

Home Is Where the Heart Lies

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Harry wishes he could go back in time and tell his younger self-always so lost, desperately searching for a family and a place to belong-that the answer was there all along. Right there next to him. Post-Hogwarts HHr.

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Home Is Where the Heart Lies

[Introduction](#)

[A Long Winding Road](#)

[Not a Dream](#)

A Long Winding Road

~A/N~ I blame this fic on Hastyhand and the beautiful art she drew of Harry and Hermione's family. This was supposed to be a short drabble for just that moment, but then I started asking myself *how* HHr got to that moment. How would they come together after the war? How would they heal and grow and go through all the moments of creating a family and a home? And well... got a little carried away.

Thank you to Curlscat, RainbowBlitz, and Tyrannicpuppy for looking over this chapter. And thank you to Hasty for going along with my ramblings and bringing this HHr AU to life through her illustrations with me.

Harry can't pinpoint the exact moment where everything changed, but after the Battle of Hogwarts ends, he keeps finding himself going back to that day at Godric's Hollow when he visited his parents.

With Hermione.

The war is over, Voldemort defeated, and Harry's fulfilled his role in saving the Wizarding World, but why can't he bring himself to be happy? There's a weary numbness, a hollow feeling that's settled deep into his bones and all he can think about is how much he has lost.

He thinks of standing in front of his parents' graves and trying not to crumble against the prospect of the family he could have had. Wondering *why*. Why did it have to be his parents? Was he doomed to stumbling through life with everyone he loved dying and leaving him, with nowhere and no one to belong to?

Hermione took his hand then and he almost choked on his tears in relief, at the stabilizing force her presence gave him.

She always did have a way of centering him.

Harry joins the Aurors.

Everyone is thrilled-exultant even-that the Boy-Who-Lived will be personally involved in hunting down the stray Death Eaters and leftover forces of Voldemort that remain in hiding.

It's only right, their whispers reach his ears, for him to finish the job. It's his calling.

Everyone is thrilled. Everyone besides Hermione.

"You don't *have* to do this, Harry." She says to him one evening while visiting Grimmauld Place.

Harry doesn't know why he came back here, to this dreary old place where the memories of Sirius linger in the shadows. But Kreacher is here and that grumpy elf would probably feel lonely all by himself and-and he didn't have anywhere else to go, really.

"I don't know what else to do," Harry tells her honestly.

He remembers the surprised look Ron had given him when he had expressed his doubt about his career path.

" Blimey, Harry. Is that even a question? What else would you do? You're the Man-Who-Conquered now, things will be smooth sailing for you there!"

Ron has suffered from the war too, with his own moments of somber silence whenever Fred is mentioned, but he seems determined to move on. To push forward and go back to his cheery self, taking advantage of their fame to enter this new stage of life with aplomb. Harry can't find it in himself to feel the same.

He remembers Ginny approaching him and wanting to rekindle what they had before he went off on the Hunt. But she looked at him with those same eyes-those eyes of worship, of adoration, that he's confronted with everywhere lately, and his heart froze. He tried desperately to regain some of the passion he had felt in sixth year, that casual joy from the normalcy her presence had given him-but he felt nothing. She expected him to move on too, for everything to go back to the way it was, and he doesn't understand how she can expect him to be the same as before, after everything he's suffered and everything he's lost-

He feels *nothing* .

"Harry?" Hermione asks, her concerned voice shaking him out of his thoughts.

"I'm just tired of this void in my life right now. I just want to do *something*," He looks at her, pleading for her to understand with his eyes. He doesn't have to say it out loud; he just wants to *feel* again.

"I know." She sighs, and Harry can't help but notice the bags under her eyes and the slump in her shoulders. "I feel the same."

Ever since Hermione found out that her parents would need to be hospitalized in St. Mungos for months to even have a chance of recovering their memories, she has been restless and frazzled.

"I'm not going to Hogwarts for my eighth year," She confesses. "Everyone expected me to- McGonagall even planned on making me Head Girl-but I can't go to classes and pretend everything is normal and... It's just not the same without you and Ron there."

She pauses on Ron's name and winces, clearly recalling the last time she had mentioned him to Harry. It had been after their one and only date, a date that had ended in disaster.

" *The kiss during the battle-oh, honestly! I don't know if it was adrenaline or nerves or what in the world I was thinking. But it's clear*

to me that Ron and I are better off as friends."

"If you're not going to Hogwarts, where will you go? And where are you staying?" He tries not to let the worry seep through his voice.

"Probably the DMLE. At least if I join them, I can put my frustrations into making changes and being useful. Maybe you and I will even bump into each other at the Ministry." She attempts to smile, but it doesn't last. "I'll probably stay at my parents' house. The one I made them leave behind."

Harry is overcome by an unsettling feeling of *wrongness*. Hermione has always been so full of energy and passion and life that it hurts to see her like this. So worn out, so tired, so *lonely*. He doesn't like the idea of her all alone in that house, surrounded by the memory of a happier time with her parents and riddled with guilt. He doesn't like the idea of her being anything but happy.

And before he knows it, he's blurting it out: "Stay with me."

"What?" She cocks her head at him. He finds it strangely adorable for some reason.

