his little family a bit anxious. Tia and Marcus had made a show of cleaning up their rooms and getting everything in order. The room adjacent to Harry's own has been cleaned and looks like any other ordinary spare bedroom, as if Harry hasn’t infused so many hopes into it.

At ten in the morning, Mr Peterson rings the doorbell and they begin the tour of the house. Harry feels like he is walking on hot coals for the entire time and calls himself a fool for being so anxious, because he should be glad to have his treasures in his life already. And treasures they are. Marcus keeps Tia busy by playing a boardgame and Harry has enough time to answer all questions.

"How many rooms do you have?" Mr Peterson asked.

"Well, we have five bedrooms in total. The master bedroom, two bedrooms for my kids and two spare rooms, although the one next to mine would be the nursery, should we be chosen for a baby."

"We?"

"Of course we! My kids need to be chosen too. Should you decide that I need to give up fostering them, I will decline the adoption."

Mr Peterson looks at Harry for a while. A small smile flits over his face. "I don't think you need to worry about that, Mr Potter. It is clear that you are very dedicated to your family. And the house provides ample space for another baby. I just have one question. What happens if you fall ill?"

Harry doesn't need to think about that. "Then my own adoptive family, the Weasleys, will pitch in."

"Well, Mr Potter, then I am pleased to tell you that I am honored to accept you into my pool of
prospective parents."

"Thank you, Mr Peterson. I am very happy to hear that, it means a lot to me and my kids and we will not disappoint the faith you have put in me."

Tia and Marcus come in at that and hug Harry.

"We have to get a nursery started. Are you guys excited to help?"

Tia nods and Marcus smiles. They are both so adorable, Harry can't wait to see how this all will play out. Downstairs, they are preparing breakfast, when his eyes fall onto the Daily Prophet. Once again a smile plays around his lips. Now Draco and he both look forward to the arrival of a baby.

Harry can't wait to get everything done. He has asked his kids if they would like to help, and, even though it would be so easy to just spell paint onto the walls, they spend an entire day goofing around with color and having an all out paint war in the nursery-to-be. It is a day he will always associate with laughter and joy, and he is grateful that his kids are so enthusiastic about helping.

At the end of the day, more paint is on them than on the walls, but it is nothing a hot bath can't fix and when Tia cuddles into his side and Marcus comments, “Not bad, dad,” Harry is happy. The nursery is painted in a soft yellow with spring green trims, the hardwood floor will get a soft polish and he will place a soft carpet in it, so he can have warm feet.

He already knows where he will buy a crib once it becomes certain, but he has picked out a changing table and a couple of sideboards along with a rocking chair. The crib though he will only buy when he has a baby that is on the way for him. He has made a down payment, but he refuses to pay in full and collect it yet. It feels like a bad omen if he gets everything ready at once.

He is thinking about names a lot. Because this name has to be just perfect. If it is a little girl that they welcome into their family, her middle name will be Lily or at least a variation of it. But what about the first name? He knows he is not really creative with names, but he refuses to give his new son or daughter a name that will only remind him of the deceased. He has all of them in his heart and he won't be able to decide whom to honor and whom to leave. So a middle name will have to be enough.

Their next purchase is a huge book of common names. Harry is overwhelmed at the sheer number of beautiful names. Maybe he should just take a needle and leave it to chance.

In the end chance comes in the form of his son. Marcus has taken the book and put a small piece of parchment into it. When Harry opens it his eyes fall onto a name that has been circled. He reads the definition and falls in love with the name, because it fits all that this families extension would be and will be.

Mila stands for – latin -cherished/precious, in spanish meaning - beautiful or miracle, romanian – compassion and empathy, slovenian – beloved, grace, swahili – elegance and beauty, hebrew – she who brings peace, greek – apples

She will be a miracle and if she is be all that her name indicates, Harry will be happy. What makes him even happier is that his son cares so much about this family addition, and that makes him fall a little more in love with the name. A boys name has always been clear in his mind, he knows that he would call him Phoenix, pure and strong, resilient. So now he is all set.

As he doesn't know how long it will take until they get their new baby, he holds back on buying stuffed animals, but it itches in his fingers and at least a tiny stuffed dragon has found its way into
their home, entirely by accident, of course..

Harry is glad that there are things distracting him from the thoughts circling around a baby that may join their family one day in the future. Marcus’ birthday is approaching fast and Harry wants to make this day at least as special as Tia’s birthday was. He knows that the Orphanage always try to make the birthdays something special, but they can only do so much.

Marcus doesn’t ask for anything, but Harry is sure the miniature Quidditch pitch that he has bought will be a hit with him. Marcus is like Harry in that sense; he loves flying and he adores the game. As soon as he’s allowed on a team in Hogwarts, no broom will be safe. In fact, the only reason Harry refrains from buying his foster-son a broom is the fact that he won’t be able to take it with him either way, and he wants to save that surprise for the next birthday.

He bakes an enormous chocolate cake for Marcus and decorates it with eleven magical candles. He knows the owls from Hogwarts always arrive early in the morning and Harry has never forgotten the wonder of his own magical eleventh birthday with the first birthday cake he ever received, and the wonder and excitement connected with the letter informing him of his heritage.

Although Marcus has not been as neglected as Harry was, he is still determined to give both of his kids a childhood that makes up for the loss that they have already endured.

Waking his son the next morning with an excited Tia jumping up and down, singing happy birthday in that out of tune way only children find beautiful, he could not be happier. Marcus lights up like the sun that has been shining in honour of his birthday since dawn. He blows out all eleven candles, and when Harry asks if he made a wish the sincere answer blows him away.

“My only wish has come true already, we have you, Dad.”

Harry ruffles his hair and they indulge in a piece of cake while still in bed and in their pyjamas. Later at the breakfast table, Harry presents his birthday surprise and is almost cuddled to death before Marcus runs outside to play with his new toy, Tia gets pulled into the game fairly quickly and the kids have fun for a good part of the morning. They only take a break when the owl arrives and delivers the letter.

Marcus is shaking but proudly reads the familiar words.

_Dear Mr. Delante_,

_We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment._

_Term begins on 1 September. We await your owl by no later than 31 July._

_Yours sincerely,_

_Minerva McGonagall_

“Dad, I have to answer really soon! It is already July 21st.” Marcus is very excited and Harry can’t contain his own smiles. He writes the reply and receives a list of supplies that will be needed on the
next day and thus they plan the trip to Diagon Alley fairly soon – after all Harry will do his very best to ensure that his kid is well prepared for Hogwarts. Fleetingly, he thinks of Draco, who by now is probably excited for different reasons, and he only feels a little pang of longing. Maybe one day, he will find someone to love beyond his children, but right now he is happy with the family he has.

The owl comes as a big surprise. August is almost over. The house is abuzz with Marcus’ excitement and Tia being a bit nervous about being without her brother for the first time. And Harry has almost, just almost, managed to forget about the possibility of having a baby soon. Of course, he has hoped that a witch might choose him from the pool of eligible parents for her baby, but he has sworn that he would be patient. He also thought that he would have to wait longer, maybe even a couple years, and that he would get to know the witch in question before he had a chance to adopt a baby.

But the bird sitting perched on his desk holds out his foot and hoots softly, bearing the seal of Peterson and Partner. The contents of the parchment throw Harry for a loop, because there it is, written in black ink on parchment.

_Dear Mr Potter,_

_We are pleased to inform you that an opportunity for adoption has arisen for you. One of our clients has decided to give her child into your loving hands._

_Since the birth of the baby occurred yesterday, we would request your presence in our office this afternoon to introduce you to your future daughter._

_Please let us know if this is feasible for you._

_Kind Regards,_

_James Peterson_

His hands tremble and he feels completely overwhelmed for a moment or so. Why is all of this happening so fast? And why hasn't he ever met the witch in question? Didn't Peterson say that she would contact him first? Get to know him and then decide whether he is the right man for her?

He downs his coffee and calls the kids to him. Tia and Marcus come running down the stairs at once. On seeing his face, caught between excitement and fear, they crowd around him, asking questions, but one hits Harry once again unexpectedly.

“Are you ill, dad? Did something happen?” Marcus asks, forehead creased as he looks searchingly into his father’s eyes. Harry smiles reassuringly, trying to alleviate the fear that he has inadvertently triggered in his kids.

“I’m not ill. Trust me when I say that I would let you know immediately. I would never keep you in the dark about something that concerns this family.” Marcus relaxes visibly at that statement and Harry continues with the news that he wants to share. “Remember the visits that we had in May?
When they checked if we would be a good home for a baby boy or girl?” Tia nods excitedly and Marcus follows at a more sedate pace.”Well, today I received an owl that a little girl has been born, and they would like me to come in and meet her for the first time. Can I count on you to stay here and not wreak havoc in the house? Then I’ll just let Aunt Hermione know that you are here, but that I trust you, and that you’ll call her only if something happens?”

Twin smiles are directed at him. Marcus puffs up, proud at being trusted to keep order and Tia smiles in her soft way that ensures Harry that she would never disappoint him.

So Harry makes the call as promised and dresses sharply, before heading out to meet the person who will willingly hand her child over to him. Harry doesn't read the daily Prophet that day, and because of this he also doesn't see the small announcement stating that Draco and Astoria Malfoy mourn the death of their daughter, Estelle, who was stillborn only a day before, but even if he would have read the announcement, he would never be able to understand what had irrevocably been set in motion now.

Diagon Alley is bustling with people, but Harry only has eyes for the house looming up in front of him. He takes a deep breath and enters the building. His first thought is that it is still as intimidating as it was on his first visit, but then the doors open and Harry stops to think. His entire focus is drawn to the tiny bundle that Peterson has in his arms. It squirms, and the little girl lets her dissatisfaction with the world be known, as she squalls loudly. With two steps Harry crosses the room and relieves Mr Peterson of his precious burden.

“Hello, little one!” Harry coos and smiles at the red faced infant, who continues to cry with soft hiccups - and yes, he is instantly in love. She has him wrapped tightly around her tiny fingers and he is irrevocably hers, just as much as Tia and Marcus have his heart. At her continuous cries he pushes his little finger into her searching mouth, glad that he had the sense to wash his hand before he entered the room. The insistent suckling shows him just what the problem is.

Harry falls in love immediately. It floods him in a wave so strong that he staggers under the realization that although he would not have hesitated to risk his life for his friends before, for her he would give it no questions asked. She has his heart completely the moment that sleepy soft blue grey eyes open and blink up at him, and a tiny fist grabs his finger and holds onto him with a surprising strength.

Her head is crowned with a shock of dark hair and she looks so much like a child of his own would, that he is breathless with wonder.

“What you have her bottle ready? She is hungry.” He addresses Peterson and as his calls for a house elf, Harry takes the bottle from its hands and feeds his daughter, as if he had never done anything else in life. The crying stops the instant that the teat is pushed between her pouty lips, and she starts drinking with abandon. Once he is sure that she is settled securely in the crook of his arm, Harry turns to face Mr Peterson once again.
“So, what happened? Didn't you say that I would get to meet the woman who would want to choose me as the adoptive parent?”

Peterson appears to be slightly uncomfortable, but after much throat clearing he gives off an explanation that makes Harry even more determined to give Mila all the love he can. “We did want to arrange a meeting between you and her mother soon, as she had already stated a preference for you just on our credentials and the file we have on your living situation and such, but unfortunately Mila was born a bit premature yesterday morning and her mother passed this night from a blood clot in her heart. She lay as if sleeping when the night healer checked. When the alarms sounded it was already too late.”

Harry feels an even deeper connection to the tiny little girl in his arms. “And what about her father?”

Peterson produces a scroll on which somebody had signed away all paternal rights to any offspring. “The father of this little girl wants nothing to do with her, he signed all rights away so that the mother could give her away for adoption.”

Harry feels uneasy at this statement, but on the other hand he is glad that he gets to raise such a miracle. When Mila opens her eyes and it almost appears as if she is looking at him, he feels like someone punched him. For they are not blue like in most infants, no, she has a decidedly grey tint to her irises and he feels eerily reminded of Narcissa Malfoy’s eyes, as she looked at him after the trial. But he shakes the feeling immediately, after all who knows just how the families are interconnected. So, he signs all the required papers and takes Mila, as she is in her blankets, home. She is sleeping in his arms, trusting and warm and Harry loves her. He stops to get the crib that he has his eyes set on and, after much gushing from the sales witch, he purchases a couple of other things that he hasn’t bought so far. Coming home, he is met with silent awe from his kids, who approach him with much caution, as if the bundle in his arms is too precious to be jostled or, heaven forbid, woken.

He settles down on the sofa and soon has a child to his left and right. Marcus is the braver of the two and asks. “So she is ours now? For real? They won’t take her away?”

Harry smiles, “Nobody will ever take her away from us. We are her family and we will love her and take care of her and make sure she always feels loved.” He shivers as if a sudden draft has gotten the room chilly and moves to put Mila into her crib, but she starts to squeal in protest until he sits down again. Tia settles next to him once again and allows Mila to grasp her finger in her tiny fist and holds on with surprising strength.

Tia looks at her with a thoughtful expression before she utters, “Family is defined by love, not by blood.” There is such a deep conviction in that statement, her weight warm against Harry's side, Marcus a solid presence on the other, and a baby staring at him with wide blue grey eyes.

Out of the blue, Harry wonders if Draco feels so complete with Astoria and his newborn child. At least he hopes for it, he wishes for it even more fervently when he reads about the terrible loss his old crush had suffered just a few days before and holds Mila a bit tighter when she cries for her bottle that night. Losing a child is such a horror that he can't even begin to fathom the pain that Draco must be undergoing, but he still can't bring himself to owl and send his condolences.

Marcus proves to be a doting older brother, spending as much time as he can with the baby. He rocks her at night, feeds her and even changing her as much as he can until he has to leave in September. One night, Harry comes into the nursery and finds his son settled into the rocking chair, holding a sleeping Mila to his chest, whispering in her ear so that she will know his voice when he comes back in three months time for Christmas.
“Hey,” Harry whispers as well, not wanting to wake the precious bundle, gifting his son with a squeeze to the shoulder instead and receives a tentative smile back.

“She fell asleep on me – Dad, do you think she'll remember me if I am always gone?”

Harry smiles at his son, “Marcus, of course she'll remember you. She knows your heartbeat! She knows your smell because you carry her with you so much, I am almost afraid you'll try to smuggle her into Hogwarts.”

Marcus beams at him, “She is so adorable and so tiny. I can't remember Tia being that small, and I just want to make sure that Mila knows that she has an older brother who loves her.”

“There will never be any doubt about that.” Harry takes the baby, who has started to squirm once again, from his son, holds her close and grimaces at the unmistakable odour she emits.

“Time for a change, little lady!” Harry says to his youngest daughter then turns to his son. “It is late already, and we need to get up early tomorrow. We need to buy your last things for Hogwarts.”

Marcus presses a kiss to Mila’s forehead and one to Harry's cheek before he disappears into his own room. Harry is thankful for the little gestures of affection that both of his kids share with him so freely. Setting Mila on the changing table, he gets rid of the offending diaper and wipes her bottom with baby wipes, then marvels at the little birthmark that he can see more clearly now. Settled on her left bumcheek, it appears as if she has a peacock feather tattooed there, but of course that is ridiculous, a baby with a tattoo.

Harry thinks that maybe her mom had the same birthmark, and promptly forgets about it once again, as Mila starts to fuss because she is getting cold. Wrapping her up securely and settling her in her crib, he watches for a while, before he checks on Marcus and Tia. A little while later, he heads to bed with a spell set to alert him if any of his kids has a nightmare and falls asleep with a smile on his face.

Time seems to speed up from that moment on. Harry wakes up the next morning and feels the sadness of a parent saying goodbye to a child old enough to take the first steps without him. He makes breakfast and makes sure that Marcus has the list of things still needed for his first year. It is not much, but Harry is glad that he can spend that one morning with his son, taking time just for him. Andromeda drops by later with Teddy and takes Mila for the few hours that they will be gone. Tia complains at being left behind, but Harry promises her that she will have her own special outing with him as soon as she is ready for Hogwarts. This leaves her somewhat mollified and she stays with Mila and Teddy, content to play in the garden.

Marcus almost glows with excitement at having Harry all to himself, most days even though Harry has always had a special connection with him, he had to share him with his mates at the orphanage, and so it is still something wonderful to spend the entire morning with him. They make their purchases and eat ice cream at Fortescue’s. Harry sees a white blond head on the other side of the road and his thoughts flit once again to Draco. He wonders how the blond is holding up. His son chatters away and Harry smiles.

That night sees him sitting in his study, and although he knows that there is no real reason for it, he writes a short missive.

_Dear Draco,_

_I know I have been silent for a long time, but I wish to express my condolences. I have heard of your loss and hope that you and your wife can one day in the future look at the memory of your little one_
and smile. I am with you in thoughts. I am aware that you probably have friends enough – but if you want to talk, I am here.

Kind regards,

Harry

He sends it off, thinking that even though he might not get an answer Draco at least knows that there are people in this world who remember him for the man he became in their eighth year, who can relate to loss and to whom he can talk uncensored, because they have always been honest to each other - apart from Harry’s crush, which has faded by now to a muted memory that makes him smile and hope that Draco is well.

The following days pass in a blur and before Harry knows it, the first of September has arrived.

Bringing Marcus to Kings Cross is bittersweet. On the one hand, Harry is so proud of his son. Giving him a hug, holding him close, he feels his son clinging to him, as if he is afraid to let go. The other hand wants to keep Marcus close for a while longer, wants to protect him and cuddle, wants to make sure he is protected.

Of course, Harry knows that this is silly. He has been with Marcus for three years now, he has made sure that the boy has grown up balanced and secure in the knowledge that he loves him, and that love will always be with him, whether he is at Hogwarts or Timbuktu. So he just squeezes him tightly and sends him off.

The night brings a letter. Harry reads it out loud, to Mila’s sleepy grey-blue eyes and Tia’s soft smile - who declares that she will be a Gryffindor instead of a Hufflepuff like her brother, when the time comes. Secretly, Harry thinks that she will probably end up in Ravenclaw, but who knows.

Harry is so busy with Mila, Tia and his job at the orphanage that he feels the time rushing by. The days pass in a blur of getting up in the morning, fixing breakfast, feeding Mila, dropping Tia off at school, rushing to the orphanage, settling Mila in her cot at the office, getting as much done as possible, talking to the other kids as well, feeding Mila her lunch, settling her to nap again, and rushing home at three so that he is there when Tia comes back from school. Then he has tea with his daughter, listening to her day and checking her homework, firing off a couple of household spells, feeding both of his kids dinner, and finally dropping into bed exhausted at ten at night.

Harry could not be happier if he tried.

Weeks pass in this fashion and Harry has almost forgotten that he had posted a letter to Draco weeks ago, but when Halloween is already looming on the horizon, he receives an owl one night.

Mila is already asleep and Tia up in her room, trying to get the latest project for school done, insisting on being able to do it on her own. So, Harry is settled in the living room indulging in a rare glass of wine with a fire blazing in the fireplace and a Quidditch Magazine open and waiting to be read.

The little bird drops the parchment without ceremony into Harry’s lap and disappears into the night again.

“Well, I guess you don't want an answer then.” Shrugging his shoulders he opens the letter, which grows to its original size in his hand. The handwriting is painfully familiar, and Harry feels something clench inside of his gut at the words that have been so sloppily written. The parchment is a mess of crossed out words and inkstains. The letter sounds so atypical for the collected blond that Harry swallows around the lump in his throat.
Potter, To be honest, your letter has taken me quite by surprise. Why now, since we haven’t heard from one another in such a long time? That is not to say that it wasn’t welcome. I need to talk to someone sane.

I have been listening to so many platitudes during the last few weeks that it was refreshing to read your, somewhat bumbling but honest offer of comfort.

I guess the only reason I am actually taking you up on it is because I can count on you to be honest and not give me some crappy line of ‘it’ll all turn out well in the end’ that is my mother’s favorite right now.

I have more than a little firewhiskey in me tonight. My daughter was supposed to be two months old today, and instead I have a crying wife and a father who looks at me as if I should have been able to prevent this. My mother is beside herself with grief too.

I guess this is my punishment for my wrongdoings in the war and karma is getting back at me, otherwise I have no idea what I have done that deserves this amount of pain.

They took her away, my beautiful daughter, Estelle, the midwife only showed her to me shortly. And then she was gone.

I know you have kids, seems you were better than me again. Sorry I am an arse. Just...Love them. I know that I will always love my firstborn. We’ll leave the country for a while soon, so don’t bother replying. But thank you for actually giving a damn.

Draco.

The next day finds Harry cuddling Mila a little longer, he hopes that Draco will find peace and his own happiness one day. He doesn't hear from the blond again, but he sees an article that states that Astoria and Draco Malfoy are moving to France for the foreseeable future, to deal with their tragic loss and that Draco will continue to work for the Malfoy holdings from Champagne. Lucius Malfoy, at the same time, has donated a large sum to St Mungo’s to invest into prenatal care research, so ‘that others will not suffer such a devastating loss like my family just had to endure.’

Harry puts that article into his growing collection and tries not to dwell on it. Time continues to fly and soon Christmas is upon them. Collecting Marcus from the train station is a joyous affair, with Tia running towards her big brother and hugging him freely as he ruffles her hair with brotherly affection, before turning to Harry and hugging him carefully, minding Mila who sleeps through all of this in the baby carrier. He gives her a gentle kiss to the forehead and off they go. Marcus talks almost nonstop and Harry feels as if he is seeing Hogwarts for the first time all over again. At night, they are settled with mugs of hot chocolate and Marcus has claimed his baby sister once again, who looks at him with big eyes.

“Her eyes have turned grey, see, Dad?”

Harry smiles and nods. It's true – the blue grey of the beginning has turned into a clear grey with bright specs that contrast beautifully with her still dark hair. He thinks sometimes that he has seen such eyes before, but he can't really place them and puts it down to the huge amount of people he has seen in his life, someone is bound to have such eyes. But he can't shake the feeling of familiarity.