"Stay here. At Grimmauld. There are so many rooms here and we could both use the company. We've already cohabited for months on end in that tent, so this shouldn't pose a challenge."

His mind scrambles to find more reasons but he just ends up repeating himself, almost desperately. "Stay."

She laughs and a weight Harry didn't notice was even there lifts off his shoulders.

"All right," She rolls up her sleeves and there's a familiar, determined glint in her eyes. "But if I'm staying, we're doing things *properly* this time. We have to get this place in good order-upstairs is still so dusty, I'll need to speak to Kreacher about a plan. We need to draw up a list: Who will do the groceries, how will we divide the

housework? Oh! And I'll need your help moving some of my belongings..."

She's on a roll, listing off things they'll need to do and Harry just nods along, basking in the knowledge that she won't be leaving anytime soon.

It happens naturally. Hermione just starts sleeping in his room one day and neither of them comment on it.

This way, Harry won't have to run to Hermione's room when he's woken up by her screams at night; sometimes it's that night at Malfoy Manor that haunts her, sometimes it's the fear that her parents never regain her memory, but more often than not it concerns *him* .

"You died. You *died* ." She muttered over and over as Harry held on to her. "You left me. You never even told me, just went to go die by yourself! How could you be so *stupid* ? Do you know how I felt seeing your body, limp in Hagrid's arms?"

"I'm sorry," he tried to console her, rubbing her back even as her fists hit his side and he felt her tears at his collarbone. "Yes, I died. But I came back. I came back to you, Hermione."

Harry doesn't scream during his nightmares, but Hermione always seems to know he's had them just by looking at his face in the morning and never fails to fret over him. He doesn't like exposing his fears and he feels a bit silly because everyone's been telling him to move on and yet these dreams are proof that he *hasn't* .

But Hermione is nothing if not stubborn and insistent, so he tells her.

Sometimes, he sees Dobby's eyes glaze over and the red spread throughout that dirty pillowcase he always wore, sometimes he sees Sirius freezing in the middle of his laughter and falling through the

veil, sometimes he hears her screams at Malfoy Manor and he's powerless to stop it.

The night after he confesses the last one, he finds her sleeping in his bed. They wake up in the morning holding on to each other and silently decide to keep it this way. It's just easier sleeping together. Practical. He feels safe in her arms and she does in his.

The only real downside is how conscious he starts becoming of her physical presence and his own craving for her touch. He finds that he likes the way her body fits into his arms as he spoons her from behind. He likes it when their legs get tangled when they sleep. He doesn't even mind that she moves in her sleep so much that some mornings he'll wake up to her weight on top of him, her head of bushy brown curls resting against his chest, and her soft breathing the only sound in the peaceful room.

On those mornings, he is content to stay in bed and play with her hair until she groggily wakes up, greeting her with a sheepish smile.

The nightmares grow less frequent, but they are still there.

Harry confesses to her one night: "I have dreams about it too-dying."

Hermione stills.

"Especially right after the war, I used to dream that I was back at King's Cross Station and I would choose to go on, choose not to keep living. The other side had my parents and Sirius and I was so *tempted* . So bloody tempted to stay in the dream and never wake up." He reaches under the covers to grab her hand. "But I'm glad I didn't. Every day I spend with you, I'm a little more glad I chose to come back."

"If I hadn't, I wouldn't have-" he holds up their entwined hands, "-this."

Hermione makes a strange sound-a cross between a laugh and a sob-and breaks away from him.

Harry stares at his now bereft hand and back to her in confusion until she speaks.

"Harry-you can't-you can't just say things like that and expect me to not react!" She struggles for words and his mind freezes, wondering if he said something wrong.

"Oh, bugger this!" She makes a frustrated noise and throws her hands up in the air. "I can't do this anymore!"

"What-" Is all Harry has the chance to say before she's pushing him down on the bed, climbing on top of him, and kissing him senseless.

They don't get much sleep that night, but for once, it's not because of the nightmares.

Hermione takes the Ministry by storm.

Of course, due to her age and lack of experience, she's still limited in what she can do. But she's fierce and passionate towards her endeavours and she has the sharp intelligence to not only know what she wants, but *how* to go after it.

And as others are now learning, she can be one stubborn witch.

"Usually, someone like me would have no chance to make a dent in the DMLE," Hermione tells Harry while they eat breakfast together. "But I have a *reputation* now. I'm the girl who helped the 'Saviour of the Wizarding World'... well, *save the wizarding world* . I'm part of the "Golden Trio" now-you know, that ridiculous name the Daily Prophet came up with. They've even taken to calling me the 'Brightest Witch of Her Age.' And I despise those titles as much as you do, but I've decided recently that I might as well make use of

them to build on the reputation I do have and let my skills speak for themselves!"

Harry leans with his elbows on the table and smirks. "You're advancing through the ranks faster than me, I see."

"Please. I can't go anywhere in the Ministry without hearing some news about you successfully completing one mission after another at record speed." She scoffs at him, before turning serious. "But be honest with me, Harry. Are you happy with your work? Does it ever get to be too much?"

"I don't know if 'happy' is the right word to use." He admits. "But it's not as bad as it was."