Marcus continues to talk about Hogwarts and Tia continues to ask question after question, trying to glean as much information from her brother as she can. Harry watches them quietly and enjoys the
idle chatter of the siblings. He is torn from his musings only when Marcus addresses him once again.

“Dad, in school they said that you’re as powerful as Dumbledore, even though you are a Halfblood is that true?”

Harry is a bit baffled. “What’s true? That I am a halfblood or that I am powerful? And did they say I shouldn’t be powerful because of that?” He treads softly here, hoping that the old prejudices are not rearing their ugly heads once again.

Marcus smiles. “Rosetta Zabini said that usually wizards with a muggle parent are not as strong, but that you are an exception. She said her Uncle told her stories about the time that you went to school together.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“Yes, she said you saved the school again and again, you even killed a Basilisk who hunted Muggleborns when you were only twelve, and you won the Triwizard Tournament. And that her house never had a chance to win the house cup while you were there, because you were always too good for your own good.”

Harry chokes a little at that, but then again, he is glad that Zabini is at least trying to keep the story neutral.

“Well, kids, I never told you much about my adventures at Hogwarts, but most of it is true. Do you want to hear more about them?”

He is met with twin voices that enthusiastically agree and so he spends the holidays filling his kids in on many of his adventures and tries to instill in them the sense that every wizard is the same. He supposes he has been living that example all the time, but one can never be too sure.

The holidays are over far too soon, and Marcus returns to Hogwarts with the promise of writing regularly. Harry is busy once again at the orphanage and with watching Tia grow up. Her tenth birthday in May is celebrated with a huge party at the Burrow, where all of her friends are invited and they have a garden party. Mila is crawling already even though Harry thinks at nine months she has no business growing up so fast on him.

Watching Tia play hide and seek with her little sister, Harry thinks that next year will receive a letter and come September he will be alone with Mila and it gives him a pang.

Coming home that night, Tia is full of chatter. After tucking Mila into bed, he finds the familiar little bird sitting on the back of his chair. He unfurls the parchment and sees a short missive.

Hello Harry,

So many months have passed again. I don’t even know why I am writing to you, after all we aren’t friends, are we? But you are the only one who cared, outside of my family, after what happened last summer and I wanted to give you an update.

France has been good for us and we are expecting again, Astoria insisted on trying again. I am torn between joy and fear. But if all goes well, we will have a baby come September.

Keep me in your thoughts.

Regards
Draco.

Harry smiles and writes a short letter back.

Hello Draco,

I wish you and your family only the best. I am keeping my fingers crossed that all goes well.

I would like it very much if we could be friends.

My thoughts are with you.

Harry

As he watches the little bird fly away, he catches himself smiling wistfully once again. He may never have Draco Malfoy as his lover but maybe they can build up a friendship, even be it only via letters.

They continue in that manner with Draco writing short little missives, and Harry entertaining him with stories of Mila, Tia and Marcus - who is back for the summer after finishing his first year at Hogwarts. So they enjoy days in the back garden of Grimmauld place, where Harry has set up an inflatable swimming pool, and days where he drops them off at the Burrow, where they can play with the other Weasley kids.

Mila’s first birthday approaches and Harry prepares a huge party for the little one, with cake and bubbles and a firework just for her, courtesy of her honorary Uncle George. Hermione announces at the party that they are expecting their first child and everybody is excited.

Ginny takes Harry aside and asks in a quiet minute, “Are you truly happy, now?”

“Of course I am! Why wouldn’t I be?”

“It’s just, you don’t go out anymore. You don’t even try to date and the only man I hear any stories about is Draco Malfoy with whom you write letters. You’re too young to be a spinster!” She says it with laughter but Harry knows she is concerned about him.

“Gin, I know I’m twenty-five, and you think I should go out more, but I’m happy as things are. I have the kids to think off, and I don’t really miss dating.”

“So, you don’t miss sex?” Trust Gin to be so blunt about this. Harry feels himself blushing.

“No, Gin, I don’t really miss sex. I have my right hand to take care of those needs. But one night stands aren’t my style, and I don't have time to go on dates.”

Gin throws her arm around his shoulders. “Well, I just worry about you.”

Harry snorts, “You mean, you want the dirt on me so you can have your own little fantasies.”

Her fake gasp and, “Well, I would never!” warms his heart more than he will let her know, and he allows the embrace to go on for a while longer.

His family is great just as it is, and if he still thinks a little too often of blond hair and silver eyes, well, that is his own business and he will deal with that on his own.
A couple of weeks later, he receives a message that touches his heart, even though it aches a little too.

;Dear Harry,

It is a boy! I have a son and he is perfectly healthy! Little Scorpius was born two days ago, he is 7 pounds, 130 grams and has a very healthy set of lungs on him. I am so happy!

Draco

Harry smiles and carries on with his own daily chores, well aware that the messages will become fewer now, seeing as life with a newborn is exhausting. He sends out his congratulations and focuses on the continuous search for new homes for the orphans. He really wishes there was a place where he could house all of them more comfortably.
Growing

Harry doesn't have a chance to sidestep the small whirlwind that shoots out of the house entrance. Mila firmly attached onto his left hand, he reacts purely on instinct. His right hand grabs onto the jacket of the toddler before he runs out into the traffic and he says, “Hold it little, tyke!”

The little blond boy, astonished at his sudden loss of freedom, doesn't even struggle much. He twists a little as if to see who has hindered his daring escape, while Harry cranes his neck to see the parent that belongs to the wayward child. He doesn't need to look long as a harried looking man comes running out looking frantically left and right and shouting, “Scorpius! Where are you?”

Harry replies, “I believe you lost this little guy then?” and that is all he can say for quite a bit, because the eyes within that harried face, drawn and gaunt, are eyes that still grace his more inapproriate dreams from time to time. It should have been obvious, given that not many boys that age run around with that name, but somehow Harry has pushed Draco as far from his mind as possible. Over the last two years, their contact has tapered off again. He hasn't heard anything from Draco in well over a year; Harry has taken it as lack of interest on his part and didn't try to resume their written acquaintance.

Draco drops to his knees, in a gesture that is so not Malfoy-like that Harry continues to gape like a fish on land, and pulls the little boy into his arms. Harry, of course, lets go at that. Obviously he is not required anymore. The child squirms a little within the tight embrace and demands in no uncertain terms, “Up, Daddy!” Startling blue eyes regard Harry with a curiosity that reminds him of the way a young Draco looked at him for the first time, although those eyes were silver grey.

Draco complies with the wish and gathers his offspring close to him. Getting up and turning towards Harry is executed with the flowing elegance that Harry remembers of Draco Malfoy as he had been the last time he saw him.

Mila doesn't like that she is all but forgotten, or so it seems as Harry still holds onto her hand but gapes at the other man, and decides to ask for his attention in a forceful manner as well. “Up, Papa!” she accompanies the request with a strong pull on his sleeve and Harry has to comply. Settling her on his hip, he feels the small arms wrap around his neck in what he can only describe later as possessive.

Draco smiles as he sees this, but it appears a little strained. There is a sadness in his eyes that irritates Harry on a deeper level. He visibly pulls himself together and gifts Harry with a more honest smile that still doesn't quite reach his eyes.

“And just who is this pretty, young lady?”

Harry breathes in, and the soft smell of Mila’s shampoo relaxes him as he has tensed up without a real cause.

“This is my daughter, Mila. She’s a little shy around strangers.”

Draco nods thoughtfully, addressing Mila directly. “Hello, Mila, it’s a pleasure to meet you!”

She twists a little in Harry's arms in order to get a better view.

“Who are you? You know my daddy?”

“My name is Draco Malfoy, and this is my son, Scorpius. Yes, I know your daddy.”
Harry smiles at that. “So, why is Scorpius running about? Do you have rabid Doxies chasing after him?”

Both kids laugh out loud at the silly statement, and just like that the ice is broken.

Draco grins at him. “By the way, thank you for catching him, Scorpius is quite excited about visiting the daycare, and forgot that we have a rule about no running in the street. I am glad that you caught hold of him, he escaped just as I was putting on my shoes.”

“Sure, no problem.” ‘Really smart,’ his brain screams at him. What is Draco doing here of all places and why on earth would he put Scorpius in a muggle daycare? Mila’s grip around his neck tightens a bit and he is reminded that he needs to get going or they will be late for the first day, and he really doesn’t want that.

“Uhm, I don’t want to be rude, but I need to get going. We are already a bit late and dropping Mila off late at her first day at ‘the crickets’ isn’t good form.”

The surprised but pleased smile that flits over Draco’s face startles Harry, but the explanation follows suit.

“Oh, that is splendid. Scorpius will be attend ‘the crickets’ as well. We can accompany you then.”

Draco settles into easy strides that match his and the two children eye each other with curiosity and a bit of mistrust, even though they just laughed with each other.

Since they need to hurry, Harry refrains from asking the million questions that are running amok inside his mind; what on earth is Draco doing here? Doesn’t he live in France anymore? What happened to his wife? And why is he placing Scorpius in muggle daycare? So many questions and no time to voice them, and no real way to do so without coming across as a terribly nosy person either. If he is honest with himself, none of this is any of his business.

When they get there they are miraculously on time, and Harry sighs in relief. Mila insists on being a big girl and goes into the group but not without a bit of trepidation. Her set shoulders tell Harry though, that she refuses to be intimidated by anyone. Harry stands there and watches her for a while, but in the end he leaves with a wink from one of the staff. He will remain close and has his phone ready should Mila get scared and call for him. In an hour he is supposed to come back and see how she did today. Then they will repeat the process for the next few days until she has completed a full week.

Harry exits the centre and feels a little as if he has gone through the wringer. Of course he has had Mila in daycare before, but now he feels a bit strange since it is a muggle institute. Before he can head off, though, a tap on his shoulder tears him from his musings, and he is confronted once again with the tired but smiling face of Draco Malfoy.

“Hey, knut for your thoughts?”

Harry can’t help but smile at the address. It is suddenly very easy to say what has been on his mind. The orphanage has already been informed that he will be in later today, and he still has some time to kill before he heads to work. The house is quiet with the kids already off to Hogwarts, and he is really very curious as to what Draco is doing here.

“So, fancy a coffee?”

Draco just nods and they fall into the same easy stride that they had before.

The coffee shop that Harry frequents is cozy and allows for a bit of privacy so that they can talk
without nosy ears listening in on them. Harry gets the coffee he always does, plain with just a dash of milk and sugar. Draco mixes so much milk into the beverage that Harry can't refrain from commenting.

“What has that poor coffee done to you that you have mangle it so much?”

Draco looks startled for a second, but then laughs. “Oh, well, I do prefer a good cup of tea to coffee, but if I do drink it I can only get it down with lots of milk and sugar. I know, terribly unrefined, but one of my many shortcomings.” The line is delivered with such deprecating humor that Harry just shakes his head and sips his own coffee for a while. But sooner rather than later, it itches him too much and he breaks the comfortable silence.

“So, what brings you to London? The last time I heard from you, you were still in France with Astoria, right?”

A shadow crosses over Draco’s face and he needs to collect his thoughts for a minute. Harry is astonished to see so many emotions flit over the face that he has only known as calm and collected in all of the time that they have been on civil terms since eight year. Which is as friendly as they ever were.

Draco sighs and stirs his coffee, so Harry wants to take the question back, since it is so painfully clear that Draco doesn't want to answer. But before he has a chance, Draco begins to speak.

“I don't know how far you have kept up with the papers?”

“To be honest, I avoid the papers as much as I can. Working with orphans doesn't require being up-to-date on the social pages, and I've never really liked the Daily Prophet.”

“Then you probably don't know that my wife passed away, two months ago.” Draco says it with a calm acceptance, and Harry once again feels completely out of his depth.

“Oh my god, I am so sorry to hear that! I'm so sorry for your loss!” He knows the words are terribly inadequate, but Draco looks at him with grateful eyes.

“Thank you. It means a lot to hear that from you. Tory and I returned to England a couple months ago, but ever since she passed, Scorpius hasn’t been able to sleep at the Manor any longer. The nightmares have become so terrible that I moved to London last week. Partly because it is still close to my parents and partly to see if he would be able to sleep here, where not everything reminds him of his mother. So far it seems to be working, but the flat that I rented is not quite right yet. I will need to go house hunting, and thus I decided to give Scorpius the chance to meet other kids his age.”

Harry is curious. “But why a muggle institute?”

“Well, I think that I, for one, would not have been quite so prejudiced if I had actually known some muggles as a child. My parents are not really happy with me, but I think that it is in Scorpius’ best interests to get to know as much of both worlds as I can expose him to.”

“That is a good outlook on life. So, are you working from home then? Or will you floo to your parents each morning to do the business?”

Draco smirks a bit. “Nosy much?”

Harry splutters, “You don't have to tell me.”

“It is fine. I am hoping to find a house that has an office space, so I can work from home. Flooing to
my parents every day is probably too much, and I really don't want mother to start in that the house
eves are perfectly alright in taking care of a toddler again.”

They continue to sip their coffee in silence. So, many questions are on Harry's mind, but no clue on
how to go about asking them. Harry’s phone rings and the app he has set to alert him informs him
that the time is almost up - that he can take his daughter home now. So, he lets Draco know and gets
up to pay for the coffees. The blond looks surprised that the time has passed so quickly and asks if
Harry would like to catch up some more the next day. Harry is happy to agree to that, and when he
picks Mila up she looks at him a little sleepily and he smiles even wider.

The next weekend will be one where Teddy drops in, and he looks forward to having the kids with
him. He makes sure that he has Teddy as often as Andromeda allows and it is not nearly often
enough for him.

“So did you have a good day, love?”

“Yes, Daddy. Me plays a lot.”

Harry carries his sleepy daughter home and settles her for a nap. He gets himself another cup of
coffee before settling down.

He has gotten the information that another pair of kids will come to the orphanage within the next
few days, and he needs to go over the plans about how to settle them in. He sighs, it really would be
prudent to find a bigger house soon, but so far he has had no luck in finding a house that is big
enough for the twenty-something kids that he has.

Mila is more tired than he thinks and sleeps almost immediately. She is out like a light for more than
an hour and Harry gets quite a lot done. But Draco is on his mind, hopefully he can see him again
soon and get more information.

Harry is looking forward to seeing Draco again come the next morning, but today, of all days, Mila
decides to throw a tantrum of epic proportions.

She is cranky as Harry wakes her and refuses to rise and shine, much less get ready for daycare.
Harry allows her to pick her own clothes most mornings, but today everything is ‘stupid’ or ‘poopy,
Mila not wanna wear poopy shirts!’

Her usual favorite green sweater ends up in a heap on the other side of the room, and she is all but
screaming the house down. Harry is reminded of Mrs Black and is equally frazzled. He doesn't want
to snap at his daughter, but she has been screaming like a banshee for thirty minutes now and they
have to leave. Harry takes a deep breath.

“Mila, stop.” More caterwauling meets his ears. “Stop it, I said!” No use. Her face is red from exertion and she hiccups while trying to draw a breath. Harry can't stand to see her like this, but they need to get going, he hates what he has to do now but otherwise they’ll never get out.

“If you don't stop this, I’ll take you as you are, in your pyjamas and bunny slippers, see if I don’t!”

Astonished silence meet his declaration. Mila looks at him with suspicious eyes and shakes her head.

“No, Daddy!”

“Yes, Mila. Now will you put on the green shirt and the blue skirt that you wanted yesterday?”

His daughter looks at him balefully, and her eyes trigger a distant memory. He is sure that someone else has looked at him that way before, all wounded dignity and pride, but he has won for today. Mila allows him to dress her in the clothes that he had chosen with her the night before. But before he can breathe easier, he realizes that they are running late, very late, and he has to rush terribly to get to the daycare on time.

He grabs the bag with the change of clothes and dashes out of the house, nearly colliding with a neighbour, who begins a diatribe about young people that have near to no manners nowadays, and Mila giggles. She giggles – even though she is the one who caused all of this havoc. Some days Harry really wishes he had someone to share the kids with, and he is just grateful that Tia is such a mature child, and he misses her sorely since she has gone to Hogwarts just like her brother; has it really only been a week? Of course, now he has all the time to focus on Mila, but she is quite a handful and very demanding. A little princess and, if he is quite honest, he has spoiled her a bit.

As he runs into the house where Mila will stay for the next two hours, he almost bowls Draco over as he is about to make his exit, and can only just prevent butting heads with the blond.

“Whoa, easy there!” Draco chuckles as he steadies Harry and his eyes twinkle in a manner that is doing things to Harry that should be forbidden.

“Sorry! I am so late, can you just..?”

Draco shakes his head clearly amused. “Shush – go get your daughter settled, I’ll wait just outside.”

Harry smiles ruefully; couldn't he be a little more put together like Draco? But then he remembers the panicked expression Draco wore just yesterday and he breathes a little easier. Mila goes again without a fuss and, if he hadn't witnessed it firsthand, he would not have believed his daughter had been anything but a well behaved angel for the entire morning. Taking a deep breath, he leaves the daycare and smiles at the sight of Draco standing next to a lamppost, hands deep in his pockets waiting for him.

“Morning, Draco, I really need a coffee now!”

“Rough morning?”

“Like you wouldn't believe. Today of all days my daughter decides to show her temper and everything that I tried to put on her was stupid or poopy and, yes, poopy is a word.”

Draco throws his head back and starts to laugh.

Harry is mesmerized at the sound and the sight of the blond laughing like this. Who is he and what
has he done with Draco Malfoy, Ice Prince of Slytherin?

“Oh, Harry, you are one of a kind.” Draco still laughs as he turns towards the cafe and simply calls over his shoulder, “You coming?”

Harry hurries after him, bemused and wondering how the world ended up such a strange place.

They order coffee and sit in silence for a while. Harry likes being silent with Draco. It is as if they belong here. Draco turns towards him, and asks, “So tell me, why has she done this? Has she had episodes like this often?”

“Normally, she is a really sweet child, I guess she is trying out how far she can go. I have to admit that it really threw me for a loop this morning. Seeing her cry like that was hard.”

“I used to scream the entire house down when I was small. Mother tells me that I deserve every tantrum that Scorpius is throwing, because I was such a horrible little boy to the house elves. I think she doesn’t quite understand that I just wanted her and not a house elf to dress me.”

And there is a glimpse into Draco’s lonely childhood, that Harry never thought he would reveal. Harry shrugs and decides that he can give that back as well.

“I didn’t throw tantrums. I just tried to be invisible and not cause trouble for my aunt. She was almost kind when I was just silent and allowed her to do as she pleased. That only lasted until I was five or so, then I was old enough for chores and no matter what I did, something was always not the way she wanted it.”

Draco looks at him, silently for a while, but his next statement throws Harry for another loop. “I guess it’s good that we both have grown up to raise our kids very differently. Besides, Tory would have had my head if I left Scorp to the house elves. He was her absolute darling and she loved him something fierce. I try to conserve all of that love so that he grows up knowing that his mother would have done anything for him.”

“You must have loved her very much.”

“I did, she was a gentle and kind soul and much more than I ever deserved or could have ever asked for. She was my best friend and I miss her every single day.”

“I don’t want to sound insensitive or nosy, but what happened? You mentioned that she passed away and I didn’t read anything about it.”

Draco looks at Harry, and he feels like he should just take back those stupid words. Of course Draco doesn’t want to talk about his loss, how insensitive can he be? What is different, though, is how carefully Draco words his response, as if he is afraid of pushing Harry away.

“Forgive me, but I am not quite comfortable, discussing that with you. Astoria passed and I am trying to be a good father to Scorpius and I can’t really…”

“It’s okay, I really should learn not to butt into your personal story. It’s just that I get told so many stories by the kids who want to talk about their parents and so on, that is comes naturally to me to ask about the deceased. I am truly sorry if I offended you, I just want us to be friends again. I thought we were on a good path and then lost contact again and I am confused, I have to admit that.”

“That was my fault entirely. Scorpius was a very difficult baby, very colicky and not very good when it came to sleeping. In fact, the only time he would actually sleep deeply and give Astoria a break was when he was on my chest, and could hear my heartbeat. I was simply exhausted for the
first couple of months. Then when Scorpius slept a little better, Astoria got more and more anxious to get back to England and we had a hard time agreeing on where we would like to live. I loved being away; I worked from home to be there for my family and for a while it was good as it was. Then Scorp began to crawl and the quiet was over.”

Draco laughs, looking far away for a bit and Harry finds himself just staring his fill. Fatherhood looks good on Draco, it has softened the edges the war had drawn into all of their faces. Harry can relate, having his children has given him a purpose, a reason to continue fighting the ministry in its pettiness. Draco always wanted to continue the family name in school and maybe it was less about the name, but more about a chance to make things better. Only Draco would never have been approved for adoption.

“Do you want another coffee? It’s my turn, I believe.”

“Oh, if they have it, an Earl Grey would be better. I have to admit, although I drink coffee, deep down I will always prefer a decent cuppa. And I’ve had my dose of coffee with you already.”

Harry just shakes his head at Draco’s antics, but who is he to judge?

“Earl Grey coming up for you!”

Draco’s smile does funny things to Harry’s insides, things that he doesn’t want to think about. After all Draco has a son. Speaking of it, maybe the kids could play with each other. He balances his second cup of coffee and Draco’s Earl Grey carefully. Setting the cup down, he voices his idea carefully.

“Does Scorpius play with other kids sometimes?”

“No, I haven’t met any muggle parents yet and I doubt that any self-respecting wizard would allow their child to play with mine. I just hope that when Hogwarts begins for him it has gotten better.”

“I would allow it.”

“Excuse me?”

“I would allow it. If you want Scorpius to have contact with magical children, I would love it if you came by with him. Mila is pretty lonely at home. Teddy, Tia and Marcus adore her but Teddy is only there one weekend per month, and Tia and Marcus are at Hogwarts, so I mean only if you want to of course. I don’t want to force myself on you.”

“Harry, you’re rambling.”

“Sorry, shutting up now.” Harry feels the blush rise in his cheeks, what was he thinking inviting Draco over, just like that? Of course he wouldn’t want to come by.