He doesn't particularly love the job. When he first started, it was only out of a desperate need to fill the void in his heart. Sometimes he felt like a machine on auto-pilot, made numb to violence and bloodshed. But seeing Hermione so passionate about what she's doing, the endless drive for justice that she has, inspired him to find a reason to continue what he does besides the fact that it's the one thing everyone's told him he's good at or because it's the 'right' thing to do.

He wants to push himself to the limits as she does. He wants to be *better* .

She's speeding through this next phase of their lives and he doesn't want to be left behind. He wants to stay on equal footing with her, being able to challenge and tease her like he does in days like these.

But more than that, he knows it won't be easy for Hermione to implement all the changes they've discussed and it'll only be an uphill battle from here on. He wants to be her support just like she was always his.

It's not much of a grand or lofty goal, but it's a purpose. And after searching for one for so long in the emptiness that followed the end

of the war, Harry grasps on to it firmly.

It's enough.

As time goes by, Harry notices that nothing much has changed after they both confessed what had been lingering unspoken between them for so long. They were practically living together as a couple this whole time anyway, instead of normal 'roommates.' And their friendship has always been open, easy, and understanding.

It's the little things that excite him. Being able to sneak up behind her when she's in the kitchen and wrapping his arms around her waist, the stolen kisses whenever they bump into each other in between breaks at the Ministry, the meaningful glances Hermione sends his way that only he can understand.

After a long day's work at the Ministry, Harry and Hermione often curl up on the large couch in the living room, talk about their day, and just unwind-relaxing in each other's presence.

One such day, Harry has a realization.

His head is lying on Hermione's lap as she holds a book in one hand and absentmindedly combs through his messy hair with the other.

"I just realized," He opens his eyes. "We're a rather boring couple, aren't we?"

There is nothing particularly dramatic or epic about their relationship. They are just two friends with a deep trust and understanding, who have vowed to find the simple happiness they've yearned for with each other. Sometimes, they argue, sometimes they have their differences, sometimes the frenzy of emotions and passion and energy collide, sometimes the shadows of the past war looms over them. But at the end of the day, they are just Harry and Hermione.

"Hmm?" Hermione looks away from her book and pauses in her stroking. "I suppose we are. Does that bother you?"

"No," Harry looks into her eyes and smiles. "I quite like it this way."

They are just Harry and Hermione and that's all they need to be. Together.

When Hermione's parents regain their memory, she breaks down completely.

They're in her parents' old house, cleaning things up and getting it ready for their return when Harry hears a crash. He runs to the living room only to find her sorting through broken shards of a photo frame that had held a picture of Mr Granger, Mrs Granger and seven-year-old Hermione.

"I was just going to return these photos to the wall and I must have made a mistake when levitating them-"

But her eyes are glassy, and her bottom lip is trembling, and Harry knows she wouldn't make a mistake like that.

"Hermione," He says softly. "Tell me what's wrong."

"I've wanted them to remember me for so long now, but now I'm *terrified*, Harry. What if they hate me for what I did? I lied to them, I broke their trust, I'm a terrible daughter-"

"Stop it!" Harry takes a hold of her shoulders, "You wanted them *alive*. We were teenagers in the middle of a war, making impossible choices that no one should have to make. Isn't that what you always tell me? Don't be so hard on yourself."

Harry has to spend hours reassuring her that it will be okay, that her parents will forgive her, that they'll see that she did it for them. But there is an unsettling, twisting feeling of guilt in the pit of his stomach

as he remembers that-no, she did all of this for *him* . She gave up the life and family she knew, the possibility of ever knowing them again, to go with him.

Seventeen-year-old him was too much of an emotional mess to give that action the attention it deserved, but the more time passes, the more Harry is astounded at the gravity of all Hermione has done for him. All she has sacrificed to just stand beside him.

It humbles him and scares him and fills him with all these emotions that he has no idea what to do with. All he knows is that he's going to spend the rest of his days making sure that she is cared for and loved as fiercely as she has always loved him.

When Hermione finally meets her parents again, Harry is right there with her to offer support. What follows is a lot of hugs and crying, but the moment that sticks with him is when Mrs Granger takes one look at him and just *knows* :

"Harry Potter... we've heard so much about you."

They marry young-too young, some might say. The early twenties are a time for exploring one's options and trying out new things. But Harry thinks that he has had enough 'excitement' for a lifetime; he wants stability, he wants peace, he wants waking up to Hermione's laughter, he wants all the Hermione Hugs and Kisses she has to give, he wants to be her family and for her to be his. He has known her for so long and gone through so much together. It feels like all their adventures and experiences from the time he first met her on the Hogwarts Express has been a long, winding road leading to this moment.

The wedding is small and private, hosted in a large garden during spring, with only their close family and friends invited. Hermione walks down the aisle, looking radiant in her flowing white dress, and Harry can't help but stare in awe, unable to believe that *this is happening, this is really happening* .

He reaches for her hand as they both face forward and say their vows, but something inside of him breaks when she squeezes back. She's *real* and this is *real* and-despite his best efforts, his eyes turn watery.

As if she knows, Hermione turns and beams at him; her eyes, too, are full of tears.

"... then I declare you bonded for life."

Harry is brought back to another moment, so different yet so similar, where he had heard those same words and had been filled with the most peculiar feeling when he looked into Hermione's eyes. Looking back, it feels like they were inevitable, like they were always gravitating towards each other without even knowing it.

Bonded for life. It feels like the stray pieces of a puzzle have finally aligned and for once in his life, everything feels *right* .

Even as they greet their guests, Harry's eyes keep travelling back to Hermione, not wanting to take his eyes off her for even a moment.

Ron thumps his shoulder, startling him out of his gaze. "You know, I think I always knew this would happen. You and Hermione."

"Did you now?" Hermione smirks at him.

"Hey!" Ron splutters. "That was *one* date-"

All three of them break into laughter.

"Aunt Hermy!" Little Teddy jumps out of Andromeda's arms and Hermione leans down-not caring about getting her wedding dress dirty-to hold on to him. "Grandma told me Uncle Harry has to treat you *extra* special now."

Harry chuckles and ruffles Teddy's wild blue hair, assuring him that he will.

Hagrid hasn't been able to stop crying throughout the whole wedding.

"Look at yeh two!" Big, fat tears roll down his face and he blows his nose with a gigantic handkerchief. "All grown up and getting married! Why-jus' yesterday I was bringing yeh in my boat to Hogwarts!"

Hagrid reaches out and pulls both him and Hermione into a bear hug, mumbling in between his tears: "Jus'-jus' be happy."

When the reception is about to end, Harry knows it's time. With much squealing and laughter from Hermione, he picks her up in a bridal carry and she encircles her arms around his neck.

"Mr Potter," Hermione says as she grabs his lapel.

"Yes, Mrs Potter?" Harry allows himself to be pulled by her, leaning forward so that their foreheads touch.

"We are going to be happy together." Her eyes gleam mischievously as she repeats Hagrid's words like a statement. Like a fact.

He kisses her then, slowly and softly, smiling against her lips.

"That was never in question."

~A/N~ The art by Hastyhand for this chapter is based on the wedding scene: " *Bonded for life*. It feels like the stray pieces of a puzzle have finally aligned and for once in his life, everything feels *right* ."

You can find the links to them on my profile or on the #homeishhr tag on instagram/tumblr

The title for this chapter is "A Long Winding Road," because I truly believe that, no matter how many bumps they have along the way, all roads lead to Harmony.

Not a Dream

~A/N~ Again, thank you to Curlscat, RainbowBlitz, and Tyrannicpuppy for looking over this chapter. And thank you to Hasty for bringing this part of HHR's story to life through her beautiful illustrations.

When Harry finds out that Hermione is pregnant, his brain instantly goes into panic mode.

It's not entirely unexpected; they're already a few years into their marriage and decided a few months ago that they would like to expand their little family. But it doesn't stop him from being entirely and utterly terrified.

He doesn't know anything about being a good father. Sure, he loves Teddy and tries to shower him with as much love and care as he is able to, but he didn't *raise* him. Andromeda did. His own childhood was dark and miserable, and the only parenting he grew up with was wretched and abusive. He wants to think that he'll be better than that, but there's a deep, twisting fear that taunts him and says that he's irreversibly scarred and emotionally stunted. That his kids will suffer for it.

"Harry, where in the world have you been?" Hermione holds the door open for him as he balances a box in his arms.

"I did a little shopping." He tries not to look too sheepish as he empties the box on the living room table to reveal dozens of books on parenting, both magical and muggle.

Hermione raises an eyebrow at him. "Stocking up on books? I thought that was my job."

"I just thought it wouldn't hurt to be a little prepared." He shrugs and can't quite meet her eyes. "I know I'm not exactly the best father material, but I want to be."

"Oh, Harry." She reaches up to cup his face and forces him to meet her gaze. "Listen to me. You are going to be a *great* father. You're the most caring and compassionate person I know, our kid will be smothered in love."

He smiles wryly and just hopes that she doesn't see the fear in his eyes.

But she sighs and drops her hand. "You know, it's okay to be scared. I'm scared too. This is all so new and exciting, and I thought I would be ready, but I don't know if I am. People sometimes tell me that I can be bossy and demanding. Cold. One time, someone joked that I'd be a nightmare of a mother-"

"Rubbish!" Harry interrupts fiercely. "Cold is the last word in the world I'd use to describe you." Hermione is all happiness and laughter and *warmth*. He goes on a rant about how these people *clearly* know nothing about her, how he can already see how much their baby will love her and only stops when Hermione starts laughing.

"You see? We're going to do just fine. The both of us together." She says and some of Harry's worry dissipates.

"In the meantime, let me get my things and we can start making some notes. Ooh! Harry, you chose some great ones!" There's a look of excitement on her face as she flips through the books Harry bought and just like that, all of his worry is gone.

They spend the rest of the evening sitting cross-legged on the carpet, surrounded by open books and hastily scribbled on notebooks as they read points from the books out loud, arguing over and discussing their plan for parenthood.

"It says here that kids need a bright, open environment to be fostered properly." Harry rubs his chin and looks around the dark corners of Grimmauld. "I've grown used to Grimmauld, but I don't think it's the best place for that. And besides, I want to have a house with a yard."

Hermione frowns. "What about your ancestral home? We agreed we would move in once it's restored."

They have been working on restoring the home his grandparents left behind for a few years now, ever since their marriage, but it is slow and steady work. Close, but not there yet.