“...like that very much.”

“Huh?”

Draco grins again. “I said, I would like that very much. If Mila and Scorpius get along, that is.”

Harry smiles. “Oh, that is so great, maybe you can bring him by tomorrow after daycare?”

“Yes, that should work. I’ll owl you later? Right now I think we need to head back and collect them again.”
“Of course.” It is amazing how time speeds up in Draco's presence.

“Oh, and Harry.” Draco looks at him in a way that reminds him of the eighth year they spend together.

“Yes?”

“Just because I’m silent sometimes, it doesn’t mean you aren’t my friend. As far as I am concerned, we have been friends since you wanted it too.”

He leaves the coffee shop and heads straight to the institute, so that Harry doesn’t have a chance to analyze that statement any longer. He picks Mila up and, later that night, he receives the promised owl, confirming a playdate for the next night.

The next day can’t come fast enough for Harry. Meeting Draco for coffee for the short few hours that the kids are in the institute is great, but he wants to really meet Draco’s son and get to know both of the blond boys better.

He cleans the house like a whirlwind and Mila is excited as well. She is chattering nonstop about the things she wants to play with the smaller boy.

“Daddy, look! I have a dragon!” She holds up one of her toys and asks, “Does Scorpius play with dragons?”

Harry smiles at that, “I think so. You can ask him soon. They'll be here shortly.”

Just on time the doorbell rings and Harry hurries to open the door.

“Welcome!”

“Hi,” Draco smiles at him, and Harry feels an entire army of butterflies take refuge in his stomach. But he has to take care of the children first, so he crouches down, to formally meet the little blond boy that he has seen only during the short morning meetings.

“Hello, there! You must be Scorpius.”

The blond toddler hides behind his father's legs in a sudden bout of shyness, but when Mila bounds over from the living room, soft toy still firmly clutched in her hand, the ice is broken.

“Hi, Mr Malfoy.” She waves with her free hand at him, and Draco is mesmerized.
“Hello, young lady!”

She giggles at that. “I am Mila.”

“I know, your Daddy told me. This is Scorpius, but you know him already, don't you?”

“Yes, he is in the other group.” She turns to Scorpius again. “Do you wanna play with me?”

He nods shyly, but steps forward from behind his father’s legs. Mila stretches her hand out and takes him firmly but gently to the play area that Harry has created in a corner of the groundfloor. Soon laughter and chattering can be heard from the kids.

“She is wonderful, and she looks so much like you!” Draco turns to Harry a little frown on his face. “Did you have a surrogate for her?”

“Oh, because of her hair? I adopted her; doing a surrogacy seemed wrong when there are so many kids out there who still need a family. Although, with her I went through private adoption. Tia and Marcus are my foster kids.”

“Amazing, with her hair she really looks like a blood relative. But her eyes are not Potter. Do you know which family she came from?”

“No, I just got the call that her mother wanted to give her up, and then she was born a little early and I never got around to enquire which family she came from. And you know me – I don't really care about blood, she is healthy and a very happy child.”

“I can see that.” Draco looks at the kids and there is something in his face that Harry can't quite place, until Draco sighs and drops the bomb.

“My daughter would be around her age, had she lived.”

Harry feels like there has been a bucket of ice water emptied right over his head. It is a harsh reminder of the woman Draco just lost.

“Oh, I am sorry if looking at her is painful for you.” He busies himself with making tea, not really knowing how to proceed now. He has never really been good at this part.

“As I said, I am very sorry for you loss.”

Draco turns back towards him and smiles a sad little smile.

“I always wanted a little girl. Don't get me wrong, I am glad that Scorp is here, and I don't want to exchange him for anything in the world, but I always wondered how a home would be if a little girl lived in it.”

“Pink, very, very pink,” is all Harry can say.

Draco laughs but turns somber very quickly again. “See, Astoria was so happy when she got pregnant soon after the wedding. For a long time it wasn't clear what we would have. The babe was always turned just so that no one could see if it was a boy or a girl. Our family healer was quite frustrated, because father was always asking about the gender of the baby, and I was laughing at him. When he told me that this was no laughing matter and that I should pray for a son, I got angry at him. We got into a terrible row and I yelled at him, that I would love any child of mine and that I really hoped that the first one would be a girl, just so that he would shut up about his precious heir.”
Draco turns towards the window, his talking becomes detached.

“I’ll never forget how pale he turned. He begged me to take my wish back, that I could have as many daughters as I wanted, but the firstborn must be a boy. He looked so haunted and sad, I thought it was ridiculous, but then he said that firstborn daughters never survive in the Malfoy family. Or in other Pureblood Families; that it is a curse.”

Draco turns back again and Harry feels the urge to hug him, but he refrains.

“Turns out he was right. Two months later, we lost our little girl. Our Estelle.”

Harry can’t hold back any longer and he steps up to Draco and wraps his arms around the shaking man. He holds him, like he would hold Ron, if he lost a child. He feels the grief still pouring off Draco in waves, even after the years that have gone by.

“It must have been so hard for you.”

“I didn’t even have a chance to really say goodbye. The midwife showed me a blue bundle. She was cold, but perfect. Ten fingers and toes, a shock of dark hair and just the most beautiful baby I had ever seen. She took her away immediately again, and I was left with my dazed wife who kept crying for her daughter. It took months until she realized that our baby was really dead. She kept asking for her; it broke my heart to tell her again and again that our daughter was dead.”

Harry doesn’t realize that he is crying himself until Draco turns in his arms and wipes the tears away, with his thumb.

“I never would have thought that one day you would shed tears over my pain.”

“I never would have thought that one day you would be close enough to me to share your pain so freely. I think I need a Firewhisky, you too?”

Draco nods and they head towards the sitting area.

Harry swallows dryly as they both take a sip of the dink. He is well aware that they need to keep an ear on the kids, but the magical kids monitor displays only laughter and Harry knows that Kreacher - even though he grumbles about it regularly - loves watching Mila play when he asks him to.

The silence could feel heavy but it doesn't. Knowing that Draco carries that much emotional pain with him makes him feel even closer to the blond. They sit like this for a while, no words needed, taking comfort from one another.

Harry breathes deeply, bracing himself for the pain he will feel when Draco tells him about his deceased wife, but he wants to give him the opportunity to talk about her.

“So, Astoria and you lived in France. And you conceived Scorpius there, why did you come back?”

It is not the most elegant start, but it works as well as any.

“Yes. Tory loved France but I wanted to come back for Scorpius. Growing up so far away from home would be difficult in the long run and, of course, my parents would miss too much. I know they are difficult, at least my father is a difficult man, but I didn't want to deprive my son of his grandparents.”

Harry smiles, it is hard to imagine Lucius Malfoy as a doting grandfather, but he is sure that Draco watches like a hawk over his son's well being and thus, would prevent anything untoward from happening. And over the last few years he has seen enough evidence of Lucius trying to turn a new
leaf to be at least willing to believe that he has learned something from the war and the consequences.

“So you moved back.”

Draco smiles at him. “Tory was the most stubborn woman you had ever met, she said that if we had to move back, she wanted something from me in exchange for moving back.”

Harry has to ask. “What did she want from you?”

“She wanted a daughter – she was adamant about having another baby, even though the doctors said that it would be too risky after Scorpius. I guess losing our first baby hit her even harder than me, because it was a little girl. In fact, as I said before, she would be Mila's age now had she lived.”

Draco’s face is drawn as he remembers. “She made me promise that we would try for another child, after Scorpius came to us and was healthy. I couldn’t say no to her – she deserved being happy for putting up with me. So I agreed foolishly to do the procedure once again.”

“What procedure?” Harry can’t help but ask, surely Draco is not talking about sex with his wife in such a clinical fashion?

“Artificial insemination, of course. I thought it was all over the papers that I was a ‘flaming poofter,’ my father’s words not mine, although I have to say that he has apologized for that outburst more than once.”

“There was nothing like that in the papers, they just wrote about your engagement and how happy your family was about the marriage.”

Draco’s face twists in a sneer at that. “So he lied about that. Well back then my father still was a conniving bastard even though he has gotten better since he got his way with Scorp’s conception.”

“What on earth are you talking about, Draco?” Harry is completely lost now, all he knows is that Draco just said that he is gay.

“When I got home from Hogwarts, I already had an inkling that I didn't want to marry a girl and produce and heir, like father had planned for me. I came out to my parents and negotiated that I would get a couple of years to myself to figure out where I wanted to go with my life and how the line would continue, because I did want to have kids - I knew that even then. Just not the way my father had planned for me. The only condition my father posed was that I would be discreet and that the papers wouldn’t get wind of my abnormal behaviour. I got three years, but when I fell in love with a man for real and told my parents that I wanted to move in with Eugene, all of a sudden I got ordered home and my father dropped a ton of papers in front of me – the Daily Prophet and Witch Weekly by the dozens all with screaming headlines about me being an aberration and defiling the Malfoy name. He told me that our deal was off and that he had already negotiated a marriage deal with the Greengrass.”

Harry can’t believe what he is hearing. Draco was forced into marriage? Would Lucius really be so cruel? Didn't he just think that Malfoy senior had turned a new leaf?

“Why did you go along with that? Why not tell him where to stick it and just go?”

Draco scratches his neck. “See the thing is, I have been raised in the knowledge that I would have to provide an heir for the Malfoy line. I went back to Eugene and talked to him about it. I all but begged him to allow me to look for a surrogate and for him to raise the child with me, but he told me that he never wanted children, that he never planned on having a family and that all that he wanted was me.”
Harry’s heart breaks a little at that. “It must have been horrible hearing that.”

Draco looks at him contemplatively. “It broke my heart, or at least I thought it broke my heart back then. Over time I have realized that although, I loved Eugene, I would not have been able to live with someone who didn’t have a wish for children. So, maybe it was not the nicest thing that my father has done, but at least it prevented me from wasting time with someone who would have broken my heart sooner or later anyway. And Tory was wonderful.”

“You said Scorpius has nightmares, is that the reason you moved out of the manor?”

“Well, see when we got back, we had just begun with the treatment for the second pregnancy. Tory insisted on looking for a new home for as soon as the baby was born and the Manor is so huge, we could house twenty people and still have enough space, so we stayed there. My parents had one wing, and we lived in another.”

Harry finds himself envious of that much space. Just for a second or so he thinks how easy it would be to have all of his kids from the orphanage sheltered in such a home, but then he returns his attention to Draco who continues to tell him the rough story of how Astoria passed.

“...started bleeding.”

“What? There was no warning? None at all?”

“She had experienced a few cramps, but that is normal once a woman enters the fifth or sixth month, practice contractions start, so we didn't think too much about it. The problem is that she was alone that day with Scorpius. I found her in his room passed out on the floor, and there was so much blood on her robes. Scorp kept calling for her to wake up from his cot. I got her to St Mungos but they couldn’t help her anymore, the blood loss was too high and she passed away that night. Ever since then, he has had nightmares, screaming whenever I tried to put him to bed in a different room of the manor. So I moved out.”

Harry feels his heart clench. Even though Draco had just said that he is gay so much love and grief resonates within his words. He covers Draco’s hand with his own - trying to give him a sense of friendship. His own feelings and longings have to stand back for a while longer. He will try and see where Draco wants to take their relationship once the initial shock has passed, but right now it is more important to give him a sense of home.

“I wanted to tell you something.”

Draco cocks his head again and Harry swallows around the lump in his throat.

“I hope it is not presumptuous but number 8, Grimmauld Place is being put on the market. The old woman wants to move into a quieter area near her daughter, and she wants to be gone quickly, because her first grandchild will arrive in a couple of months. So if you are still looking for a new home and wouldn't mind living so close to me, I could get you the contact information and you could have a look?”

Harry tries not to hope for too much, but Draco smiles at him and nods.

“That would be great. The apartment that I rented is too small for a permanent stay and only for the next two months anyway. It is an interim rental. And I really like your neighborhood.”

Harry feels warmth coiling in his gut; for sure it is a good sign that Draco wants to be so close to him, but he will give him time. He has more than enough of that.
Harry does get in touch with his neighbor’s estate agent directly when his break allows it. The woman is happy to hear that there is already someone expressing an interest. The neighborhood is nice enough, but there is not the heated buying going on that is rushing through London, so she knows that with the pressure that her client is building, she needs to show the house quickly. Because of that, she agrees to show the house to Draco and his son on the following day. Harry owls Draco the details and feels a growing warmth in his gut when he gets a quick message back, asking if he would come along and look at the Malfoy’s maybe future home.

Of course, Harry is glad to agree, and so he drops Mila once again at Molly's telling her that he will come by later.

Molly grins and calls after him, “Enjoy your date, Harry!”

Harry laughs and just barely keeps from replying. Right now he is not ready to share his budding whatever it is.

He is late by five minutes and stumbles out of the apparition, spinning and preparing himself for a hard landing when soft but strong hands catch him and Draco’s voice greets him. “So eager to see us, Harry?”

Harry later blames the dizziness of the apparition on his spontaneous outburst, but his traitorous mouth spills, “Always!” He bites his tongue and feels heat suffuse his cheeks, but Draco smiles so warmly at him that Harry wisely chooses to simply shut his mouth and sheepishly smiles at them both. The large and mini Malfoy are both dressed in muggle jeans and sweaters with a coat over them. Harry really has to keep from salivating. He is rescued by a soft cough, that pulls him back into the present.

The estate agent smiles a bland little smile and motions towards the house. Draco gently takes him by the elbow and steers him into the house, Scorpius on his hip, and for a fleeting moment Harry feels as if they are a family looking at their first house together, but then a very important part is missing – his little girl.

Entering the house is familiar; the entry hall shaped similar to his own - of course, there is no troll stand or house elf heads on the walls, but he had gotten rid of those early on anyway. Here, Draco will need to do a similar amount of work in order to get rid of the old fashioned wall paper that is covering the walls as far as he can see. Draco looks at him with raised eyebrows and the estate agent hurries to explain that the house gives a lot of opportunities for renovation. Harry bites his lip in order to keep from laughing.
They continue the exploration, and Harry knows that Draco will buy the house as soon as they see the garden - the house itself is a fright but the garden is kept meticulously.

Pro forma, Draco looks into the remaining rooms, all the while keeping his poker face. Harry almost feels pity for the woman who keeps babbling on about the advantages of the house.

Scorpius has been toddling through the rooms and turns back to Harry. “Up!” He demands, and Harry simply bends down and settles the little boy on his hip, while talking in hushed tones with Draco about the needed adjustments. Draco smiles softly at the sight.

“It seems like my son has taken quite a liking to you, Harry.” Turning towards the agent, he states, “How much was the asking price?”

Taken aback by the question, the woman states a sum that doesn't even make Draco blink. He turns to Scorpius. “What do you say, Scorp, are we going to live here?”

Harry looks down and only sees a decisive nod. “But other color on the walls, this is ugly!”

Draco smiles and turns back to the agent. “Please tell your client that I am willing to pay the asking price. But I expect the house empty in a weeks time. I will need to make some renovations and want to move in as fast as possible.”

She smiles at Draco nodding. “Very well. We will make all the necessary arrangements.”

They shake hands on it and Harry takes his new neighbors home and invites them for dinner.

“Now, that is a sight that I could get used to.”

Harry grins over his shoulder, and for a second he believes that Draco is checking his arse out, but then he berates his mind for getting ahead of himself - even if Draco looks at him, it doesn't mean he should get too cocky. So he smiles at Draco and enjoys the way that his breath catches a little and his cheeks turn a little pink, his pale skin giving him away.

“Why don't you show Scorpius the tapestry while I get the dinner ready? The pasta sauce needs a little longer.”

“Mother told me about that, come with us?” Harry knows it is futile to resist and puts a stasis charm on the food. Draco carries Scorpius upstairs and soon they stand in front of the tapestry, and this time Harry is sure that Draco is consciously standing closer than necessary. He breathes his unique scent in and explains quietly where he made the restorations on the tapestry. He shows Draco his own name and the two lines going from his name to the new generation of Malfoys.

Draco goes pale and whispers into Harry's ear.

“Why is she on there?”

Harry tugs him close, and Draco goes without resistance.

“Because every new member of the family shows up on the tapestry. No matter how long they are alive.”

“Okay.”

Scorpius doesn't understand what he’s seeing, but he turns to his dad and the question makes Harry curse himself for suggesting this in the beginning.
“Who’s `tella?” He stumbles over the name.

“A little girl that couldn’t stay with us. She sent you instead to be loved and cherished.” Draco presses his son tighter to himself. “I love you, Scorp.”

“Let’s go downstairs, the pasta needs to finish cooking and then we need to eat.”

Harry goes, and knows that Draco will come after him.

Dinner is a quiet affair, even the little boy doesn’t talk much, picking up on the sadness in the air.

When they say goodbye, Harry feels a pang, but at the same time he has a feeling that he has looked even deeper into the person that Draco has become and that he searched for his comfort in Harry’s presence. Harry decides to take it as a positive sign.

The next few days find him often at Draco’s new house. They strip the walls together and spell new wallpaper onto the walls. The floors get a new coating and they scrub the kitchen. Harry likes the easy laughter that he shares with Draco and the look of labour on the other man. But then the orphanage takes up Harry’s attention again and he find himself busy at work, he vows to make it up to Draco and Scorpius. His chance comes after another stressful weekend, when he has barely enough time to drop Mila off before work calls him again.

“Welcome to your new home! May bread and salt never run out!” Harry holds out the bread that he made this morning and the salt that he has put into a pretty glass bowl. He knows it is a silly custom, but he feels it is a nice and welcoming gesture nonetheless.

Scorpius hugs Harry’s legs, and Draco smiles fondly at his son. It is a marvel how happy and carefree the little boy has become since he moved into the apartment with Draco alone.

Gone is the little boy that clung to his father at every step, especially when it came to getting put to sleep. Scorpius has grown to chatter nonstop, and Harry falls a little more in love with the little boy each time he sees him.

Right now, he tugs him towards the kitchen and tells Harry all about the new house elf, Nippy, that has joined them. Harry loves the airy feeling of the kitchen, they have polished the floor and the cabinets are gleaming, but what Harry loves most is the massive oak table that is positioned in the middle of the room - it suggests many future family dinners around it.

He puts the bread and salt down on the table and is greeted by more giggles coming from underneath the table. He indulges Scorp in a quick game of hide and seek, before he pretends to give up and heads slowly back into the parlour. He admires the cream coloured walls and the overall homey feel that the house has acquired.

Walking into the room that he had last seen stripped bare is an eyeopener. Draco has really outdone himself. Something catches his eye and he finds himself captivated by the portrait that Draco has hung up in the parlor. There is no other explanation but that it shows Scorpius’ late mother, Astoria Malfoy. She really was a beautiful woman, with long dark curls and soulful eyes. It nearly eats Harry up, but he wants to know what the relationship between them was. Draco has been so open about being gay, how on earth did they manage to have Scorpius? Harry remembers that Draco mentioned artificial insemination, but was Astoria in love with Draco? How would she feel if she knew that Harry had always been in love with Draco, even though he managed to put his feelings on a backburner for a long time.

“That is my mommy.” Scorpius stands behind him, eyes still a little sad and his mouth quivers only a
“She’s beautiful.” Harry crouches down in front of the little boy. “I am sure she loved you very much and watches over you.”

“You think?”

Harry has learned to believe. His own parents have been watching at least sometimes, ever since they accompanied him to his death, and so he is firmly convinced that Astoria is watching over her son.

“I don’t think, Scorp, I know,” and as he looks at the picture he realizes that she is not moving.

Scorpius throws his arms around his neck and holds on really tight. “I like you. I like Mila too, and daddy likes you too.”

Harry instinctively hugs the little boy and breathes his scent in. It reminds him of Mila as a baby and, funny enough, of Draco as well - it is such a unique smell. And then he feels a warm presence at his back. The owner doesn't need to say anything, Harry will always know who he is just from the smell alone, which tells him that Draco stands quite a lot closer than strictly necessary.

“Hello, Draco.” Harry doesn't turn around, simply enjoying the intimacy of the situation. They stand like this for a while, but then Scorpius squirms and Harry puts him down again. Mila is at the Weasley’s that night. Molly takes her on a regular base, because Mila loves playing with her honorary cousins and Harry can't begrudge her the nights when the kids all have too much to eat and stay up a little too late under Molly's eyes - after all she has no grandparents that can spoil her.

It leaves him with days when he can catch up on paperwork and get the house cleaned and today it has allowed him to drop by Draco’s and Scorpius’ new home. They had moved in already a couple of days ago, and Harry had dropped Mila off on the last weekend to play with Scorp, but somehow he didn’t manage to stay for longer than the five minutes he needed to drop her off, due to an emergency at the orphanage.

Tonight though, he has finally got the time to come over and really welcome them into their new home. Draco has invited him to come and look at the results of all the work that they have done - now that the furniture is there and he has hung up all the pictures and got the decorating done. Harry is looking forward to this night. He knows that his attraction is only continuing to grow, and he hopes that Draco’s frequent invitations to spend time with him mean that there is something on his side too. Even though he has not been pushing, he knows that with every minute that he is spending in Dracos company, he is falling a little more for the man that Draco has become. He knows that his crush never went away, but seeing Draco with the kids and hearing him talk about life with Tory and the way he missed England when he was in France, there is just something about the man that makes Harry yearn to be in his company. He can't name the feeling yet, but it has definitely grown beyond a crush.

Scorpius pulls at his trouser leg and demands that he come into the dining room. The table is set for two adults and a child and Harry feels his throat close a little, it looks so cozy and right.

Draco steps up and smiles at Harry winningly. “I hope steak and kidney pie is still a favorite with you? I believe Bitsy has even made treacle tart for pudding?”

Harry gapes, “You remember that?”

“I remember quite a bit about you, Harry.” The voice is like a caress and Harry knows that tonight something is different. They settle at the table and eat with Scorpius in between them. The little boy
chatters almost nonstop and finally Draco simply puts his finger to Scorps lips. “Shush, darling, with all that talking you can't eat anything and then you'll get thin and grand-mère will fret, do you want that?”