" *Our* ancestral home," Harry corrects. "And yes, if we speed things up we could probably move in before the baby's due. I just don't know if I want to put that pressure on you while you're pregnant."

"Oh honestly, Harry." Hermione huffs and rolls her eyes, but gives him a small smile nonetheless. "Thank you for the concern, but I can handle this. I want to finish building this home with you."

With that topic decided, they move on.

"Lullabies?" Hermione groans.

"Guess you have to take singing lessons now," Harry teases and dodges when she playfully swats him with a book.

"I can't wait to teach him how to read," She says dreamily.

"I can't wait to teach her how to ride a broom." He smirks.

Hermione glares at him. They haven't found out the baby's gender yet, but she's convinced it's a boy.

"Ten galleons that it's a boy and he looks just like you." She points at him intimidatingly.

"Ten galleons that it's a girl and she looks just like *you* ." He makes a grand gesture towards her.

They shake hands and the bet is made.

It turns out that both of them are wrong.

Harry stares in awe at the two little humans sleeping peacefully in the crib. It's been almost half a day since his children came into the world and he's still in a state of wondrous disbelief.

"Harry," comes Hermione's tired voice from the bed.

His head whips around and he rushes to her side. "What is it? Is everything all right? Are you feeling-"

"I'm fine. Exhausted and *certainly* not going to get pregnant again any time soon, but fine. " Hermione snorts. "It's just that you've been standing near the crib for ages now. They won't disappear."

Harry runs his hand through his hair and grins sheepishly. "I just want to hold them again, but I don't want to wake them when they just fell asleep. So I'm just looking. They're so beautiful, Hermione."

Hermione's features soften with a small, proud smile. "Yes, they are."

Rose Lily Potter has the same bushy brown hair as her mother and already has a stubborn set to her chin when she scrunches up her face to cry. But her green eyes are his. James Sirius Potter has Harry's unruly black hair and is the quiet one of the twins, barely ever crying. He has Hermione's warm brown eyes.

When they wake up a while later, Harry carefully cradles Rose in his arms and gives her to Hermione, before taking James and seating himself next to the bed.

He drops a light kiss on James' forehead, a little overwhelmed at how small and fragile he feels in his arms. At how tiny his fingers are compared to his own.

"Welcome to the family," Hermione whispers to Rose and then looks up to Harry with a knowing smile. His heart fills with happiness at the word.

Family . It always seemed such an unattainable, foreign concept to him. Something that other people had, something that didn't and would never belong to him.

But he has one now and he's never letting go.

Harry creeps into the house late at night, trying to tread lightly and praying that Hermione has already gone to sleep.

No such luck. The light is on in the nursery and Hermione comes out with James swaddled in blankets against her chest and her eyebrows scrunched up in worry.

"Harry, you're covered in blood!" She rushes towards him but he takes a step back.

"I didn't want the kids to see me like this," He mumbles, knowing it's silly but self consciously fiddling with his red-stained Auror uniform anyway. "Don't worry, I'm fine. The mission went bad but we got out of it in one piece."

Hermione doesn't say anything, waiting.

"I quit the job." Harry admits, the words spilling out of him like a flood. "That's why it took so long for me to come home. Had to tie all the loose ends up."

"What brought this on?" She asks quietly.

He swallows hard. "There was a close call today with a stray spell. I'm so used to near-death experiences now, I usually don't feel anything anymore. But this time was different. All I could think about was if it had hit me, I wouldn't be able to come home. I wouldn't be able to see you and the kids again. I've spent my whole life trying to do the right thing and for a time it meant helping people and living up to my name as a saviour."

James makes a little gurgling sound and Harry looks down at him with a small smile. "But now the right thing means being alive and being there for my family."

" *Oh, Harry* ." Hermione takes his hand, entwining her fingers with his.

"You don't mind?" He feels compelled to ask even though he already knows the answer.

"That you've finally quit that horrible job everyone pushed you to do when it never made you happy? I'm *ecstatic* . And besides, this couldn't be more perfect timing." Her eyes shine with mirth. "My maternity leave will end soon soon and now we don't have to search for a nanny."

He snorts. "Hold your horses. The Ministry did offer some other options-they're really not eager to let me go. They said I could take a representative position of sorts, or even involve myself in the Wizengamot. My appearances would be infrequent, but it's something to consider."

"Seems like they want to keep a position open for you in case you ever go back," Hermione shifts James in her arms, biting her lower lip in thought. "Well, it makes sense. Even without the whole Boy-Who-Lived thing, your years with the Aurors have been nothing short of exemplary. You're a legend in more ways than one, Harry."

Harry scoffs.

Throughout his life, he has had many titles: the Boy-Who-Lived, the Man-Who-Conquered, the Hero-Who-Vanquished, the Chosen One, the Saviour of the Wizarding World. Most of them are bold and boasting and grandiose, but the ones he prefers are much simpler. He is Harry Potter.

Husband.

Father.

Family man.

Despite rushing headfirst back into the politically murky waters of the Ministry, Hermione makes sure that she never misses a single one of the twins' milestones.

The insanely proud look on her face whenever one of the twins manages to do something new never ceases to amuse Harry. James is the one who talks first, but Rose learns to walk before him.

"That's it! That's it, Rosie!" Hermione holds her arms out to her daughter who is currently taking wobbly steps towards her. "Harry, are you getting this?"

"Yes, yes." Harry has a wizarding camera in his hands while he cheers their toddler on. "Slow and steady, Daddy's here if you fall."

Rose manages to reach Hermione right before she loses her footing, but Hermione is there to scoop her up and pepper her face with kisses. Harry takes one more shot of mother and daughter, before putting his arm around Hermione and joining in their little celebration.

"James," Hermione calls to her son, who is still focused on his toy blocks and content to remain inside the playpen. "Do you want to try walking too? Mummy will help!"

"No!" Is all he says before turning his attention back to his toys.

This time, it's Harry who chuckles and tries to cajole him into talking again. Hermione is torn between despair at the blunt refusal she received from her son and pride at the conviction with which he said his first word.

"Well, at least he's confident in what he wants." She beams.

Harry can't stop snickering. "I wish everyone who thought you would be a strict mum could see you now."

She raises her eyebrow at him. "You talk as if Rose doesn't have you wrapped around her little finger."

From the side, Kreacher lets out a disdainful *humph* .

Poor Kreacher was somehow persuaded by Hermione to leave Grimmauld behind and come with them to the Potter Manor where the eventual heirs of the Black Family residence would be raised. Despite his constant complaints about the noise and messiness the twins' birth has brought, he has regained a bit of his old energy.

He says in an exasperated, croaky voice: "Masters are *both* fools for these stinky brats."

The two young parents reluctantly admit that he may have a point.

Harry agrees with Hermione that sending their kids off to kindergarten is the best course of action, but when the day comes to send them off he almost can't bring himself to do it.

He crouches in front of the school entrance and busies himself with straightening their already perfectly ironed clothes.

"I packed some extra snacks in case you get hungry. I know this is different, but it'll be a fun opportunity to make friends and learn new things. Remember that you can't-"

"Let people know about magic," James nods seriously. "We know."

"Dad!" Rose stamps her feet. "The other kids are already going inside!"

"All right," Hermione interferes and pulls Harry back. "It's time to say your goodbyes kids, we'll be back to pick you up before you know it."

"Bye dad! Bye mum!" Rose waves happily before bouncing off.

James doesn't say anything, but surprises Harry by giving both his parents a tight hug before running after his sister.

Harry watches them go while Hermione links their arms together and gives him a gentle nudge.

"You did well," she tells him, and he thinks ruefully that she must have seen the tears he tried to hold back.

If it was anyone else, he would think they were making fun of him. But Hermione knows how much this moment means to him. Hermione understands.

He squeezes her hand in thanks.

Harry looks through his parents' wedding photos, coming to a stop at a particularly worn photograph: James Potter and Sirius Black, faces flushed, laughing uproariously, and still so full of youthful hope and joy at the prospect of their future.

Sometimes, Harry regrets the name he gave to his son. When Hermione was pregnant, they took lots to decide who would be naming which twin. He decided on James Sirius after two men who were brave and good, two men who risked their lives for him, two men who could have taken the role of his father, had life given them a chance.

There is no one else Harry would have named him after, but sometimes-when people comment that James Sirius must be another prankster in the making-he wonders if he should have ever named him after someone else at all. He knows all too well the burden of expectations.

One day, while Harry and James are sitting in his study-Harry going through papers for the Wizengamot and James finishing his homework-Harry feels the urge to ask.

"Does it bother you?" He puts down his papers and looks at his son seriously. "That joke your Aunt McGonagall made about you being another little Marauder?"

James chews on his pencil and Harry finds it adorable just how much his scrunched up face looks like Hermione's when she's deep in thought.

"Yes!" He finally says and Harry's heart sinks. "Everyone thinks I'm going to be a prankster, but I'm not!"

"You can be anything you want to be." Harry rushes to reassure his son, but before he can continue James launches into a very Hermione-like tirade.

His eyes are sparkling as he recounts all the stories Harry told him about the Marauders and how he's come to a conclusion that his namesakes were only so successful at pranks because of how *brilliant* they were.

"I'm going to be a *real* Marauder. I'm going to be a *genius* !" He proclaims and Harry is momentarily at a loss for words, before he bursts into laughter.

"Oh, James." He ruffles his son's wild hair, hair just like his own. "I have a feeling that Prongs and Padfoot would gladly welcome you into their ranks."

When they first started dating, during that period of emptiness after the war, Hermione would take his hand and drag him all over London to experience the muggle life he never had a chance to as a child. She never asked why things as mundane as going to a restaurant or the theatre were such foreign concepts to him, and just focused on drawing a smile out of him. It wasn't very hard-Harry never seemed to stop smiling around her.

But as they grew older, had children, and Hermione grew more occupied with matters of the Ministry, Harry took the responsibility of planning those dates upon himself. It was his turn to relieve the stress off her shoulders, to make her smile.

They go on family dates with Rose and James too, but sometimes he wants it to be just the two of them. Today is one of those days. After dropping the twins at Andromeda's place, he takes Hermione's hand and kisses it dramatically.

"Where does my lady wish to go?"