Scorpius thinks about that for a second, before he begins shoveling food into his mouth with determination until his plate is all clear. “Grand-mère not fretting about Scorpius!” is all he declares while glaring at his father as if daring him to say something contrary.

Draco smiles tenderly at his son. “You are such a good boy. Do you want pudding?”

Harry watches the exchange, smiling. Some might say that Draco manipulated his son, but he thinks that Scorpius looks perfectly happy. He hasn't eaten too much, and Draco let him talk for quite a while before gently getting him to eat.

As they both nod ‘yes’ to pudding and enjoy a decent portion of treacle tart, he watches Draco further. He jokes with the little boy and when Scors eyes droop more and more, he puts him on his hip, like Harry does for Mila and has done for the kids in the orphanage more than a thousand times, as well. He takes him to the bathroom and brushes his teeth. The pyjamas that he is putting on the little one are pale blue and covered in tiny snitches and brooms. Scorp is stretching his arms out to Harry and he finds himself being kissed and hugged by baby arms.

“Good night, Harry!”

Draco takes Scorpius to bed and reads him a story about a boy who caught the snitch on the first time he was ever on a broom. Harry smiles to himself remembering his first lesson and the childish bickering they both did back then.

He settles down in the living room, waiting for Draco and almost falling asleep himself as he watches the flames flicker, the wine soothing his mind even further. It takes a while, but then Draco tiptoes down the stairs, joining him on the sofa with a soft sigh.

“Sometimes I wonder how you managed with two of them.”

Harry smiles. “Well, Marcus and Tia were older when they came to live with me, but when Mila came into the mix, at times I felt like I would go crazy as well. I’m still afraid sometimes that one of them feels left out. Thank god they are confident enough to ask for my time if they feel like they need more of me. And with the big ones gone, most of the time Mila gets a lot of my attention, and then there are of course the Weasleys. Mila is not blood related, but they basically adopted her.”

“Yeah, for a while I thought you might end up getting married to Ginerva. If you hadn't told me that Mila was adopted I would have bet that she’s yours by blood.”

“Just like you got married to Astoria? No, we broke up before it came to that.”

Before he can explain further, Draco sits up straighter.

“I still owe you an explanation on how our marriage worked.”

“Draco, you don't owe me anything!”

“Let me get this out, Harry. I need you to understand, just do me the favour and listen to me, okay?”

Harry nods and snuggles into the sofa. Draco looks far away as he begins to talk.

“Tory and I were best friends, I loved her, but I was never in love with her. How could I, being gay? 
My father had never told the Greengrass’ about my inclinations, but I was honest with her right from the start. I was sick and tired of building relationships on lies. If she had been in love with me, I would not have been able to pull this off. But Tory understood and appreciated that I was upfront with her. We decided to get married anyway and have a child. We both agreed that we would explain the situation as soon as Scorpius was old enough to understand and maybe get a divorce so that we would be free to have our own love lives then.”

“And your parents? How did they take that?”

Draco sneers at the thought. “My parents at that time only cared about the fact that I agreed to get married, consummate the marriage so that it would not get annulled and produce an heir for the Malfoy line.”

“But how did you get it up for the consummation?” Before Harry can even think about how inappropriate the question is, the elephant is in the room. His ears are burning and Draco looks at him for the fraction of a second, before he starts to laugh.

“Oh, my Harry, I really missed your bluntness!” He turns serious. “Well, you have seen Astoria’s picture, haven’t you? She had a very slender built, not many curves and it helped that she was my” - here he draws quotation marks into the air - “type. And I loved her hair, the dark tresses. And, well, you’ve been with Ginny, it works, it just feels terribly, terribly wrong. We both agreed that we wouldn’t put ourselves through the torture again and went straight for the artificial insemination after that one and only night.”

Harry looks at Draco. “I can tell you cared a great deal for her.” Offering his hand is a risk, but when Draco clasps his outstretched hand, a warmth spreads through Harry and makes him bold.

“And I know your type, slender, on the short side, dark hair, dark eyes and can never keep his mouth shut.”

Draco quirks his beautiful smile. “You got it almost right. Astoria was right up to one little detail. Her eyes were the wrong colour. I favor a certain shade of green.”

Harry tugs at his hand and just like that Draco follows. Watching the clear silver eyes, Harry takes another step towards the edge, prepared to fall without a safety net. “And what would that shade be? Slytherin?”

Draco shakes his head and pulls Harry closer. “Wrong Potter, my favorite shade of green looks at you every morning.” And for once Draco is the braver one and closes the remaining distance between them. His lips feel soft and warm. As far as kisses go, Harry knows somewhere in the back of his mind that surely he has had kisses of this quality before, but because this is Draco kissing him, it all feels so surreal and so very, very right that he almost forgets to kiss back. But just when Draco wants to pull back, Harry’s brain kicks into gear again and he pulls the man of his dreams close and snogs him in earnest. Only when oxygen becomes a real issue does he let go and watch Draco’s face intently.

Draco is flushed and has his eyes closed for a second, before he licks his lips and opens them again, smiling at Harry like a cat that just got a large pot of cream.

“Well, well, you certainly do know how to kiss.” He sounds a little out of breath and even though it is ridiculous Harry feels a sliver of pride at having ruffled Dracos pristine feathers just by kissing him.
Harry knows he is rapidly falling in love with Draco - who is he kidding, he never fell out of love with the blond - but now there are kids involved. But then there are the sweet nights out when they are alone because Molly and Narcissa are babysitting their respective grandchild, and they both have few single friends that they can spend time with. And the nights spent cuddled together on the sofa because the kids refuse to fall asleep for so long they have to cancel their dates.

Knowing that Draco is interested has really has put an entirely new spin on this story. Harry wonders if he is reading Draco right and if Draco would be in it for the long haul. Knowing himself, he will never figure this out on his own. So he does the only logical thing, which is, if in doubt ask your best female friend.

So here he is, on a friday night, Mila fast asleep at Molly's, and Draco with Scorpius visiting his parents. Harry has invited Ginny out for dinner, like he does from time to time because they are fiends, and she is the person he has always gone to with his personal troubles - although it is the first time he is going to her with romance issues.

The night is nice, it is cold but not wet and snow has begun to fall. It is close to christmas, would Draco like it if he got him a present?

“Earth to Harry!” He is pulled from his thoughts by fingers being snapped in his face. “Oh, there you are, and here I thought I would have to cast enervate on you!” Ginny smiles at him, that mischievous smile that always indicates embarrassing questions for him.

“So, what has got you in such a twist? Or, should I ask, who?”

Harry sighs.

“Oh my, you’ve got it bad.”

“I guess I do. Problem is, I have no idea if this is a good idea or a recipe for disaster.”

“Well, he is wonderful. He has a son, who he adores, he’s lived in France for a while and only returned to England a couple of months ago. He used to be married.” Here Ginny raises an eyebrow, but Harry hurries on. “But it was arranged – he’s gay, he told me so, but his old friends don't really care, they are busy with their own lives. He moved to number eight, Grimmauld Place, because he wanted his son to grow up in an area that exposes him to muggles, but is still close enough to St Mungo's and the magical zoo. We spend a lot of time with each other, but I am not sure if he wants me or if it just my wishful thinking.”
“Hm, does he touch you a lot?”

Harry thinks back on the fleeting little touches that Draco is so free with, a hand on his arm or shoulder, putting a lock of hair behind Mila’s ear and the frequent cuddles he bestows upon his son. The bumping shoulders every time they are out in the park, bundled up in their thick coats because the kids love playing with the fallen leaves.

“He does touch me sometimes, yes.”

“Does he call on you for no reason?”

Little notes come to mind, playdates for the kids, calls on Sundays and invites to accompany them to the zoo or out for hot chocolate, dropping by in the evenings, because Draco forgot to go shopping for food once again and then, of course, the insisting on returning the favour.

“You could call it that.”

“Has he ever described his type?”

Harry smiles at the recollection. “Yeah, he did describe his type pretty clearly.”

“Has he had a boyfriend before?”

“Yes, he did, but his father broke them up.”

“Does he sometimes just look at you?”

“I have no idea. If yes, I haven’t caught him at it.” That is a blatant lie, but somehow Harry is not willing to share the cute blush that paints Draco’s cheeks rosy when he gets caught staring.

“Oh, Harry, you are such a bad liar.” Ginny laughs, “But that’s okay, I think it’s sweet that you are so embarrassed by this.” She looks at him for a while and becomes serious, taking his hand she says quietly. “I haven’t seen you this happy since you got together with Oliver. If your young man is half as sweet as you describe him, you would be a fool not to go for him. If he has a kid of his own, he will know what commitment means and from the way you are talking about him, he is head over heels in love with you!”

“Gin, I need to tell you something.” Harry is nervous, but it is her reaction that is the most important to him right now. Ron and Hermione will flip and yell and be mad at him for a while, but they will come around sooner or later, but if Ginny can’t accept Harry’s choice then he will be in real trouble.

“Spit it out, Harry.”

“You won’t like him.”

“And you know that how?”

“Because the guy we are talking about is Draco Malfoy.”

She tilts her head just so and then all of a sudden, begins to laugh. Harry feels like he is missing something and hopes that she will pull herself together soon, because people are beginning to stare at them.

“Oh my god, that is too precious.” She is still laughing, but now tears are flowing too.

“Gin?”
“Give me a second,” is all that she says. Then she beckons the waiter over and orders a double shot of firewhiskey for both of them. As the drinks arrive, she knocks hers back and shudders. Then, she squares her shoulders and looks him straight into the eyes.

“Okay, Harry, you want my honest opinion on that?”

Harry grimaces but nods, after all friends are not the people who say only the things you want to hear.

“Well, apart from the fact, that I wonder why you both didn’t just end up in bed together in our last year in Hogwarts, because even then I sometimes thought you looked at him more than at me, and the fact that I thought you had a different type, why should I have a problem with you dating Draco Malfoy?”

“Uhm, because of the fact that he was a prat in school? And his father tried to kill you?”

She rolls her eyes at him, “Oh, come on, school has been over for how many years now? Five? And I’m sure Draco has grown up just like you have, otherwise I can't imaging how he managed to get such a besotted look onto your face, or is it the sex? I mean the man is gorgeous I have to admit that!”

“Gin!” Now it is Harry's turn to knock back a drink. “Just for your information, we haven’t had sex yet! He just kissed me. This was such a bad idea. I am sorry, I should just go.”

But before he can leave, Ginny grabs his arm and says firmly, “Sit down, Harry! From what you have told me Draco is just as besotted with you as you are with him. And if he is as sweet with Mila as you have just described, you would be a fool to not try a relationship with him. As for his family, well, no one is perfect, but as far as I’m concerned the Malfoys have paid their dues. And as long as you don't have a problem with them, well, it is not my place to judge. All I can say is that I haven't see you as happy as tonight in forever and if it is Draco Malfoy who makes you this happy? Well then I'll be happy too. Just tell him if he hurts you my bat bogey hex will be the least of his troubles.”

“Duly noted!”

He feels her arms around him in a warm hug. “Go get him, Harry, and tell me all the juicy details later!”

Harry feels like an entire mountain is off his chest and he can enjoy the rest of the evening with Ginny like they used too. They are so busy laughing and joking that neither of them notices the reporter snapping pictures.

Harry apparates home late that night, tired but happy. He will pick up Mila tomorrow morning from Molly and later they will go to the Christmas Market together.

He has very sweet dreams that night, which leave him with a raging case of morning wood and thus he indulges in a rare morning wank before getting up and showering. Apparating to the Burrow he has breakfast with his adopted family and enjoys a quick game of quidditch with Ron and George. After lunch it is late already and thus he is rushing with Mila to pick up their two favorite blonds for their outing to the Christmas Market.

Mila is happily chattering about all the sweets that she wants to try, when Draco opens the door. Harry knows immediately that something is wrong. Draco avoids his eyes as he says, “I don't feel so good, I think we need to cancel our trip.”

“What is wrong, Draco, are you getting sick?”
“No, I am just not feeling well.”

Just at that moment, Scorpius makes his appearance. He is like a mini tornado of anger, and Draco has no chance to make a grab for his enraged child.

“You is making Daddy cry! You is a bad man!” He is hitting Harry wherever he can reach him, and Harry is so stunned that he lets him for a few seconds, before he drops down and catches the small fists in his hands.

“Whoa, slow down, Scorp.”

The little boy looks at him with big eyes that are full of scorn but also hurt.

“Why are you making Daddy cry? He is not supposed to cry anymore!”

“Scorpius, come here.” Draco calls for his son and Harry looks at him, still baffled and concerned. He lets go of the little boy, who toddles over to his dad, who picks him up and looks at Harry wonderingly.

“Draco, what did I do? How have I hurt you? Don’t I deserve a chance to defend myself from whatever I supposedly did?”

Draco sighs. “Better come in then.”

Mila, who has followed the exchange with large eyes, clings to Harry. “Is Draco mad at us?” Her lower lip wobbles, and Harry really hopes that they can clear this up soon. His daughter loves Draco fiercely and to lose Draco as a friend would hurt her deeply.

“No, darling, he is upset with me – not you, and I hope I’ll get this silly misunderstanding out of the way.”

Draco puts Mila and Scorpius in a room close to the living room, hugging Mila and assuring her that he still loves her. It makes Harry's heart clench painfully, because he longs to hear those words himself, but right now he is not sure that Draco will ever love him. He wracks his brain for a clue, but comes up absolutely empty.

So when Draco enters the room and looks silently at Harry, the tension is more than he can bear.

“Will you please tell me what is going on? What have I done that your son sees the need to hit me and my daughter fears that you might not love her anymore?”

It takes patience that Harry doesn’t have, but as he learned with the kids people need their own pace. Draco pulls out a newspaper and puts it on the table. He begins to speak but the words make no sense in Harry's ears.

“I am sorry that I misinterpreted what was between us. I thought we were on our way to building a relationship, but obviously I saw that wrong. You must think I am such a tramp, throwing myself at you all the time when you are rekindling your relationship with Ginevra. Right now, I just hope that she is not too upset that I have taken up so much of your time.”

“What on earth are you talking about? What relationship between Ginny and I? She is my best friend, my sister in every sense but blood, we have not even thought about sex ever since I came out to her as gay! And that was 1999.”

Draco turns pale – which looks strange on his already pale face and that is when Harry finally
registers just what is on the front page. It is a picture of course. A picture of him and Ginny, and if he were in Draco's shoes, yes he probably would have drawn the wrong conclusions too. But this is the last straw. They can print what they want, but that right there has hurt someone that Harry loves, and it ends here.

“That’s it! I’m suing their sorry arses until they won't be able to see straight!”

Draco’s mouth drops open in an undignified manner and Harry has enough. Well aware that he might get hexed for his troubles, he steps up into Draco’s personal space and marches him backwards until his legs hit the edge of the sofa.

“Draco, I will say this once, and I want you to listen to me, really, really closely. I am not good with words, and I will probably mess up somewhere in the future, and I want you to remember what I am saying now.”

Draco looks up at him, eyes wide, and Harry knows that he will do whatever he can to make sure that he never cries again because of him.

“It sounds incredibly cheesy and if you want to laugh then that’s fine. But you have to know one thing. You have always been the one for me.”

A breathless little laugh escapes Draco and he looks like he wants to speak, but Harry just pushes his finger against the lips that he had kissed so passionately only two days before.

“Even when I thought that I would never have a chance with you, I loved you. I always just wanted you to be happy, and I swore to myself that I would be ok as long as you were happy. So, now that I know that I have a chance to be with you, that for some incredible reason you like me and feel attracted to me, do you really think that I would be so damn stupid to risk my chance with you? To maybe be a family one day? Do you think so little of me?”

Harry takes his finger away and drops down in front of Draco. He is exhausted, it is one thing loving Draco like he always has but quite another putting it out there, being vulnerable and risking that his love might be rejected. Harry doesn't know how long he sits there, but then a soft hand touches his chin and raises his face. He finds himself looking into the clear silver eyes that he loves so much.

“You love me?” Draco whispers.

Harry just nods.

“You want us to be a family one day?”

Again another nod.

“You know how incredibly Gryffindors that is?”

“Well, that is how you know me right? Always a Gryffindor to the core.” Harry looks at man that he loves and waits for the final verdict. He receives it when Draco claims his mouth in a bruising kiss. But before the kisses can turn into more, Draco pulls away and looks at Harry in a regretful way.

"I would love to take this further, but Scorpius and Mila are anxious in the room next door and I don't want our first time to be rushed and careless because they could come in anytime. That will be the case often enough in the future.”

“You mean?”
“IF you still want a paranoid ex-Slytherin, I am yours, and as you know I don't share.”

Harry pulls Draco into his arms and whispers “I want only one ex-slytherin with his son and I don't share either.” And that is that. Draco flicks the door open again and sure enough the two kids tumble in caught in the act of eavesdropping.

“I think we need to teach you that listening in at doors is something you only do when you can’t get caught!” They both need a second to gather their bearings, but then they realize when they look at their fathers closely entwined, and that they don't appear to be fighting. They both throw themselves at their fathers and Harry catches them to include them in the cuddle.

“So, who is ready to plunder the Christmas Market?”

The happy squeals that answer him and the soft smile that Draco bestows on him are music in Harry’s ears.

Harry is nervous, which in itself is absolutely ridiculous, it isn't as if he is a virgin, and he knows that Draco has slept with someone before. It is not as if this is the first time that he deems himself in love. He loved Oliver and he enjoyed the sex they had. But still this is Draco, and Draco has always been special in a way that Harry can't even describe.

So he runs through the house for the fifth time, trying to make sure that there is nothing that could cause someone to trip or step onto a toy or anything to make this awkward. The living room is cleaned up, the sheets are fresh and he himself is showered. He has even made dinner by himself. He poured the wine and made sure it has the perfect temperature, so everything is perfect, too perfect. Harry is a wreck, and he has no idea why. All that he knows is that if he messes this up somehow, he won't just be able to laugh it off.

And then it happens, he is stirring the tomato sauce when the knock sounds through the house and he is startled, thus dropping the spoon and messing up his shirt because of course he has no apron that covers his chest. He hurries to open the door and stubs his toe on the corner of the cabinet, so he opens the door, splattered with tomato sauce and hopping on one foot.

Draco just raises an eyebrow and laughs lightly, dipping a finger into the stain on his chest, he licks the sauce of and purrs. “Hmm, delicious!” He kisses Harry lightly on the lips and saunters into the kitchen.

Harry realizes two things at once. Firstly, it should be illegal to walk like that and, secondly, he can't think with ALL his blood in his lower regions.

“Harry?” Draco calls from the kitchen, “I think the sauce is done, do you want me to turn the heat down?”

What? Somewhere in his brain Harry is sure that he does want that, but why? OH right the food!
“I am coming!” And he hurries back into the kitchen where Draco, standing at the stove, turns towards him and gives him another smile that makes something inside of Harry melt.

“Not yet I hope.” Draco teases gently

And just like that, Harry is back to the here and now, and reminded that being nervous is not necessary. Draco knows that life is not perfect, most of all when the house is shared with small kids.

He takes a deep breath.

“Are you doing this on purpose?” he lightly accuses Draco, poking him in the center of the chest. “Do you like seeing me flustered and off center?”

Draco cocks his head and simply says, “Yes.”

“Why?” It is more of a whine than a question, but Harry doesn't care.

“Because to everyone out there, you are the poised and calm Harry Potter, you have solutions for all their small and big problems, you never lose your cool and you never need to search for words, but here with me you are nervous and cute and just mine. I like that – I am selfish like that. Because only I can keep you on your toes like this.” Draco smiles and his face is downright predatory. “Are you very hungry, or do you think dinner can wait a bit?”

“Uhm, it can wait?”

“Good answer.” And with that Harry finds his mouth claimed thoroughly. Draco has fastened his lips over his and he can only surrender. Normally, he would fight a bit more for dominance, but Draco's tongue is in his mouth, basically fucking him, and his fingers are firmly wrapped in his hair just on this side of painful. Harry has never been so turned on before, he moans into the kiss, wanton and needy, but to be honest he couldn't care less. His knees feel like they are filled with jelly and his entire lower body tingles.

He presses himself closer to Draco to get across where he needs him most, and when his cock feels an answering hardness in Draco's trousers, he moans again into that delicious mouth.

“Bed or right here?” Draco pants and Harry can't really answer--there is not enough blood in his brain. Draco takes his clue from him and simply drops on his knees in front of him. He makes short work of his jeans and pants, and pulls his aching cock out.

He looks up at Harry through lowered eyelashes, and it takes a huge effort not to come right then and there. Draco wraps his hand around the hard shaft in front of him and gives Harry a smile that is just on this side of mischievous, before he licks the tip, once. “Ahh,” Harry is not really coherent and just gets out, “Please!” but it must get across what he really needs at that moment, as Draco begins to suck him earnestly.
Wrapping his lips around the head of the thick cock in front of him, he sucks Harry down as far as he can, applying pressure with his tongue to the underside of his cock. He does that a couple of times, before pulling off with a smacking sound that should be obscene, but drives Harry even more crazy.

Harry wraps his own fingers in the silky blond hair and lightly guides Draco back where he wants him most, and he marvels when he feels that hot mouth on himself again. Draco sucks him to the brink of orgasm, and when Harry wants to warn him, wraps his mouth firmly around the tip of his cock while stroking his shaft twice and playing with his balls with the other hand.

Harry feels his orgasm pulse through him, and he spills helplessly into the sucking mouth. The motion intensifying the feeling of his orgasm even further so that he feels like his soul is being sucked out right through his dick.
Harry feels his knees buckle and he knows that Draco is still hard and that he should take care of him, but when he tries to get the words out, Draco simply takes his hand and shows him the damp spot in his underwear.

He breathes deeply and simply lies on the kitchen floor for a minute or so. When he can think again, he looks at Draco, takes in the swollen lips and the satisfied smile and shakes his head.

“Wow, that was simply, wow.”

“Good, yes?”

“Better than good. Give me a minute and I can take care of you.”

“Oh, you will, but right now I would like that dinner, I can't live only on protein.”

Harry laughs. It's a free laugh, a satisfied ‘life is really good’ laugh, and before Draco can react he finds himself being pulled on top of Harry and snogged thoroughly.

“Once I am done with you, you won't be that cocky anymore, darling,” Harry promises. He pulls his underwear back up, steps out of the jeans and casts a quick wandless *scourgify* at Draco’s pants.

“Show-off,” Draco mutters, but it is combined with a smile.

Now that the immediate and crazy edge is taken off, they can both know that what comes later tonight is what they both want, hopefully again and again. Harry feels more at ease. He serves dinner and pours both of them a glass of wine. They eat in the kitchen, laughing and teasing, and Harry feels at home - completely at home - which has nothing to do with the house and everything with his company.

When the food is cleared, they clean the kitchen together; Harry washes up and Draco dries the dishes. It feels so domestic that Harry feels an ache inside of him, hoping to keep this sense of belonging for forever.

Draco turns towards him, stretching his hand out for him and Harry takes it, together they walk the short way to the bedroom, but the walk is extended through frequent stops for kisses. Finally, they get to the bedroom, and Harry pushes Draco, who goes without protest, backwards. Where he was aggressive before, now he is pliant and soft underneath Harry's hands, stretching into his touch like a large cat that begs for affection. He is beautiful like this, and it takes Harry's breath away to see him in this state.

He bats Draco's hands away when he wants to take off his shirt. “Uh-uh! My turn to play!” he growls and enjoys the way that Draco's breath hitches and his hips jerk up slightly.

He takes his time, opening each button slowly and savoring the pale skin that appears, inch by inch. Once the shirt is open, he touches the rosy nipples slightly and pinches the nubs until they are hard and peaked and he hears Draco suck in a breath in a sound that is caught between lust and pain. He rolls one nipple between his fingers and sucks on the other, enjoying the motions that Draco's body makes searching for friction. He continues the treatment on the other side until Draco is all but begging him to continue.

Harry puts his palm over the straining bulge in Draco's trousers and squeezes him, while at the same time fucking his mouth with his tongue, just like Draco had done for him a short while ago. Harry lifts himself up a bit and he sees the results of his efforts, hair mussed and cheeks flushed, lips swollen through kisses and slight nips, eyes made hazy by lust with pupils blown wide. Draco is a sight to behold, his chest is heaving with exertion and, all of a sudden, Harry just wants him naked.
and writhing beneath him.

He makes short work of the shirt and pulls the pants and trousers down in one go, taking the socks off and undressing himself quickly too. Before Draco can get another idea, Harry lies down on top of him, and for the first time their naked bodies touch. Draco bucks up and their groins rub against each other.

“Oh, Merlin, Harry, do something. I can’t... ahh.” Harry rubs himself against Draco, keeping him on edge, while fumbling with the lube.

“Can I fuck you?” They should have talked about this before, but somehow it never came up and now is probably the last moment that Harry could pull back. If they continue this for a moment longer stopping will be more than a herculean effort.

“Oh yes, just slow. It’s been a while,” Draco moans.

Harry rolls off him and spreads his arse cheeks. He notices that Draco has a birthmark on his left cheek, but he is too far gone to really see it. Right now all he is concerned with is getting his fingers into that tight heat. He circles the pink rosebud with his finger, before pressing against it, marveling at the ease with with Draco accepts his finger. He moves carefully, searching for the bundle of nerves that will turn a feeling of fullness into pure pleasure for Draco. After a few seconds, the tremble that runs through the pale body before him tells him that he has found what he is searching for, he begins fingerling Draco in earnest, adding a second finger and pouring more lube into his crack. Before long, Harry has three fingers inside of Draco, and his lover is fucking himself on them.

“Oh god, please, just get inside me!” Draco turns over and pulls his own cheeks apart. Harry slicks himself up and angles his cock so that he can penetrate Draco easily. Sliding into the silky heat is incredible and Harry is glad that he doesn't need to worry about STDs like he would with a muggle, he can feel Draco completely. He stills his movement to give Draco a moment to get used to the cock inside of him, because even though Harry is not huge, a cock is different than fingers. But soon Draco moves back into him, indicating that he is ready for more and Harry begins to thrust into him. He moans, and the filthy words and pleas falling from Draco's lips urge him on even more.

“Oh yeah, just like that, oh fuck, harder, yes!”

After a few minutes, he pulls out and flips Draco over, pushing back in and taking him like that. He intertwines their hands and kisses Draco deeply while fucking him, frantically, feeling Draco support him with his heels. He feels his orgasm building, slowly but steadily and sooner than he wants, he is at the point of no return. He wraps his hand around Draco's cock and strokes him twice, feeling him erupt between their bodies and the spasms inside of him, pushing Harry over the edge, so that he spills his seed deep inside of Draco's arse.

He can only just refrain from collapsing onto Draco and pulls out carefully in order not to do any damage. Taking Draco with him, he falls onto his back, breathing out carefully, as if not to shatter from any more exertion. Draco's head is settled on the junction of his shoulder and torso and his hand plays languidly with the hairs on Harry’s chest. Draco has his leg settled firmly on top of his, and for a second Harry contemplates getting up to clean himself, but his bones feel like molten butter, and the aftershocks still run though his body like little bolts of lightning. So, as long as Draco remains pliant in his arms, he will do fuck all about moving.

After a few minutes, Draco begins to squirm, and Harry moves his hand in a lazy motion. It cleans both of them sufficiently and Draco settles down again. They are both sated and sleepy, and Harry only hears Draco mumble.
“Pull the blanket up a bit, will you? Not everyone is a living furnace.”

With that they both drift off to sleep.

It is only the next morning that everything comes crashing down on Harry.

He wakes up earlier than Draco and a quick check of the time confirms that they have time for another quickie before they need to get up and take a shower. So he pulls the blanket down carefully to display Draco's arse fully, he sees the birthmark on his left arsecheek completely now, and his mind draws a blank. He knows that mark, he has seen it a hundreds of times before, when he changed nappies and wiped a little, baby bottom. What can that mean? Is it just a coincidence? Maybe all purebloods have such a birthmark? But, no, he would know, even though they don't have babies at the orphanage, he has seen some of the kids age two to three; they don't have a feather on their arses. But he recalls a little girl with a birthmark like a fox under her arm, maybe it shows belonging to a family then? But if Mila belongs to the Malfoy family – how?

Draco stirs from being cold and Harry pulls the blanket back up, all thoughts of sex gone from his mind. What is going on here? The easiest thing would be to ask Draco about the birthmark. Maybe there is a logical explanation for all of this, and if not, well Harry will find one.

He pulls Draco close to him once again and tries to calm his racing heart. He loves this man here, and he loves his daughter, and he needs to know why both of them have a feather on their left bum cheek.

Draco snuggles into the warmth that Harry provides and stretches like a cat.

“Morning, love!”

Harry smiles. “Morning, sleepyhead!” He doesn't get out more because he finds himself being snogged again, morning breath be damned, and it is wonderful that Draco - who the world finds prissy at best - is so uninhibited with him that he kisses him after just waking up.

He does get up afterwards and moves to the bathroom, but that first kiss has taken at least a bit of Harry's anxiety and thrown it out of the window. Harry gets out of bed and steps into the shower with Draco, helping him wash his back and, finding him loose still from the previous night, can't resist but fuck him again, this time against the shower tiles until Draco spills his seed and it washes down the drain. Harry pulls out just in time and shoots his load all over Draco's back and arse.

They stay in the shower afterwards when Harry swats Draco lightly and calls out, “Nice little tattoo there...”

“Huh?” Draco is adorably confused, and Harry uses the opportunity, even though his heart is almost in his throat.

“Well, on your left arse cheek. It looks like a feather, isn't that a tattoo?”

Draco towels himself dry and utters the words that throw Harry’s world into utter chaos.

“Oh, no, that is not a tattoo. Every member of the Malfoy family, born into it, not married into mind you, has this mark, it is a magical birthmark. You can't fake it and you can't remove it, it will always show which family you belong to. I think every old family has such a mark, even though I don’t know what the others look like. Most of us glamour it.”

Harry feels numb, as if someone punched him and the pain hasn't yet registered with his brain. He needs to make sure that he has really heard Draco right.
“So, every pureblood family member has the same birthmark, at the exact same place on their bodies? So, Scorpius has a feather on his left arse cheek, like you do? And even your father? Every member? So would your mum have one as well?”

Draco looks at him, as if amused about his incredulous expression.

“‘Yes, Harry, as far as I know, every pureblood family - at least those who are listed as the old twenty-eight families with true pure blood - have a birthmark, secret to anyone else but family members and their spouses But to answer your question my mum has the Black family mark, while I have the Malfoy Mark. Because it is the paternal side that influences the marking’”

“So if, say, a pureblood married a halfblood and they had a kid, would that child have the birthmark?”

“Good question, I never asked. I knew that all of my children would have the Malfoy-birthmark. But why the sudden interest?”

Harry almost chokes on the answer, but with quick thinking he gets out.

“‘Well, I just want to know if all children can be assigned to a family through the birthmarks. I don’t remember any of my kids having a mark on their bodies and thus being able to find a family who they could belong to. I mean, it would be neat right? At least they would have an idea then of where they come from. But if the marks disappear as soon as the mother or the father is a halfblood or muggle, that would be an explanation.’”

“‘You know that is a valid point. I will ask father about it. I don’t think the magic is that strong that the marks disappear with the first dilutio of the blood.’”

Draco dresses and they eat breakfast together, even though to Harry it is as if he is chewing on cardboard and drinking dishwashing water. Maybe there is an explanation for all of this, maybe Abraxas had an illegitimate child that no one knew about and Mila comes from a branch of the Malfoys that has been forgotten. The alternative doesn’t bear thinking about.

Harry needs help, he needs someone who is good at research.

He needs Hermione.
Harry is convinced that he needs to trace every possibility and find a way to work out what happened, so he sits down and writes a letter to Peterson. He doesn't truly expect an answer, but he will not allow anybody to accuse him of not doing everything he can to find out what happened.

Dear Mr Peterson,

Due to recent events, I need to get into touch with Mila’s biological parents or grandparents. I know that you value the privacy of the your clients, but please consider that we are dealing with a hereditary trait here and I am desperate to find out more about my little girl. Please get in touch with me, so that I can contact the family about Mila’s condition.

Kind Regards,

Harry Potter

Watching the owl as it flies away gives Harry a pang. Has he asked too much when he wanted more than two great kids that love him? When he pushed for a baby and even more a man to love him?

The day has been a nightmare. Draco is so tender and sweet with the kids, Harry falls deeper and deeper and it wears on him not to blurt out what he is thinking, but does he know Draco well enough yet to know how he would take that? Would he take Mila away from him? He doesn't think he would, but a tiny mean voice keeps whispering in his ear that Draco would not understand and would take Mila back into his family and then he would be left out alone with his foster-kids.

Then he remembers the face that Draco made when he told him about his loss, and Harry realizes something else. He needs to be absolutely sure that Mila is involved with Draco and how that came to be, before he can try to sort this mess out, he will not raise false hope or risk his own family if he doesn't have a solid explanation. And then there is Lia the little girl with the fox mark under her arm.

Peterson has not replied to the letter that he wrote, so he has informed the one person who will be able to find out what really is going on. He is nervous and just hopes that this riddle is solved quickly.

He has left Mila with Draco; she loves him, and Draco had not even asked a question when Harry told him that he needs to drop by the orphanage to clarify something.

He stands for a while in front of the house, pacing for a bit, before he gathers his resolve and knocks on the door. Flooing would have been easier, but he needed the time to get his emotions halfway back under control. When the smart witch opens the door, Harry all but falls into her home. Her hands on his shoulder center him enough to breathe and tell her what he has come for. Of course, the letter should have told her what she needs to know, but he needs to say it out loud for it to be real.

“Mione, I need your help.”

“Come in, Harry. Here have a cup of tea!”

“I don't want tea, I want answers.”

“Harry James Potter! Drink the tea, and then you will tell me right from the beginning what has you in such an uproar. Your letter was so vague, what exactly has happened to Mila?”
Harry knows better than to cross Hermione, and he sips the tea in front of him. The calm washing over him tells him that he had been frazzled enough that she resorted to dosing him with a potion. It is a testament to their friendship that he doesn't storm out right away.

“Okay, now tell me.”

“I think Mila might have been stolen from someone in the Malfoy family.”

“What?” The witch sits down opposite him. She grabs the tea from him and downs a huge gulp in one go.

“And what is worse, I think it might not only be her.”

Harry has an awful thought. What if someone is out there stealing children, pretending that they are dead, and then sells them to Peterson, or does it without him knowing anything about it?

“Remember how we discussed adoption?” Hermione frowns a bit but listens to Harry getting his fears out. It takes him a while to get all of his crazy thoughts and fears into a pattern, that allows him to tell the story as it is. Hermione is left to align the puzzle pieces of his rambling and sums it up in her usual no nonsense manner.

“Okay, summing it up. Mila has a birthmark. Draco has the same one.” Harry nods. “And you have not told Draco that you believe that Mila could be from his family.”

Again, he can only nod.

“I won't ask why, because I am sure I won't like the answer. For now, I want to know if you plan on telling him?”

Harry feels like a puppet as he swallows dryly and nods again. Hermione narrows her eyes and studies him for a while, making Harry feel like a specimen under her microscope, but her words are those that he longs for.

“What do you need me for, Harry?”

He breathes in and out before he says, “I want to know what is going on with adoption in the wizarding world. Why would someone do that? Are there hints in the adoption files in the Ministry? I can't check those, obviously, since I am not even allowed to adopt Ministry wards. You could get access to those files, check if someone else had a stillbirth that occurred simultaneously to another adoption. I will try to talk to Peterson once again. Maybe he can at least give me the name of the family of Mila's birth mother, then I can check if there really is a family connection to the Malfoys. And once I am sure that I have a good explanation I will tell Draco.”

Mione frowns again, but after a long while she shakes her curls and says, “I will try to find out what you want to know. I still think you should tell Draco, but I trust you to know him better than I do. I just hope you don't regret this in the end.”
Harry knows that life with Draco is too good to be true. Or at least, he has had a sinking feeling ever since he found the mark on Draco’s arse and that is his explanation to himself - his attempt at assuaging the gnawing guilt in his innards. If Mila really has Malfoy blood, and he is pretty sure that this is the only logical explanation, how on earth did she end up being adopted by him? His first lines of research turn out to be dead ends. Draco has no other living relatives and Lucius has no illegitimate children either, which might make this plausible and the pure idea that Narcissa might have given a child up – it is so preposterous that Harry discards that idea immediately again.

But then what happened? Had Astoria given Mila away without Draco knowing about it? Had she faked her daughter’s death? But why would she do that – and why would she try for another baby if she had given Mila away, and in such a sneaky way.

Harry feels sick, every moment that he watches Draco and Mila, wondering if she is really Draco’s daughter and how his lover will react if he reveals his thoughts and worries. Will he lose his daughter and his lover as well? He can prove that he has known nothing about anything fishy going on, but will Draco understand?

His temper is not easy and, even though Harry has come to love him dearly, their fights are still fierce and fiery, but Harry fears the icy silence that Draco exudes when he is really angry. Still, Harry resolves to research a bit more, to have a chance to clean this mess up, and give him all of the puzzles pieces.

Harry knows one thing for sure, if he has to choose between keeping his daughter and keeping his lover, his heart will bleed no matter what the final choice is.

He comes home with a heavy heart; his eyes are tired and his shoulders ache. He has been researching all births that occurred around the time that Mila was born, and so far there have been no other stillborn that were been registered.

Draco wanted to be home with Scorpius that day and Harry misses them both already. Before this mess had started, he had played with the thought of asking Draco soonish to move in with him and Mila. After all, they have been a couple for only a few weeks, but he has known and loved Draco all his life.

Just as he has settled down with a Firewhisky, the fireplace flares green and Draco tumbles out. Harry feels his heart constrict at the expression he sees in Draco’s eyes, there is pain and cold fury but it is not directed at him, as Harry realizes when Draco all but throws himself at him, needing reassurance.

They stay like this for a short while, but Draco disentangles himself and pulls a book from his robes. “I need to show you something.”
His tone is set, nervous, and yet so determined that Harry is convinced for a split second that Draco has found out about Mila and now is about to tell him why he is the worst scum on earth and that he will take her away now and care for her much better than Harry has done so far.

“I need you to read this and then tell me what you think about it.”

Harry is trembling but manages to open the book at the section that Draco has marked. At first, he is confused, but soon he realizes that he is looking at the diary of Astoria Malfoy.

“What on earth? Draco where did you find this?”

Draco paces in front of the fireplace.

“I was going through a trunk that Mother had sent with me when I moved out with Scorpius. I hadn’t looked at it yet, because...well to be honest, I was afraid that it might be Astoria’s stuff and I didn’t want to open wounds that are healing. And then tonight Scorpius stumbled over the trunk and wanted to open it. Tory’s portrait said I should look into it, and then talk to you about it. So I did.”

Harry looks at the book in his hand as if it might poison him. But looking at Dracos open pleading face, he has no choice but to comply with his wish.

Astoria has written everything in her wonderful elegant hand.

They say that I am hallucinating, that I must still suffer from the aftereffects of the trauma, but I know what I heard when Estelle was born! I remember it so clearly. The pain was worse than I thought, and I hoped that the midwife would be able to help me. She was so kind in the beginning, and Mother was so sure that she would help me. After all she is the one who you call when a babe is on its way: old Ms Elderidge.

Harry almost drops the book at the name, that coincidence appears a little too much. He falters a little but conceals it behind a cough. With trembling hands he switches the page and continues to read out loud.

The day has been burned into my mind. I have asked myself again and again if I misheard, but I am so sure of what I heard. I know that I was barely conscious when she was finally born, but I was so sure that she cried. I remember that I thought that she had such a loud and strong voice and then there was only silence, and Ms Elderidge told me that our little one hadn't made it. I think I passed out from the pain, but when I came to, I heard her below the window. I know I heard her no matter what Draco told me later on. He has seen our angel and he said she was cold and blue and not breathing and still the most beautiful little girl he has ever seen.

I know I heard her talking to another man, and she said that she had the goods ready for delivery and that she expected ‘her’ to fetch a tidy sum. Maybe Estelle wasn't dead at all? Maybe she has been taken and sold somewhere. But who would be so cruel?

Draco was so excited about our little girl. I know Lucius was hoping for an heir, but I was sure that we could try for another baby once she is a bit bigger. Ms Elderidge had been with me for months, why would she do this to us? She has known our families forever. This just doesn't make sense.

But as soon as I am better I will start researching. I know that my daughter is alive.

Harry puts the book down and wants to throw up, but he schools his face into neutrality as he turns towards Draco.

“Which made Tory keep asking for her, did she ever start to search for her?”
Draco shakes his head. “I thought I had gotten through to her and that she finally understood that Estelle was dead. But what if she was right? What if someone really has stolen my daughter and sold her to who knows where? My wife was not mad, so if she was convinced that Estelle was alive, I owe her to at least check the facts. If she is out there, I will find her and get her back and whoever took her will pay for that!”

Harry flinches slightly at the coldness in Draco’s voice. And it convinces him even more to solve the mystery before he confronts Draco with his suspicion.

Sleeping doesn’t come easily that night. Draco breathes easily next to him, but Harry tosses and turns. Giving sleep up as a lost cause, he padds downstairs, always intent on being quiet. He really doesn’t want to wake up anybody in the house. He crosses into the parlour where she hangs and takes her diary out. Before he reads it again, he asks the portrait for permission though.

“Your husband found this among your belongings and he showed a certain part to me.”

She watches him with her beautiful eyes and Harry feels like the lowest of lifeforms for a second, but then he gathers his resolve.

“I would like your permission to read your diary, otherwise you could tell me what it is that has you so convinced that Estelle is still alive?”

Silence greets him and Harry all but resigns himself to reading book even though he doesn’t want to snoop in her private life, but before he can open it a melodious voice interrupts his musings.

“It does you credit that you ask my permission, even though I am a mere portrait and cannot truly be offended should you chose to read the diary anyway.”

“Good evening, Mrs Malfoy.” Harry feels like he has swallowed a ball of lead, but he turns to look at her.

She looks at him with a small, sad smile. “So, it is you who my husband has fallen in love with.”

“If it is any consolation, I love him too. Have forever.” Harry feels awkward but the words make themselves said before he can think too much about them.

Her eyes scrutinise him for a while, a silent standoff before a smile flits over her face once more, warmer now.

“You'll do just fine, Mr Potter. Now what can I tell you?”

“Draco says you wrote down what you heard and that Estelle was still alive?”

“Yes, the birth was hard and I nearly passed out towards the end, but trust me, Mr Potter, a woman will always remember the cries of her child. Estelle was born, healthy and breathing. The midwife did her best to distract me, but I saw her squirm, my beautiful darling. I am sure that she knocked me out with a stunner or something, because when I came to again the body that they showed me was blue, and cold, quite dead from my muddled view. Draco was distraught and she didn't allow us much time with our baby.” There is so much pain in her eyes, Harry wonders if portraits can’t cry or if she simply won’t.

“But when she left to take the body away, she must have forgotten the open window. I could hear her clearly stating that the goods were ready for delivery and that they should inform 'Peterson'.”

Harry shivers involuntarily. “Did you know who Peterson was?”
“I researched his name, and I found the adoption agency, but there was nothing really that indicated foul play. Nothing that I could really use to confirm my feeling that my baby was still out there. But you should check the familial connections between Peterson and the old pureblood families, you’ll find that he has always been a guest in their homes, just like his father before him. And we all used the same midwife, for generations the Elderidge women have brought pure-blooded babies into the world.”

Harry definitely needs to check this family, there just seems to be too much of a coincidence. He bids Astoria goodnight and heads back to bed. Sleep evades him for a long time.

When Hermione steps through the floo that night, Harry knows that something serious has happened. She is pale and her hair a frizzy halo, she vibrates with nervous energy and paces several times across the floor trying to get her temper under control.