"Harry!" She laughs at his ridiculous antics. "Honestly, I don't mind where we go-I'm just so happy to be away from work for once. Surprise me!"

And so he does.

First, they go to the amusement park and Harry pulls Hermione along on all the 'childish' rides that she's hesitant to go on.

"I'm a mum now, Harry. I'm too old for this!" She protests feebly and Harry rolls his eyes, remembering when he had once said something similar, self conscious of his lack of experience.

"You're never too old for fun." He throws the words of her eighteen-year-old self right back at her and she huffs but sits beside him on the rides anyway. The snapshot of one particular ride shows her half screaming half laughing, her hair flying madly in the air, and tightly

holding onto one Harry Potter who looks entirely too pleased with himself.

They do all of the things they want to do, giggling like kids as they get their faces painted, binge eating cotton candy, wearing those goofy animal eared headbands, and playing game after game until Harry finally wins the otter plushie he's had his eye on.

"There," he pushes the plushie in her arms. "Now that stag you gave me all those years ago finally has a partner."

When they get tired of walking around, he takes her to a restaurant and gives a small smile when Hermione stops and stares. "Oh! We haven't been here in ages, Harry!"

Hermione's face glows with joy throughout the meal, but she's surprised when Harry pulls out movie tickets and informs her that their date isn't over yet.

It's a rerun of an old movie from more than a decade ago. Not many people are in the theatre, but Hermione doesn't seem to mind as she cuddles closer to him and rests her head on his shoulder.

As the movie starts, she leans closer to him and whispers against his neck: "The same movie too, huh?"

By now, she's clearly caught on that today was a recreation of their first date.

He leans his head against hers. "I just wanted to let you know. No matter how many years pass, some things will never change."

The love he has for Hermione isn't flashy or dramatic, but the one thing he can promise her is that it will always endure. In the Forest of Dean, she once told him: *"Maybe we should just stay here, Harry. Grow old..."* That's all he wants now, to grow white haired by her side and have many more days of simple happiness just like this.

Harry loves reading bedtime stories to his kids. They switch back and forth between muggle storybooks and wizarding fairytales, but lately the twins have started to take initiative and nominate their own choices for a story.

He is usually happy to encourage this, but when he settles into his chair next to the bed that night and Rose shoves a book excitedly into his hands, his blood runs cold.

It's a book titled *The Boy Who Lived and the Hero Who Vanquished*. The top half of the cover shows a baby swaddled in white and surrounded by a glowing light which causes the crimson scar on his forehead and the single tear rolling down his cheek to stand out. The second half of the cover shows a heroic figure, clothed in pristine robes and standing on top of a mountain of bodies with a triumphant smirk on his face. His foot is on the face of a monstrous creature, snakelike and red-eyed even in its cartoonish illustration.

His hands tremble and he almost drops the book, bile threatening to rise to his throat as his stomach churns at the mockery in front of his eyes.

"Dad?" Rose asks quietly, her excitement gone. "Is something wrong?"

"Where did you find this?" He struggles to keep his voice steady.

"It was in your study. In that bag of things Uncle Ron brought over yesterday." She squirms uncomfortably under his stare.

Harry exhales deeply. Books like these have existed and circulated among the Wizarding masses ever since that fateful Halloween night. No one had bothered to tell his clueless child self that he was the main character of these ridiculous stories, but after the war ended and the Harry Potter book mania had a resurgence with people everywhere looking to profit after his misery, he couldn't have avoided it if he had tried. They salivate at the picture of an innocent,

pure orphan growing up to be the ruthless, powerful hero they had always envisioned him to be.

Hero, they whisper even all these years later. *The Chosen One*. Who is that stranger they draw, standing on his enemies' corpses with a delighted grin on his face? Were they even there that day, when he actually killed Voldemort? Did they see the dirt and leaves on his blood splattered clothes from the forest floor where his lifeless body had once laid? Did they know of the exhaustion in his bones, the blood racing in his ears as the memory of dying screams rang over and over, the ache in his feet as he forced himself to move just one step forward?

He didn't smile that day, he didn't kill Tom Riddle and think of success and glory. He killed him and thought of what a waste it all was. That his entire life had been uprooted and destroyed just so fate could have him kill one monster. That he had completed his so-called destiny and felt no happiness, no triumph, just a chasm in his chest where his heart should have been. He had thought, "*Ah, so this is the end. Why did it take so long?*" and then struggled to not sway on his feet, to not collapse in the middle of the Great Hall in front of everyone.

"Dad?" Rose is pulling at his sleeve and her voice is quivering. "I'm sorry I went snooping in your study, I shouldn't have! I'm sorry-don't be mad!"

Harry snaps out of it and reaches out to squeeze her shoulder comfortingly. "I'm not mad. Not at you, Rose."

He remembers now. Ever since he retired from the Aurors and took up a prominent position in the Wizengamot, learning more about laws and his rights, he's made an effort to stamp out any books that try to exploit his fame. They always appear one after another, like undying weeds, and by now his friends know to inform him of the ones that escape his notice. Ron must have dropped one by for him and he had just been too busy to look into it.

"Is that book about *you*, dad? The Boy-Who-Lived?" James looks up at him curiously and Harry tries to hold back a groan when he recalls how his son attempts to read the Daily Prophet once Hermione's done with it and that rag *still* brings up those titles in headlines every now and then.