Harry knows that approaching her in this sort of mood is dangerous for any sane wizard, so he simply makes tea and sets it down before her. She sips the piping hot beverage and slowly calms down. When she sinks into the armchair across from him, Harry can't help but see that there is not only anger vibrating through her. There is a profound sense of sadness and insecurity also lurking behind her chocolate eyes. He decides to brave her anger, and hopefully he can get to the hurt as well. They might not be as close as they used to be, but she is his Hermione, his friend and he hates to see her so broken.

“What is it, Mione? What did you find?” He knows that the direct approach is the best with this kind of situation. Ron would fly off the handle, but Hermione needs the cut to the core, no nonsense approach.

She drags out a book from her satchel and enlarges it, for a while she just stares at the book and seems to be far, far away, but then she shakes it off and looks straight at Harry.

“I started with the birthmark. You said it was so unusual that I had hoped that there would be something at the library telling me about magical birthmarks and how they are inherited within certain bloodlines or if they indicate something else. I sat there for two days without finding anything substantial, but today a reference led me to this book here.”

Harry looks at the tome that she has on her lap; it appears heavy and the leather is old and creaking, the pages look as if they might crumble if you so much as breathe on them too heavily. He doesn't ask, just looks questioningly at Hermione.

“This book contains information about the old bloodlines. The ones that are what Lucius Malfoy always referred to as the purest of blood.”
“What?”

“This is the Pureblood Directory.”

“The sacred twenty-eight.” Harry remembers Draco telling him about them. Hermione nods.

“It lists all families in Wizarding Britain that are considered pureblood. It also lists their distinct traits, and the surest way to recognize a pureblood, but the most important thing is, it states that no firstborn daughter of the pureblood families ever survived if a brother was not born either before and died or was conceived immediately after her birth.”

“They wrote that in there?” Harry is confused. So far she has told him nothing that he understands or that should have caused her to be so hurt and confused.

She calmly pulls out a little mirror and shows him a tiny birthmark right behind her ear, hidden mostly by her curls. It is hard to see, but it looks like a tiny little snake. It is similar to Draco’s feather and Lia’s little fox. Harry can’t remember having seen it before, but then apart from the time in their seventh year in the forest of Dean, he has never spent much time alone with Hermione - and even then he didn’t have a physical interest in her and simply enjoyed not being alone and talking with her.

“Did you find out who that mark belongs to?”

Hermione swallows. “I am almost an entire year older than you are, remember?”

“Yes, but what does that have to do with that birthmark?”

“There was a boy in our year, who had the same mark. I had almost forgotten, but I worked with him in arithmancy and we had to partner for a project. Working in the library he might not have known that it was there or the glamour had worn off late at night, I saw it quite frequently, but I didn’t think anything by it.” Hermione looks pained “I thought it was a similar thing, but I looked at my memories at home, it was the exact same thing.”

Harry begins to feel sick. “How much younger than you was he?”

“ Eleven months.” She turns to him and an angry tear makes it way into her eyes, but she wipes it away impatiently.

“So, since Draco said that the birthmarks are not openly shown, and the book only referenced to the rough shape they would take in each family, I knew that I had only a small chance of finding another pureblood to check.”

Harry takes her hand, “Hermione, who was the boy with the same mark?”

She turns her head away. “Let me finish!” and Harry knows he has to wait for her to get there on her own. “So, I went to the Ministry and asked to see the births from my year and that one year later. I said I wanted to research the impact of the war on the birth rates. I checked on the boy’s family and they did have a stillborn girl noted down exactly eleven months before he was born.”

Harry can’t believe what he is hearing.

“And what about you?”

Hermione laughs, a brittle sound that makes him shudder.

“I wasn’t in there, I am not noted down in the registry for magical births, there is no sign of a magical
baby girl being born on my birthday. So I asked how they note it down, if the parents have to come and tell the Ministry about it - you know like with the registration of newborns in England?"

Harry nods.

“They said it is old magic, as soon as a magical child is born the book updates itself, only stillborns are corrected later.”

Harry files that information away, he will ask Draco later who made the correction in Estelle’s case and if something unusual happened. Hermione continues talking.

“Then I asked if that was different for muggleborns? Maybe my mother was a muggle and I was born as the first one with magic in that family.”

“And?”

“No, even muggleborns show up. In the old ages, that was the only way to protect magical children; they were registered and taken from their unmagical families to make sure they wouldn’t be persecuted later on for being magical.”

“Hermione, who are you?”

“The only logical explanation that I have is that I am really Theodora Nott, officially stillborn.”

“Theo Nott is your brother?” Harry almost falls off the chair, but then the pieces begin to slot together. Theo the small Slytherin, with the pinched face and the beady eyes - one of Draco’s followers back in Hogwarts.

“Do you think they knew about this?”

“I have no idea, Harry:” Harry hates to see his friend so confused, but she is another puzzle that they now need to solve.

“I just need to know one thing, Harry. I am pretty sure I know the answer.”

“Anything, Mione.”

“Did you pay for Mila?”

“What? Of course not! I had to pay for the process, but Hermione, my god, you know that I would never buy a child!” He spits it out as if the words leave a bad taste in his mouth.

Hermione looks at him.

“I know, I just needed to hear it. You wouldn’t hurt anybody knowingly, and to think that you knew that Mila might be stolen, I just, I was so shocked. Why would anybody do that?”

Harry is still reeling from the information that he just received. Mila, his darling daughter really was stolen?

“Herm, you checked her year too, didn’t you? What did you find? And what about Lia?”

Hermione looks at him, “You won’t like this.”

“Tell me!”
“There has only been one birth in the month of August, and that was Estelle Malfoy. And for Lia’s year, there was a still born in the Parkinson family.”

Harry feels the colour drain from his face. “And there is no doubt about it? Could someone have manipulated the books? Herm, please, can you check that for me? I can’t tell Draco that his supposedly dead daughter has been stolen and given to me for adoption, if I am not one thousand percent sure that this is the truth.”

She looks at him as if he is a stranger. “You don’t want to tell him?”

In Harry, his wish to alleviate the pain that he sees in Draco’s eyes every time that he talks about his dead baby girl, wars with his fear that he might lose his precious darling daughter. If Draco gets it into his head that maybe he knew about this from that beginning, and out of some misguided sense of retribution, takes her away from him...

The love they share is strong, but only beginning. Would it be strong enough to weather this storm?

“Soon, Herm, I promise, soon. But I need to know more.”

It is a testament to their friendship that she just nods. She doesn't push and simply says, “I will continue to research this then, but don’t get your hopes up. I doubt there will be a good explanation. All we can do is to try to find out what is really going on and put the bastard to justice.”

She gets up, looking older than her 25 years, and Harry knows that whoever is responsible for this mess will rue the day that he raised this issue.

Harry knows that Hermione will make good on her word and research the official files in the ministry. For once, Harry is glad that all stillbirths have to be registered. This way they have a chance to find out if Mila was a terrible misunderstanding or if there is more to this. Part of Harry desperately wants to believe that there was just a mix up in the files, but the larger part of him knows that something is foul in the entire scheme of things.

Seeing as he has no way of helping Hermione at the ministry, Harry decides to pay Peterson a visit to ask for the files on Mila’s birth. There has been no reply to his letter, and Harry has a very strange feeling about this. Maybe he can find out if there is a connection to Draco’s family that he has overlooked. After all, Charles Potter has a connection to the family as well, but then again, Harry has no strange birthmark that declares him of Malfoy blood. He curses himself for not asking Draco about this.

Deep in his thoughts, he enters the familiar building, even though no one is there to announce his presence. Walking through the hall, he wonders if Peterson is away on an appointment, but wouldn't he close the office then? He calls out but only silence answers.

The door to Peterson’s office is ajar and Harry enters after knocking, maybe Peterson is taking a nap? He just wants to ask quickly if he can take a look into Mila’s file and then he will be out of
Peterson’s hair once again. What he finds though makes him reel back in horror.

Peterson is seated at his desk, staring at him with wide eyes, face frozen in an expression of horror. Harry doesn't need to touch him to know that the man is very much dead. He knows that expression too well and a familiar ache rises from his stomach. No, he will not throw up. A glance around the office shows him that somebody searched for something; files are dropped all over the floor and Harry realizes that he is in far deeper than he suspected. Somebody doesn't want him to read the old files and, from the look of it, Peterson knew far more about this than he thought previously.

Harry sends his Patronus to Hermione - she will know what to do. Only seconds pass, or at least it feels like only seconds, before the familiar pop of Apparition tears Harry from his shock. Hermione surveys the scene and turns towards him.

“Have you touched anything?”

“No – I saw him, saw the mess and called you.”

“Have you told anybody about going to see Peterson?” Hermione is thinking hard.

“No, I only made the decision this morning.”

Hermione frowns hard and looks straight at him.

“If you told nobody about this, then we need to find out who knows about Peterson and where the babies come from that he distributes. There is a connection between Peterson and the Elderidges? You did say that Astoria wrote something about it.”

Harry feels numb, talking to Astoria again will be painful, but he nods and decides to go back right away. Draco is home and he might find a chance to talk to Astoria.

Hermione gives him a hug and heads back towards the ministry, mumbling about needing to dig a little deeper into the archives. She instructs him to leave the situation as it is and go to his office, alerting anyone to him of Peterson's death would not help the situation. And even though it speaks against everything that Harry stood for in his teenage years, he listens because it is no longer just about him.

Harry tries to keep his mind for a while longer on the tasks that make up his other life, tries to concentrate on the kids and what he needs to do for the orphanage. But it is futile. His thoughts go back again and again, so he gives in and goes home much earlier than he usually would on a workday.

Stepping into his own home feels a bit strange, as he has spent so much time at Draco’s with Mila and Scorpius lately. When he goes up into his study, his thoughts swirl around the little girls that he has seen come and go. He is so glad that there have been no more stillbirths uncovered by Hermione so far, that he needs to figure out.

Draco has taken the diary back with him, but Harry made a copy. Talking to Astoria has made him even more determined to figure out how all of this is connected. He knows it is not entirely fair, keeping it from Draco, but he wants to read up on the circumstances once more without having to answer unwanted questions. And the topic has Draco so riled up, that he would continue to dig deeper and deeper, and if Harry hasn't found a good explanation for what is going on, then he might be left alone, and he won't stand for it. He wants to keep his entire family and if he needs to circumvent telling the truth for a little longer then he will do so. With a sigh, he opens the diary once more, flipping through the pages until he comes to a date at which Astoria must have been early in
her pregnancy. What he reads makes Harry's blood run cold.

_I will admit that I used to have no great sympathy for Pansy Parkinson, seeing as she has bound herself to a lesser son of a lower French family just to ensure that her name will continue. Her moaning about her loss of lifestyle to Draco has also been quite tiresome, so that I am glad to see her leave. She used to be such a demanding person, but her loss has turned her into a shell of the woman Draco remembers fondly from School._

_I wonder if she turned into such a harpy because Draco refused to marry her, even though she had always been told that she would be used to secure the name, after her brother passed away so early. Violet Parkinson is nothing but ruthless, but still has nothing on my father-in-law, I am not sad to say that I will fight for my child to make its own choices._

_I can't believe the procedure already took and that in a few months time I will be a mother. Draco is over the moon, but also a little scared after what happened to Pansy. It is such a tragedy that she lost her little girl, maybe it would have brought her closer to her husband. I am so glad that Draco is such a wonderful friend to me as well. I could have had a lot worse._

Harry drops the book and swallows, reading about it makes it even worse. He remembers Pansy as a loud and determined girl, always in Draco’s shadow, trying to get her own. He hasn't heard anything about her in years, but thinking about Lia, the little girl who might be her daughter, he can see her mother's genes coming through.

Lia is petite and has straight black hair, and even though her nose is not a Parkinson’s, her eyes and determination have reminded him eerily of his former schoolmate in the past. He decides to have Hermione check Pansy's familial situation, and to contact her as soon as this is clarified. He flips through the pages and stumbles across another entry, that tears a chuckle from his throat even though the situation in anything but funny.

_Guh! I really hate those stuffy afternoon teas! Thank god that Draco is on my side that we will move to France for a while as soon as our baby is here. If I have to sit through another meeting of those old hags, cackling about childbirth and how it surely must be a baby boy, because otherwise a horrible fate will await me. Especially Mrs Nott, she is so horrible! Telling me that Merlin will prevent any female baby from being born first. I have never heard such rubbish before!_  

_Narcissa is always so worried about me. it is hard enough to bear her constant nattering, but the others, urg, I can't stand their old witches’ talk! And that they all are so adamant about taking one specific midwife, just my suggestion to go to St Mungo's has been shut down immediately. I don't want to have my baby here! I don't know why, but giving birth here scares me. I need to talk to Draco about this, maybe he can talk sense into his parents._

Harry drops the book. Astoria was worried about the birth, as if she knew that a girl would be a problem. And the older generation was involved as well. Knowing what Hermione had told him about her own family makes him wonder why no one ever tried to solve the mystery of the dying firstborns. But considering Peterson ended up dead just when Hermione started looking at the birth registers, Harry can't help but wonder just who has them in their sights.

He keeps trying to figure out who has access to the registers but no one comes to mind. Of course, Ms Elderidge knows about it, but she doesn't strike Harry as someone to plan murder to keep a secret.

Just when Harry is about to give up for the day, his floo activates with a ‘woosh’ and Hermione tumbles out. Her hair is even more frizzy and the wild look in her eyes tells Harry that something
must have upset her deeply. She clutches a piece of parchment tightly.

“What happened, Herm?”

“They were at our home! Harry, this has gone too far!”

“I’ll make us tea and then we can talk about this. I need you to keep calm and tell me exactly what happened.”

Hermione paces the kitchen - Harry is half surprised that she is not wearing a trace into the floor.

“I tried to call a colleague in registration, and she told me that someone had blocked all requests unless they came from outside. Something about archiving processes that would be ongoing for a while longer - didn’t say how long it was going to be. She didn't say who, but there is only one person who can make such a decision for the department.”

Harry doesn't need a name to know just who has blocked the internal requests. At times like this, he really questions his decision not to go into the Aurors. Then he wouldn't have such troubles getting the information he needs.

“I got home and I saw that someone had tried to get through the wards.”

“But they didn’t succeed?” Harry is sure that whoever tried to mess with Hermione and Ron’s house was in for a nasty surprise. Hermione had warded the house herself and that was that.

“No, they didn’t. But they left this letter in front of the wards. I found it when I checked the damage.”

“May I?” Harry takes the parchment, sure that Hermione has already cast the necessary spells for detection. The letter is short and to the point.

Mrs Weasley,

*Stop looking into things that don't concern you. Otherwise your family will suffer the consequences. I won't hesitate to give you the same treatment Peterson got. In the end, all that knowledge didn't help him.*

*Stop your requests if you know what is good for you!*

The truly terrifying thing is not the letter itself, but it is written in a dark liquid stinking like copper when he smells it.

“Did they write that in blood?” Harry is torn between incredulousness and worry.

“Yes, but it is not human blood, I tested.”

But no matter how ridiculous the threats are, the fact remains that someone is determined to keep them from researching. Harry wonders how far they might take their attempts. Under no circumstances does he want to risk his family and friends. If they continue to run up against walls, he
will go to Draco with his findings and maybe they can figure out a way together.

“Harry, I really want you to meet my parents.” Draco will not relent on this issue and Harry is in deep trouble.

On the one hand, he understands why Draco is so adamant about reintroducing him as his partner and lover. On the other, he is simply terrified. Lucius Malfoy has tried to kill him - swiftly and painless on a good day; the bad ones involved torture and taunting. Not that the old man ever succeeded, and Harry has heard more than once that prison and house arrest have mellowed Lucius Malfoy to a bearable level, but then again Harry remembers the underhanded way that he forced Draco into the marriage with Astoria. Yes, Scorpius is the result of that, but still, does he have to like the idea of meeting the man who has made Draco’s life hell for most of it?

Harry is so caught up in his thoughts that he doesn't notice the fact that Draco has locked the bedroom door and has started to strip until there is a naked body pressed to his backside and he groans.

“You play dirty, Malfoy!”

“Oh, you have no idea how dirty I can play!” And with these words, Harry finds himself on his bed, spread eagled and bound to the bedposts. Somehow, Draco has divested him of all his clothes and is straddling his hips, legs left and right, looking down on him with a smirk that promises Harry all kinds of naughty things. Draco puts his thumb and forefinger in a ring around the base of Harry's cock which already stands straight up and ready for action. Slowly, he begins to move his hand up and down, up and down, he uses the oil that drives Harry wild since it smells of musk and sandalwood and somehow has become his primal association to Draco. It smells like making love to Draco and thus the pure smell alone is enough to push Harry far.

Draco balances himself so that Harry cannot reach him, can't even kiss him and he is not ashamed to beg for it. “Please, Draco, I want to kiss you!” And even though Harry half expects him to deny him that simple pleasure, it seems that the power play has not begun just yet, since Draco comes willingly, slanting his mouth over Harrys and plundering him with his tongue. Harry thinks that one day he will come from kissing Draco alone. It ignites a fire in his belly that he can't control, it is too hot to know that this wonderful man who is so beautiful and could have anybody, has chosen him, wants his body and currently owns him so completely.

Draco explores Harry's mouth as if every kiss is the first one. He drinks him like a thirsting man would drink water, at least that is how Harry would describe it. All the while Draco continues to stroke Harry's cock and the pressure that he is building, still feels great. A groan escapes Harry and is silenced immediately by Draco's mouth.

Harry pulls on his bindings, knowing full well that they will hold unless he either gives in, or says
the safeword that they agreed on when they first played like this. But he doesn't think he will need it. He already knows that he will go with Draco, but who says he can't enjoy Draco’s persuasion tactics a while longer?

Watching his gorgeous lover will never get old for Harry and he plans on keeping Draco forever, if he can have it his way.

He feels the warm breath ghost over his skin just behind his ear where he is sensitive, and he doesn’t really know what to focus on in that moment. The hot hand that is still massaging his cock or the sinful mouth that tortures him so sweetly with kisses and nips and licks down his neck and onto his shoulder. Draco is drawing patterns of hot saliva onto his skin, blowing on them and creating a contrast that drives Harry wild. He loves being so defenceless, vulnerable to Draco, because he knows Draco will never truly exploit the situation. He will use it to get his way, but then so does Harry sometimes.

By now, Draco has reached his nipples, and the hand leaves his cock for a short while. Harry opens his eyes again, which have drifted shut under Dracos ministrations, and his breath catches at the sight that greets him. Draco has straddled him once again, his arse is nestled firmly against Harry's crotch, and he feels his rock hard dick pressing into Draco's crack.

Draco is lubed and so Harry glides quite easily between the firm globes of his lover’s arse. Draco raises himself a little so that Harry can see his own cock disappear while Dracos dick hangs fully erects between his legs, straining up towards his belly. Precum already beading at the slit. Harry would love to taste Draco right now, but asking for that would mean giving up the feeling of Draco's arse cradling his cock. Both of Draco's hands are now massaging Harrys upper body, playing with his nipples until they are both stiff, little nubs aching to be licked and sucked.

“Please!” That is all that he gets out before Draco winks at him and bends down. He continues to roll one nipple between his fingers and lavs the other with his tongue. Only when Harry is reduced to a quivering mass of need does Draco relent and allow Harry to breach him. Being nearly delirious with desire, Harry is not capable of words any longer. He can’t thrust into Draco as he wants, and simply allows Draco to ride him, taking pleasure in Harry's body.

There is something wonderfully dirty in being used like this, and Harry is content to simply feel. When his orgasm hits it is with such an intensity that his back arches and Draco falters a little in his rhythm. But only for the fraction of a second, before he continues to ride Harry in earnest and soon reaches his own peak. He breaks down, not caring in the least about getting his own spunk onto his chest, and when Harry tugs weakly at the bonds holding him, it is with a lazy wave of his wand that he releases him. When Harry cradles his lover he is mentally counting the seconds until Draco will make his demands known once again and he is not disappointed.

“So are we going to visit my parents? Or do you need more incentive to see things my way?”

Giving in is not hard, not when he has such a wonderful man in his life. For a second, Harry can push the troubles aside that he has with their familial constellation.

“Yes, we are visiting your family. I just hope your father is over the wanting to kill me thing.”

“Very funny, Potter!” But there is no bite behind the words, and Draco continues snuggling into Harry's side. Drifting off to sleep, Harry thinks that having Draco and Scorpius in his life is worth more than giving in once in a while.

The day of the visit finds him waking content and well rested. Mila is already awake in her room, playing with the toys Draco has given her. They don't need to hurry since they will visit the Manor
later in the day. Draco is still half asleep and Harry simply enjoys the quiet.

Soon enough, they will get up, have breakfast and then get ready to visit Draco's parents. And even if Harry doesn't want to admit it, he is a little scared. But only a little, and he won't allow that tiny bubble of panic to explode. He faced Voldemort, he can survive lunch with Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy. Maybe, just maybe, he will take a bezoar with him just to be prepared, and he doesn't need to tell Draco about it either - no need to upset his lover; just better to be safe than sorry, right?

Mila is all sunshine with them. She holds both of their hands, skipping between them, while Scorpius holds on tightly to Harry and refuses to let go of his perch upon his hip. When they land on the apparition spot and Scorp instantly demands, “Up Harry.” Draco half complains in jest that his son is playing favorites, but Mila intervened immediately by hugging his legs and declaring, with the earnestness that only small kids have, that she isn't doing that and that she, “Like Draco soooo much”.

Harry laughs, settling Scorp and taking her hand. Draco can't help it, resisting her pleading eyes is futile anyway and so they spend the walk up the drive, letting her fly and laughing.

The doors to the house are opened by a friendly house elf dressed in a clean toga, who declares that he is very happy to show them to the dining room where, “Mr and Mrs Malfoy be already waiting for their grandson and the other little girl!”

They exchange a look and Harry squares his shoulders, so this is it, he is meeting his future-in-laws - well, if Draco and he ever take that step.

Harry’s first thought is that he never expected the Manor dining room to be so bright.

“Did your parents redecorate this?” He half turns to Draco with the question, but receives his answer from Lucius Malfoy in person.

“Welcome, Mr Potter. If you don't mind me answering this, yes we did refurbish the Manor after my sentence. We found that it held too many unpleasant memories and too many things that were unbecoming for a small child. So we changed many things.”

Scorpius begins to squirm on Harry’s hip, and he gently sets him down. Lucius surprises Harry by crouching down so that he is at eye level with the little boy.

“Hello, Scorpius! You have grown quite a bit, since I last saw you.”

Scorpius is a little torn between shyness and wanting to hug his grandfather, but Lucius opens his arms and asks, “Don't I get a hug from my favorite little boy?”

Scorpius laughs. “You are silly, grandpa. There are no other little boys here!” but he toddles over and lets Lucius hug him.

“Okay, you need to pinch me, Draco. I am dreaming.” Harry just stares at the scene, which is totally alien for him. Draco just smiles and gently buffs his elbow into his side.

“And who might this pretty young lady be with you gentlemen?” Narcissa’s gentle voice tears Harry from his musings and he hurries to greet the woman.

“Excuse me, Mrs Malfoy. If I may introduce you, this is my daughter, Mila. We are glad that we could both come.”

She smiles a sad little smile and stretches her hand out towards Mila, who looks at the strange lady
with distrust for a moment or two before inching towards her. When she has reached Narcissa, she looks at her and finally declares, “You are pretty! I like your hair.”

Harry feels his ears turning red and he wonders how he can excuse his daughter before Narcissa reacts in a cutting manner, but once again he is in for a surprise.

“Why, thank you! You are very pretty too. Has your daddy done your hair?”

“No, Draco does my hair. Daddy doesn’t have the patience for that.” She stumbles over the word and Draco has to suppress a snicker, but Narcissa keeps a perfectly straight face.

“You like it?”

Mila laughs, she is drawn to Narcissa like a moth to flame and continues to chatter once she gets over the initial shyness. Harry wonders why Narcissa looks at Mila with such longing. Wasn’t it her husband who pushed for a male heir? She looks up at him and gently smiles.

“Mr Potter, I know you adore her. It shines from every pore. I am glad that my Draco has found someone who has made his family complete.”

Harry cocks his head and can’t restrain himself.

“You do know that I have two other kids that are at Hogwarts right now. They don't have my name, but I love them just as much.”

He doesn’t really know what he expects from her, but she takes his hand looking at him. “You must think that I would think little of you, having children that can't carry your name. But I would have cherished any child that we have in our home. It broke my heart to see Astoria so broken. I know we come across as restrained, but our culture is more inward. Only with my husband and close family can I talk about my grief.”

Harry sees Lucius talking with both Scorpius and Mila, Draco standing close by watching like a hawk that the kids don't get too close to the small pond situated in the middle of the garden.

“I know Draco thought Lucius pushed for a boy because he wanted an heir, but that is only half of the truth.” There are tears in her eyes and Harry is sure whatever she tells him will break his heart a little. “Draco was not our first baby. I was pregnant once before, and lost my little girl. I couldn't carry her to term and she was born in the sixth month. My little Violet died after only two hours. Lucius told me that there was a curse on the families, that all of the little girls passed away either directly at birth or by miscarriage.”

Harry feels like she has pulled the floor out from underneath him.

“I am so sorry to hear that! Why didn't you go to St Mungo’s?” He knows it is an insensitive question, but it is out before he can check himself.

Narcissa smiles at him, but it is a sad one. “Harry--I am allowed to call you Harry, yes?”

He nods captivated by her demeanor.

“Well, Harry, as you know we are very old fashioned, and I was convinced that I would be entirely okay with the family healer and the midwife whose mother had helped me into the world. When I began to lose blood it was way too late to get me to the hospital and all they could do was to keep me alive. I lost her and Lucius was devastated to see that the curse had struck again.”
Harry breathes in. "The midwife knew that it would be a girl?"

Narcissa shakes her head. "No, they tried to staunch the blood flow and tried to keep the baby inside my body for as long as possible, but it was no use. It was a very close call for me, and Lucius had to decide in the end that Violet had to be born so that I could be saved. He told me later that they had worked for two hours trying to keep her alive but she was just too small."

Harry takes her hand in his. "I am so sorry to hear that. I know it is no real consolation, but I love Draco and I am sure that he will bring Mila over as often as he can. I’d be grateful if she could have another honorary grandmother in you."

Narcissa pulls him into an unexpected hug. Harry isn't sure but he thinks that his shoulder gets a little wet.

Lucius watches them skeptically but refrains from commenting. The look on his face when Mila tugs on his trousers is priceless, but he picks her up after a minute. The smile flitting over the strict face transforms it for a split second and Harry sees the man that Draco will become with age. The nod that he sends in Harry's direction is the acknowledgment that he accepts his son’s new partner for now.

A couple of days pass, and Harry continues to grow more and more anxious. Ever since his visit to the Manor, he has been convinced that a baby girl would have been just as welcome as Scorpius is so his earlier vague idea that Lucius could have had his fingers in this sordid affair have gone out of the window as well. The man might have been a bastard, and he used questionable methods to get his way in regards to an heir, but somehow Harry knows that he would have found another way to ensure that Draco had another child. The sadness in his eyes was true. And the diary indicated that other families might have suffered a similar crime.

Hermione has indicated that she has found something and will bring the file by so that Harry can look through it and then finally talk to Draco about the situation. Harry is still nervous about the upcoming conversation, but he holds onto the belief that Draco will be more happy about having a daughter instead of being angry at Harry for having her in the first place.

When she comes by, Harry takes the file and rereads what they have assembled. He feels another shiver. He puts the file away, not really paying attention to the cover - later he will wonder if he didn't leave the file out with the Malfoy crest stamped upon it on purpose, just to get out of finding a way to tell Draco about this. But that will be much later.

Right now, he thanks Hermione for her work and sends her back to her own family. He brings Mila over to Molly and prepares the romantic dinner that he has planned. He figures that he might find a better way to start the conversation if he reminds Draco once more of his love for him, and the family they have created.
Waiting for Draco makes him nervous. He paces the room and passes the time by making minor adjustments to the table that he has set. He keeps running the conversation that he needs to have in his mind, again and again. Thankfully, his wait is not long and the familiar ‘whoosh’ of the floo releases some of the tension.

He kisses Draco with a passion that leaves him breathless and tears a laugh from him. “Wow – what did I do to deserve that?

“I just missed you.” He kisses Draco again, just to make sure that he is still here.

“Harry, I was here just a couple of days ago, and when we’re not here we’re at our place.” Draco is amused but when his thumb strokes over his cheek, he belies his own emotions.

“Dinner, then!” Harry drags him into the kitchen, dishes out the food and they enjoy the meal, and wine.

Harry still searches for the right way to approach the topic at hand, when Draco has other ideas.

“I would like some dessert now.” Harry loves the assertive side that he has discovered throughout the last weeks and months.

“Oh, really? What can I do about that then?”

Draco grins and drags Harry to him, pulling him into a kiss that makes his knees buckle. He is being owned, there is no other word for it. And even though in their last encounters Draco has bottomed, tonight Harry is ready to give himself entirely to this man.

Going upstairs into their bedroom makes Harry a little nervous still. He has allowed Draco to bind him before, but he hasn’t been passive for a long time. He knows Draco will be careful, he trusts him without a shadow of a doubt. So he sinks into the mattress and smiles in what he hopes is an enticing way.

“Are you trying to seduce me?”

“Is it working?”

Draco doesn't answer with words, but he undresses himself with a careless wave of his wand, presenting his body with a nonchalance that makes Harry’s breath catch. He still can't believe that this beautiful man is his.

Draco takes his time undressing Harry, kissing every inch of skin that he reveals. Whereas their lovemaking has always been passionate and fast paced, tonight something is different. Harry can't quite put his finger onto it, but the tenderness that Draco shows him makes something curl deep inside of him.

Draco looks at him for a second, before he smiles and licks a slow stripe up Harry’s straining cock, while circling his entrance with a finger. He has warmed the lube and Harry groans, pushing into the tender touch. Draco plays a little longer with him. When Harry all but begs, he pushes his finger in up to the first knuckle, and Harry clenches around the intrusion, but he relaxes under Dracos loving caress.

“Let me take care of you, Harry.” Draco's voice is as gentle as his ministrations. Soon, Harry receives more of his fingers and the scissoring motion opens him up to his lovers caress. Only the quickening of his breath shows Harry that Draco is as affected as he is, and he gives himself over. When Draco finds his prostate his back arches without conscious thought. The moans and gasps that
fall from his lips are uninhibited and he doesn't hold back. Draco concentrates fully on his lover’s pleasure and his breath hitches when green eyes lock with his own.

“Draco, god please! Get inside me, or are you planning on killing me like this?”

A breathless laugh escapes Draco and he moves back up to steal another kiss. His aching cock drags along Harry's crack, and he bumps against his opened entrance. He mutters another lubrication spell to make sure that he won't hurt Harry with his cock. Watching closely for any sign of discomfort, he pushes into the tight heat. Harry clenches a little and Draco can't keep from cursing, but Harry's body yields quickly and Draco pushes fully inside. He stills and waits for Harry to look at him. He falls into the green pools and lowers his mouth again.

“I love you so much. God, Harry, you have no idea.”

Harry gasps and kisses back with a passion that Draco feels so deeply inside of himself. The arms that wrap around his upper body nearly crush him and hinder his movements, but Draco doesn't complain when he hears the whispered words.

“You are everything to me. I can't be without you.”

Draco moves inside Harry, not faltering in his rhythm until they both reach completion. His orgasm builds slowly and crests over him like a tidal wave. He can barely keep himself from crushing the sated body beneath his. Pulling out and cleaning them both is a conscious effort. He almost slips into sleep, when Harry moves and whispers:

“Draco, we need to talk about something.”

He pulls Harry close and buries his nose in his neck. “Lets talk tomorrow, I’m tired.” Harry gives in and, as Draco drifts off, the last thing he hears is a softly whispered, “I love you, don't forget that ever.”

Draco sleeps well, he doesn't notice that Harry lies awake and breathes his scent in, only drifting off when the first hints of dawn arise. Later, Harry will tell him that this is the only reason why he didn't wake up when Draco gets up and slips into the kitchen. He had seen the folder with his name yesterday and has a feeling that Harry wants to talk about this, so he wants to check what his father has been up to again. He doesn't expect to find what he finds. And Harry finds him with his eyes glued to the words, he sees but doesn't really understand.

Harry doesn't need to ask what Draco is reading when he steps into the kitchen. Today the anger, pain and fury are really directed at him and he feels not even two feet small. As if someone has pulled the floor out from underneath him, he watches as Draco leafs through the file and reads every finding that Harry has noted down with Hermione's help. He doesn't yell or accuse Harry - and somehow that is worse than any loud quarrel that they could have. Draco reads his condemnation, reads of Harry's growing conviction that Mila must be not only of his blood, but that possibly even his daughter. Harry has no idea how long he stands there rooted to the floor, petrified, but it seems like hours might have passed. Of course, this is ridiculous and mere minutes must have gone by, but then a single question pierces the silence between them.

"Why?"

Harry feels like Draco has poured ice water over him. He could have dealt with anger, with fury, with being called scarface and idiot, with insults or any other outbreak, but that single question is too much and he answers in the exactly wrong way.
"Because I needed to be sure."

"Sure of what? That she is of my blood? That she is my daughter? That I didn't know about this? You needed to be sure that WHAT??" Draco is finally yelling at him, and even though Harry is aware that he is probably losing the man that he loves for good, he can't help but feel relief. If he can answer Draco’s questions there still is a tiny chance that maybe everything will turn out alright in the end.

"I needed to be sure that she really was the baby girl that you lost, and that I wouldn’t raise old ghosts for nothing."

"Did you ever plan on telling me about this? Or did you think that if she was not my daughter and just of my blood it wouldn't matter to me, that she had been stolen from someone? Do you have any idea what it would take to have a Malfoy part with his own child? We care about our children, they are precious to us and we love them." Draco's chest heaves and he is glorious in his anger.

Harry looks at him, not sure how to approach him and how to make this right again. He needs to tell Draco that he now knows that Mila is definitely his daughter because there was no other baby girl born at that time, and he needs to trust the man that he loves that he won't break his heart and take her away from him. He extends his hand towards Draco and pulls him close. It is a testament to their love that Draco does come willingly, even though he is still bristling with anger.

“I suspected that Mila might be related to you, once I saw the feather on your arse. So many things made sense then.” Harry takes a deep breath and goes on “Because she has your eyes, you know? I was thinking of you so often when she looked at me, that I really have no idea how I could not make that connection earlier.”

“That is because sometimes you are really dense.” But Draco buries his face into Harry’s shoulder. Harry feels that his shoulder is getting wet. “It nearly killed me when they said she was dead.” Harry's arms tighten instinctively around the man in his arms, and he vows that he will find out who did this.

"I know that you love her, I know you would never have given her away, and I know that I don't understand why I got to adopt her, so I needed to know where she came from. Peterson is dead; he can't give me anymore answers. Hermione has researched for me, because I hoped that there was simply a misunderstanding, but we soon realized that someone has been manipulating the birth registers for a while."

“Then why? I really don’t get it. Why you didn’t trust me?”

And that is the crux of the matter, right? Harry knows that this question is justified. And that his answer is not worthy of himself or their relationship, and that it might well break them.

Ron’s Patronus interrupts their discussion. The foxterrier runs through the open door and states with a clear voice. “Get to the Burrow, now! Mila has been abducted!”

Harry looks at Draco, who appears just as shocked and simultaneously they apparate to the Burrow. He knows that they will need to discuss this further, and that Draco has every right to be mad at him. But he also knows that he won't give them both up without a fight. They are his and he fights for his family - always has, always will.
They both land with a stumble and take off running towards the Burrow. Harry can't stop thinking that this is all his fault. He should have left well enough alone and told Draco privately about his suspicions. Then Hermione's hurt face flashes back into his mind and he knows that he would never be okay with ignoring the fact that someone out there is crazy enough to decide that some babies are not allowed to remain in their families. Even though there was a recognizable pattern, Harry is convinced that they need to stop this madness.

When they enter the Burrow, they are greeted by the sight of Victoire lying on the sofa, her eyes slightly unfocused and cheeks wet with tears. Harry rushes over and drops down next to her. “Honey, what happened?”

“The bad man took Mila!” Victoire says, nothing more, nothing less.

Molly is wringing her hands, pacing in the small room. “I should not have let them out of sight. I told them to stay close to the house!”

Draco steps in with a simple question, “Why could he even take her in the first place?”

“Victoire and Mila were playing in the field, just outside the wards. The man stunned Victoire and disapparated with Mila.”

“Is she alright?” Draco asks. A full blown stunner used on a small girl could have serious consequences, and Victoire does seem to be a bit dazed still, even though Molly enervate; immediately to find out what had happened and who had taken Mila.

Ron crouches down next to his oldest niece and asks her urgently. “Vicky, have you seen anything that can help us?”

She shakes her head and begins to cry. In between hiccups she gets out, “I couldn't do anything - he grabbed her and when I tried to hold on, he hexed me. I couldn't do anything! It is all my fault. Grandma always said that we should stay inside the wards, but I wanted to show Mila the flowers that grow in the field.”

Draco surprises Harry once again, softly touching Victoire’s cheek and telling her earnestly, “Don't worry darling, your screams were loud enough to alert your Gran, and I’m sure he would have been able to get through the wards. It is lucky that nothing happened to you. We will get Mila back. Now, sleep a little.”

Victoire’s eyes drift shut and she falls into a light sleep as Draco gets up from his kneeling position on the floor. He looks grim and Harry has a sinking feeling in his stomach.

“Draco what is it?” Harry knows he won't like the answer.
“I know only one way to find Mila and the man who has taken her and you won't like it.”

Ron looks at him and turns a little green. “Let me check first to see if I can get a magical trace from the disapparition.”

Draco nods and Harry has the distinct feeling that he is missing something.

“Mione, what is going on?”

His old friend doesn't look happy, as she starts her explanation.

“Well, so far all we know is that someone found out that you were looking for Mila’s genetic parents and that Peterson was involved in all of this. But we don't know who actually is behind the theft of the children. So, maybe that someone wants to make sure that you won't tell and is trying to set up a trap for you.”

“So you think the person who orchestrated Estelle’s death is also responsible for yours? That was twenty-five years ago!”

“Think about it, Harry, twenty-five years is nothing for a wizard! And I am convinced if we dig deeper we will find others that have been sold too. And don't forget about Lia.”

Ron comes back into the kitchen, pale and frustrated. “There is no magical trace that we can use. The bastard covered his tracks pretty well.”

Draco nods. “Thought so. Ron, I need a map of England and a silver chalice. I’ll pop over to the Manor to get that - no offence, but I don't think you have one lying around.”

Ron shakes his head and says wryly, “We haven’t needed one lately.”

Draco talks to him as if they are old friends and Harry can only watch, baffled. “Put the map down in Grimmauld Place. We will need to work there, where her aura is strongest. I’ll bring the chalice and the dagger.” He turns to Harry, “We will get her back, even though the method is slightly unconventional.” But before Harry can get a question out. Draco has apparated.

Ron tugs on his arm. “Come on mate, we don't have that much time.”

Harry allows Ron to apparate them, he is still numb and confused. Ron settles him into a chair and pours him a shot of firewhiskey.

“You'll need it. The ritual Draco needs to conduct is not for a weak stomach.”

“What is he going to do?”

Ron is moving through the living room, drawing a map of the British Isles onto the floor with sure strokes after checking that Harry doesn't have a map lying around.

“He will track her with the blood trace. In order to do that he needs to gather quite a bit of his own blood. He will cut himself with the ritual dagger that he is fetching from his parents, then he needs to catch the blood in the silver chalice, then the trace gets activated with the family spell and when he pours the blood onto the floor it will spell out the exact coordinates of Mila’s prison, and it will show us where she is on the map as well.”

Draco apparates into the living room with a bundle wrapped in blood red velvet. He hugs Harry shortly and nods to Ron. Taking his cloak off, he reveals his naked arms. He carefully puts down the
chalice in the middle of the map and steps over it, the dagger in his hand gleams and Harry knows that it is more than sharp - if Draco cuts too deep he could easily kill himself. Ron explained that the cut would be along the artery and not perpendicular as Harry half thought. He will bleed himself quickly and relies on Ron to heal the cut in time, the chalice needs to be full but not overflowing, timing is crucial. If Draco spills too much of his own blood finding out exactly where Mila is will be much harder, if it is not enough it won't work at all.

Harry looks at Draco who catches his eye. The minute nod is enough to reassure him, and then Draco cuts.

Harry can't look away; he sees the blood flow steadily, Ron waits for Draco's, “Now,” and heals the wound with a precision that makes Harry wonder for a second what he has missed by not joining the Aurors.

The Chalice is full to the brim. Ron hands Draco a blood replenishing potion and he swallows it without a grimace.

Draco pulls his wand and whispers words that Harry can't quite catch, the blood glows dark red and Draco lifts it up, pouring it straight onto the floor. It doesn't splatter like Harry expected it to. Instead, it flows like a snake and curls tightly somewhere near London. Once all of the blood is on the floor it glows again and letters appear on the floor.

Estelle Malfoy aka Mila Liliana Potter

Thetford Forest Park

52.44512909 longitude 0.67977905 latitude

Any lingering doubt Harry still had disappears at that, and he loses what little colour he had. Looking at Draco is simply not possible in that moment.

“Don't you dare break down now, Harry!” It is Draco's voice that pulls him back. Looking at the man that has given him his heart, he is captivated by the grey eyes. There is no judgement to be found, just determination and a fierce love for a little girl that he has gotten to know over the last few months. Draco stretches his hand out towards Harry, imploring him not to pull back. “We need to get her back, later we can figure out what to do.”

And these simple words are enough. Stretching his shoulders, he gets up, intertwining their fingers, feeling them tighten. It is time to get their daughter back.

“Let’s do this.”

Draco nods and apparates them to their destination.
The first thought that Harry has is that it shouldn't be so airy and light. He instinctively expected something dark and dank. But the house that stands right in front of them appears normal – too normal.

They exchange a look and Draco nods. ‘Glamours.’ He takes out his wand and begins to cast. With every layer of the wards being peeled back, the house looks more and more decrepit. Until it is nothing more than a ruin. Draco grips his wand harder and they both advance into the building. The first room looks abandoned and they continue on. Room after room they search. When Harry finds the door leading into the basement, Harry's pulse accelerates.

The last door pulses with magic and Harry disables the wards efficiently. The door opens with a soft click. Draco goes in first and Harry gasps when he sees his little girl huddled on the rickety bed. She is bound with a rope.

“Daddy!” She calls out. Moving towards her and releasing the ropes is one act for Harry. He wants to breathe out with relief when her eyes widen in fear and Draco turns, wand raised. Harry pushes her behind him and turns.

“Oh, Mister Potter, I knew I should have paid closer attention to someone with such bad habits.”

“You!” Harry spits the word out as if it is something that tastes badly.

He faces the woman that judged him so harshly before. She stands in the door with a nasty smile. The man next to her is unknown to Harry, but Draco stiffens next to him.

“Father said you were dead. How did you survive the Last Battle?”

The man is exceptionally ugly, with a bulging brow bone and a stumped leg.

“Who is that, Draco?” Harry turns towards his lover. But the man interrupts them once again.

“How terribly rude of me. My name is Antonov Selwyn.”

“The Selwyn family. Why does that not surprise me.” Harry remembers reading up on them in the Pureblood dictionary. “The only family that never had a female firstborn. But you had many women die due to miscarriages.”

“Well, you know one does what needs to be done!” He smiles at Harry showing crooked teeth.

“Why are you doing this? I mean they are pureblooded witches and won’t do harm to your precious culture?” Harry would like nothing more than to hex those two silly, but the wand trained firmly on his and Draco's chests make him decide to play for time - if he knows his friend at all, Ron is already
on his way with reinforcements.

“It would have been okay if some of the older fools had not decided to keep the precious child and refuse to have a backup heir who could take the name! Do you know how many pureblood families existed three-hundred years ago? More than a hundred!” Selwyn almost foams at the mouth. “And they died out one by one! So my ancestor Elwynius came up with this wonderful plan. Even back then the purebloods kept to themselves and we had a family in which the midwifery was given from mother to daughter. He bought the midwife and paid her handsomely for her deceit. So when a girl was born into a pureblood family that had been stupid enough to state that one child would be enough, we did something.”

“But what about the Parkinsons? Pansy is a girl and the firstborn!”

Elderidge steps in at that. “She is only alive because her father said that he would want other children should she be a girl. Unfortunately, she only got a sister later.”

Selwyn nods “But Parkinson made a deal with his son in law – that they would have to have at least two sons so that his name would go on anyway.”

“And Pansy had a girl first,” Draco whispers

“What happened to the children, before the adoption scheme?” Harry feels nauseous.

“Until my great-great-grandfather had the idea to plant someone in the ministry to forge the stillbirths they killed them off. But afterwards they involved the family's lawyer – Peterson. He used to be trustworthy and we made sure that sometime actually someone who was in trouble went to him so he wouldn't get suspicious. But then your friend had to start looking through the still births and adoptions a little too closely and I didn't want to risk him blabbering – so he had to go.”

Elderidge smiles again. “Thank god we have more and more muggleborns, so it is not such a surprise when a child from a non-magic family shows magic, and once they have the name, no one really cares anymore.”

“And if no one wants them, they end up in the orphanage, because they are dead to the world,” Harry concludes and his heart aches at the thought of little Lia.

“You are smart, too bad that we need to kill you in order to keep this running as smoothly as it did.”

Harry looks to Draco, who nods minutely as they both act simultaneously. Elderidge gets her protego up just in time, but Selwyn receives the full force of Harry's stunner, when he flies against the door. His neck gives an ugly, crunching sound and he slumps down. Harry is pretty sure his neck is broken, and he feels guilty for using too much force, but on the other hand, he is sure that Selwyn would not have hesitated to use the killing curse to get rid of him. He looks over and sees that Draco has everything under control. Mila jumps down from the bed and snuggles into Harry's arms.

Draco looks at him. “Thank god that they always like to hear themselves talk. Everything alright with you?”

Harry nods, “Yeah”, and that is all he says. He half wishes that Draco would kiss him and tell him that everything is alright between them too, but Draco doesn't look at him, just looks at Mila who clambers out of Harry's lap and goes over to Draco as well. She puts her arms out, silently asking to be picked up and when Draco picks her up he inhales her scent, burrowing his face in her neck.

“I wonder how long it will take until Weasely shows up.” He still holds on to Mila and doesn’t look in Harry's direction. Harry shivers but not from cold.
Right on cue, the door to the cellar flies open and Ron storms in, wand at the ready. He surveys the scene, checks Selwyn on the floor and simply asks, “What happened?”

“Got him with a stunner,” Harry says.

His companion asks, “What about her?”

Harry breathes in and says, “She is his accomplice. They have stolen at least two girls from pureblood families and placed them in adoptive families. My daughter being one of them. The other girl is currently at the orphanage for wizarding children.”

“What do you know whose child she really is?”

Harry laughs but it is not a happy sound. “Her biological father holds her right now.”

The auror addresses Draco and he nods, they move out of the cellar without much ado, and when Harry tries to follow him Ron blocks his path

Ron is pale and in his eyes he sees the pity that he so does not want. The hug his friend gives him is not comforting in the least, especially when Ron says, “You know I have to take her to the ministry. We need to sort this out and then you can be with Draco and the other kids. Even I can see that he loves you, don’t worry so much. I am sure they’ll find a way to get this all straightened out. You need to come with me too and make a statement.” And with a last look around Harry follows.

The forest really shouldn’t be so airy and bright, not when it has hidden so much ugliness.

Harry had thought the hardest thing he had ever done in his life was to walk into the forbidden forest to die, but now he knows that it wasn’t the dying that was hard. Continuing to live when you feel like your heart has been ripped out and trampled upon is infinitely harder.

He is released after making his statement about what happened and goes home to his other two kids. Tia and Marcus have come home from Hogwarts. Marcus is in that phase where physical affection is not his thing any longer, but taking one look at his father has him at his side, hugging him as if his life depends on it.

“What happened, Dad? Is Mila sick?”

Harry shakes his head. And then the entire story, well the parts that are suitable for young ears, pours out. About how he found the birthmark, and how he was sure that he had seen something similar beforehand, but was not sure, how he was afraid to lose Mila because it would kill him if he lost any one of them. And how he realized that Mila was of Malfoy blood but not sure if she was Draco’s daughter or someone else’s until he found out that Astoria had lost a little girl and everything.
He is sobbing and he knows that he should keep it together, but he just can't any longer. Marcus makes sure he lies down before calling his Grandma. Harry doesn't hear the conversation, but Molly arrives in a flurry of robes and makes dinner for the kids before coming up into his bedroom. She sits down on the bed and strokes his hair. It doesn't matter that he is twenty-eight at that moment, he curls up and cries into her.

"Poor Harry, you've really made a mess of things this time, haven't you? Give your young man a bit of time, I am sure it is just the shock at finding out Mila is biologically his. You two have been raising the kids basically together for the last weeks. And he is so very much in love with you."

Harry raises his face to her. "Do you think he can forgive me?"

Molly clucks her tongue. "I don't think that you need forgiveness. You thought someone in the Malfoy family had given their adorable little girl up, and you took her in and did what you do best - you loved her, you even encouraged contact with her blood family."

"But what if Draco doesn't want anything to do with me anymore? I lied to him, and now Mila is in the Ministry. And I have no idea what will happen. Peterson is dead and, if Selwyn told the truth, no one ever really wanted to give Mila up for adoption anyway. So I basically stole her from her family. He was so sad about that loss, he grieved for his little girl and all because I wanted a baby of my own."

"Hush now, Harry, the only one who stole that baby was Selwyn, him and his crazy ideas about keeping the bloodlines pure. Draco loves you and not only you but Marcus and Tia and Scorpius as well. As I said, give him time. For now you need to sleep." Molly covers him with a blanket and leaves the room.

The next morning finds Harry with bloodshot eyes and the entire household in a heavy mood. By now, Harry is not only anxious about Mila. No, now he is terrified that this entire thing might affect Tia and Marcus. They are almost grown up, but what if the ministry tries to take them away from him too?

"Dad, please, you need to eat something." Marcus is plying him with bacon and scrambled eggs. Harry eats them with little to no enthusiasm, because everything tastes like cardboard anyway. The owl that delivers the daily post carries a Ministry envelope. Hands shaking, Harry rips the missive open and reads the dreaded words.

_Dear Mr Potter,_

_Due to the circumstances surrounding the adoption of Mila Liliana Potter, we regret to inform you that the aforementioned adoption has been rendered void. Mila Liliana Malfoy has been returned to her rightful family. You are forbidden to contact the Malfoys regarding this matter. Any contact must be initiated by the aggrieved party. Please keep in mind that the Malfoys retain the right to bring the matter before the Wizengamot to ensure that your conduct in the affair has been honourable._

_Best Regards_

_Suzanna Wildman_
Harry doesn't quite know if he should be relieved, because nothing has been said about his other kids, or if he should be afraid, because of the implied legal charges he might face due to Mila's adoption.

He gathers his kids close, trying to keep in mind that this is Draco they are talking about, the man who loved his child enough to turn his back on the home he grew up in, the man he made love to, and he just hopes that Draco will come back as soon as he has settled into the idea of having two children, of whom one at least refers to Harry as ‘Daddy.’

Hermione and Ginny drop by in the afternoon. At first, Harry is relieved at having other familiar faces around and tries to confide in them about his insecurities, but then Hermione begins a conversation that leaves him and Ginny baffled.

"I think you should forget about Draco Malfoy and his children. I am sure he will not return to you anytime soon."

"Why would you say that Hermione? I love Draco and I love Scorpius. I am sure as soon as they have all settled into the idea then he will come back and we can get through this."

Hermione shakes her head. "I don't know, Harry, why do you think they haven’t gotten in touch with you already. I mean Draco has been gone for more than twenty-four hours now. Don't you think that he would have found a minute to pen a letter to you if he planned on coming back?"

Harry is not to be deterred. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I know you don't trust Draco, but you haven't been around all that much in the last year, so you don't know how our relationship works. We love each other, and if Draco hasn't found the time to write, he will have a good reason for it. I love you, Herm, but I think your judgement of Draco is still clouded from the boy you knew in Hogwarts."

Ginny jumps in at that. "Hermione, you have been so busy with your own family lately that I think you don't have the right to judge Harry. If he trusts Draco to come back, then I do too. They have been so happy that I believe Harry!"

Hermione looks at them, still with doubt in her eyes. "Do you think the elder Malfoys will be pleased that Scorpius has an elder sister now? I mean with the law the way it is right now, everything should go to her, and that means the name will be lost." She finishes her speech with a little sneer that is so atypical for her that Harry wonders if her blood heritage is shining through now that she knows who she has been born to.
Ginny replies to that question. "I don't think it is any of your business if the elder Malfoys feel comfortable with that! Draco is ecstatic to have a daughter, and if you have a problem with him, I would advise you to get over it, because Harry won't leave Draco just because you feel the need to protect him or something."

Harry looks between the two women who mean so much to him, and he feels like he is missing something. Living with teenagers has made him much more aware of undertones and he senses that something is wrong with his friend. "Hermione, is this really about Draco?" he asks.

His voice is kind and he sees Ginny freeze at the implications of his question. She looks at him wide eyed as if she only understands at this very moment that Hermione is affected by the whole affair too.

"Oh my god! Hermione! You, what, how?" No real sentence comes from her mouth as she rushes over to her shaking friend. Hermione is crying now, silently, tears falling and she allows Ginny to wrap her in a hug. Harry loves her so much at that moment, his kindhearted Ginny, his sister in every sense but blood.
"What happened, Herm, you can tell us everything. Who hurt you?" Ginny fires the questions off like a machine gun, keeping Hermione wrapped up in her arms at the same. Hermione continues to cry a bit longer but then straightens her shoulders and wipes the tears away as if angry that they even existed.

"I made the mistake of wanting to know if my biological family would be happy to know that I am not dead. So I researched the address and then traveled to see them. I mean I was so excited to have a brother." She takes a deep breath. "I don't care about the money or anything, I just always wanted a sibling and had hoped that I would find someone who could come to care for me.

"I was such a fool. They told me that they wished had I stayed dead and that they would never accept me, because I grew up with Muggles and that I still wasn't worth anything to them, because I am a woman and married into the Weasley family."

Ginny lets go and looks into her eyes. "Silly girl. You do know that you have five brothers and at least one sister, and I am sure Fleur won't be happy to hear that you don't count her as family? You of all people should know that family is not defined by blood. Haven't we made a family that is defined by love?"

Hermione shakes her head a bit, and laughs. "Yes, I know. I’ve just been foolish to think that a pureblood family like the Notts could accept me."

Now Harry jumps in. "Nott has always been an annoying little shit, but I had thought he mellowed a bit after the war."

Hermione gives him a watery smile. "It was Mrs Nott who made me feel like I intruded and wasn't welcome, my own biological mother! Theo writes to me once in a while."

Harry shakes his head. "Well, Mr Nott died in Azkaban, I can imagine that it is hard for her to adjust to the new world, and she wants to protect her son. I think you need to be glad that Theo is interested in getting to know you better. But that doesn't explain why you think I am better off without Draco?"

Hermione looks a bit sheepish at that. "I thought Mr and Mrs Malfoy would react similarly to Mila. You have been raising her like a muggle in most aspects, and although Scorpius is a well adjusted child I thought you told me Draco had moved out because of trouble at home?"

Harry looks at his friend. "Herm, you’re smart, but I think your husband has rubbed off on you a little too much! Draco moved out because Scorpius had nightmares in the Manor. He wanted to provide his son with a fresh environment. One where he could make friends his own age. Draco has grown up too sheltered, and I will tell you why."

Harry takes a deep breath. In all honesty it is none of Hermione’s business, but he thinks she needs to know that they love their granddaughter to pieces. "Narcissa and Lucius lost a little girl, a year before Draco was born. She was born at six months and didn’t make it. Narcissa has never really gotten over it. You should have seen her, she was crying when she told me about Violet. I think if you had been their daughter, they would have been overjoyed!"

Hermione has turned pale at his explanation. "Really?"

He looks at her closely. "Yes, really, Hermione. I know that look, what have you done?"

If possible she turns even paler. "Promise you won't hate me?"

Harry is eerily reminded of his son when he messes up, and he suppresses the urge to laugh. Hermione looks so guilty that he already knows why he hasn't received a note from Draco.
“Shall I take a guess? Because you thought I was better off without Draco, you prevented any contact? Because surely he can't possibly mean any good things when he has been dating me for months now and practically lives with me?”

Ginny gasps, but Harry indicates for her to be quiet. You can't go on a horcrux hunt with someone without really getting to know them, and so he knows Hermiones weaknesses as well. She is interfering and thinks herself smarter than Harry or Ron, and most of the time she is right. But sometimes even she makes bad choices and it is up to Ron and Harry to remind her that a family can stand up for one another without trying to rule over them. She has been due a slip up after five years of normal friendship. Ginny will understand if he explains it later.

Hermione has tears in her eyes now, and holds out a piece of paper. It isn't opened and a bit rumpled, as if she has turned it over again and again. "This was on the table when you came back. But you were so depressed, that Tia thought you didn't need a confirmation that Draco was going to take Mila away. So she sent the letter to me and I kept it. I think you should read it now. Maybe it has better news than I thought."

Harry holds his breath. His wonderful overprotective daughter, combined with an interfering, though well meaning friend - he really has his work cut out for him. His hands tremble a bit when he tears the envelope open. Reading the short missive makes his heart swell with love once again.

;Dear Harry,

The last hours have been turbulent and since Mila is truly my daughter I will have to take her to meet her Grandparents, so I am sure I will have to stay a day or two there until Mum is convinced she won't disappear again, but then I will come back and we will talk about your problem trusting me! We are a family, you stubborn Gryffindor, and you belong with me and our kids.

In case you haven't noticed: I love you! Even if you do drive me crazy sometimes!

Yours,

Draco

His relieved laugh startles Hermione and he shows her the letter. "Are you satisfied now, that Draco won't up and leave? He loves us, all of us. And he will come back!"

She smiles at him, but he sees that it is tinged with sadness and, because he is who he is, hugs her. "Herm, your biological family might not want you, but we all love you! Haven't we proved it again and again?"
Celebrating

“Daddy!” No sound has ever been sweeter to his ears than that of his daughter shouting for him. She runs up to him and throwing herself into his arms. He catches her twirling her around holding on so tight he never wants to let go.

“Mila, darling. I am so glad you are here! How are you? Did you sleep alright? Has Draco been nice to you?” She laughs her wonderful little girl laugh and her grey eyes twinkle with mischief.

“Silly daddy, papa is always nice to me!” She squirms a bit in order to get down and rushes back to the man standing close to the door, hovering a bit as if not sure that he is still welcome in Harry’s home. So he does the only thing possible. With two steps, he closes the distance between them and kisses Draco with all his pent up passion and frustration of the last two days.

“Don't ever do this to me again!” He snaps.

“Do what, Potter?” Draco's drawl indicates arousal but also challenge. “Don't mess up? Don't try to get the mess you made cleared up? Don't write you a love letter making clear that you won't get rid of me? Don't do what, Harry?” His voice trails off, as if he doesn't really know what Harry wants him to say.

“Don't leave me, Draco. Don't leave us. I don't think I can function without you, I don't want to function without you.”

Mila laughs, and Harry smiles down at her. She stands between them and looks so much like a perfect blend of them that Harry feels a slight pang. She will always be his daughter, whether her last name is Potter or Malfoy, it doesn’t matter, he just hopes Draco meant what he said in his letter.

“Harry.” Draco sounds so sincere that his knees buckle, “I will never leave you, for as long as you want me. We have chosen each other and we are a family. I needed to get some things cleared up though and that took some time. Since I don't want to tell you everything in detail, I would like to show it to you tonight in a pensive. Mila and Scorp will sleep at Molly's with Hugo and Rose.”

Harry wants to protest that they just got back and that he wants Mila with them, but Draco doesn't allow for any protest. So after an extensive round of cuddling, they pack her clothes and take her over to Molly and have dinner there. Mila is happy to play with Hugo, Scorp and Rose, so they say good-bye and take the floo back to Grimmauld place.

Harry takes out the Pensive he received from Dumbledore, and Draco pours in a long strand of silver memory. Together they enter the memory and Harry finds himself standing in front of Lucius Malfoy. To see the stern man play with Mila again makes his heart melt, and he feels guilty again for having deprived them of Mila as a baby.

“Don't wallow in guilt, you didn't know! And I didn't want to show you that they missed something, I wanted to show you that Mila has been well received as their biological granddaughter as much as she was loved when she was ‘only’ yours, and she is loved by all of her grandparents. Mum is over the moon to have another little girl to spoil and hopes you will send Tia over again soon; my parents miss her.”

Harry is flabbergasted, but before he can say something, Draco and his father leave the study and wander through the Manor.

Draco looks at his father and asks, “How many rooms does the Manor have? And how many do we
actually use?”

Lucius ponders the question for a while. “Well, in use are basically the library and the solar room, then our bedrooms and your room. Of course, we have a couple guest suites always prepared but currently we use less than a tenth of all the rooms. The Manor was been built to accommodate a family much larger than ours. Why do you ask?”

Draco stands in the entrance hall, looking out into the huge gardens and says, “Because I think it is a shame that twenty orphans don’t have a real home, when I am sitting in a house that could provide shelter and love for all of them. We could easily accommodate all of the kids and even a couple of teachers, but they are stuck in London, sleeping in bunk beds and not really knowing the love of a family.”

Lucius smiles. Harry is a bit taken aback, because although he knows the man has mellowed considerably over the years it still isn't an expression he has seen often. The next words take him even more by surprise.

“Harry would know how to fill this old manor with love. Why don't you ask me what you really want to ask son?”

Draco inclines his head. “Father, I would like your permission to marry Harry Potter and to move the wizarding orphanage into the Malfoy Manor, so that we can all live here with the children and provide them with love and care.”

Harry holds his breath, surely Lucius isn't going to be happy with that?

“Draco, he makes you happy. And I have made so many mistakes in my life that I am simply grateful to have the chance to see you happy. Mila is a wonderful little girl and what I have seen from Tia and Marcus makes it even more obvious that Harry is not only a powerful wizard, but a loving father as well. Why are you even asking my permission? By law, the Manor is yours already, you can do with it what you want. Your mother and I can move into the gardeners cottage, then we can help out with wizarding customs and spellwork, while Harry teaches muggle technology. I am guessing you will take over the books and make sure everything is in order, that the funds don't run out. So go ahead, son, take what life offers you. Be happy.”

The memory ends and Harry turn towards Draco. “Did I just dream that? Or did someone polyjuice into your father?”

Draco laughs. “Oh, Harry, can you believe that my parents truly just want to see me happy? I have done my duty by producing an heir for the Malfoy name, and even though I miss Tory every day, the only person I ever truly loved is standing right in front of me. So will you? Marry me that is? And raise a whole bunch of kids together, show them what truly makes a family?”

Harry has only one word for him. But that is enough.

“Yes”
Epilogue

The last holidays were great. Harry had Tia, Marcus, Mila and his family the Weasleys.

But this holiday will be perfect. Laughter and shrieks greet Harry when he stumbles at the step into the living room, the stack of presents threatening to tumble down because he can barely balance them.

He peers over the top of the precarious stack and smiles at the sight. Mila is covered in tinsel and laughs delightedly at her big brother, who tries to unwrap her under Scorpius’ defiant gaze. The little one clings tightly to Marcus and jealously demands all of his attention. Tia is entirely a young lady through and through and smiles indulgently at her siblings’ antics while consulting Draco on where to place the fairy lights.

Harry's breath catches at the sight of Draco in his new Weasley sweater, identical to the one that Marcus, Tia, Scorpius and Mila are wearing. But what makes him the most beautiful creature on earth, is the love that shines from his eyes for their entire family. He puts the stack down under the tree and looks at the many presents for the rest of their family.

Harry is nervous at the thought of the Weasleys and the Malfoys meeting each other, but Draco wraps his arms around his waist. “I can hear you think, darling!”

“Do you think it will turn out alright?”

Draco chuckles. “Well, it will certainly be interesting, but then I think they’ll all be on their best behaviour. My parents don't want to upset Scorpius or Mila, and the Weasleys will do nothing to upset you and your kids. Kreacher has cooked up a storm and Molly Weasley will probably bring pudding enough for an army. That and my father can always be plied with a good brandy, which I happen to have bought plenty of.”

“My Slytherin, what would I do without you?” Harry is only half joking and Draco pays attention to it, the sweet kiss that he bestows on him giving more than an answer.

“And it is really ok that I invited Pansy with Lia?” Draco asks once again.

“If she is okay with a bunch of Gryffindors being here, then I have no problem with that. Lia is a sweet girl and I think if she takes after her mother, she should do fine. We have all grown up.”

Harry reflects on the scene when they reunited Lia with her mother. Pansy had divorced the man she had been forced to marry to keep the name going after he tried to force her to have another baby directly after Lia's supposed stillbirth. The woman who stood before him had nothing of the pug faced, stubborn girl he remembered.

Looking at Lia standing there, she fell to her knees and began to cry. Lia had been so confused as she went up to the woman to comfort her, but when Pansy had pulled her into her arms and started rocking her whispering, “My little darling, my baby”, well, Harry had been won over entirely. Right now, Pansy lives at Malfoy Manor, which they are reconstructing already to house the orphanage - and of course she is welcome into their strange little family.

“Daddy! Papa! Come look, Scorpius is soo cute with the tinsel!” Mila calls them and Harry feels that he finally has everything he ever wanted.
End Notes

You may leave a comment here or return to Livejournal

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!