"That's what they used to call me," Harry sighs and gets off his chair. "All right you two, budge over." The twins squeal and obediently make space for him in the middle of the bed.

"This book here," he holds it up for them to see, "is complete nonsense. James might know this already, but I'm a bit... famous in our world. And the truth often gets lost when people try to tell my story."

He goes through the pages of the book then and starts pointing out inaccuracies while the twins snicker and chortle loudly at his commentary.

"I *did* kill that basilisk, but I wasn't nearly as tall or handsome as they portray me here. I was twelve! And I was terrified."

"Dad, can I-"

"No, Rose. You may not fight a basilisk. I don't know where you would find one in any case, but there aren't any in *our* bathrooms."

She giggles and James rolls his eyes.

Harry frowns as he goes through the pages. "Another thing is that they make me out to be a lone hero of sorts, but I had people to help me along the way. You see that dragon they show me facing?"

They nod seriously, hanging on to his every word.

"The only reason I survived that encounter was because your mum spent practically day and night searching for a way to help me. We practiced the charm I needed to escape the dragon together for

ages. Or else I would have been toast. *Dragon toast* ." He grins as both six year olds groan at the bad joke.

"Tell us more about mum!" James implores him, his eyes shining.

So he does. He tells them about how the books are wrong, he was never a legend or some glamorous hero. He was just a skinny little boy with taped-together glasses and a childhood of loneliness who came to Hogwarts searching for a home. He tells them that it was Hermione

who was the first person to ever tell him he was more. Not the Boy-Who-Lived or the Man-Who-Conquered. He was the boy who gave her friendship, the boy who was brave. Somehow, that became a badge he was prouder to wear than anything else.

He can't tell them of the things they went through together in detail, the horrible danger that no children should have had to face, the war that should have never been theirs to fight. But he can tell them of how things weren't ever easy, how he doesn't know if he would have made it through without her there by his side.

"Sounds like Mum needs her own book." Rose says in between her yawns.

"Sounds like it's time for bed," He closes the book and manages to untangle himself from the two little monkeys climbing over him and begging for *just one more page* .

"Good night," He murmurs softly once as they have finally settled down and drifted off to sleep, kissing their foreheads one by one, closing the light, and tip-toeing to the door.

What he finds there almost makes him let out a startled yelp.

"How long have you been standing there?" Harry whispers to Hermione, who is standing by the bedroom door in her Ministry robes and staring at him with the most peculiar look in her eyes.

"Long enough," Is all she says before she throws her arms around his neck and kisses him soundly.

"Mmph-I thought you were going to be held up longer with that emergency." He questions in between her onslaught. "Hermione! The kids might wake up!"

She doesn't seem to be in the mood to listen so he rolls his eyes and picks her up, carrying her to their room himself.

He's barely put her down on the bed gently before she's tossed her robes off and pulled him on top of her.

Their faces are pushed close together and Harry playfully nuzzles her nose. "Maybe I should tell bedtime stories in front of you more often if this is the reaction I get."

Hermione always wears her signature white blouse under her robes and Harry takes great care to unbutton it one by one, dropping a soft kiss on each newly exposed patch of skin as he goes down.

"Harry," There's something in the breathless quality to her voice that makes him look up at her flushed face and bright eyes. "Harry, I want another baby."

"What?" His hands pause in their movement.

"I want another baby." She repeats more forcefully and then turns a little red at the confession. "I know you're going to ask why and why now when we've decided the twins are enough. I don't know why. All I know is that I came home today, tired and weary, to my husband telling my children the most ridiculous, sweet bedtime story- *our* story-and I thought that I don't want it to be the last time I hear it be passed down."

Harry lets out an incredulous laugh, both deliriously joyful and disbelieving. "I've always wanted a large family, Hermione. You won't find me disagreeing."

"Another baby, huh?" He smirks down at her. "That can be arranged."

Hours later, when the both of them are tired and sated and Harry is about to drift off to sleep, he feels Hermione burrow her face into his back and murmur drowsily against his skin, "I told you, didn't I? I said you would be a great father, and I was right."

"You were right." He smiles and allows himself to close his eyes, knowing nothing but peaceful dreams await him. "You always are."

It's Rose who brings up the topic. She's the clumsier, cheerful one of the twins, always looking to get up to some mischief, unlike her brother who prefers to bury himself in his books yet always gets dragged along with her antics anyway.

But if there's one thing the twins inherited from their parents, it's their curiosity and love for questions.

"Dad, when can we meet your parents?" She asks at breakfast one day and Harry nearly drops the spatula he's holding.

"Honey," Hermione's spoon pauses in mid air from where she was feeding their one year old son. "You know that your Grandma and Grandpa Potter aren't in this world anymore. We've had this talk."

"I know," Rose nods solemnly. "But I still want to meet them. James and I have so many things we want to tell them!"

James fidgets. "I read a book from the library where some kids went to their parents' graves and it helped put the parents' souls at ease. Can't we try that with Grandma and Grandpa?"

It's not like Harry never planned to take his kids to visit the Potters' grave, but he had imagined taking them when they were much older. However, now that he has them both gazing at him with those big, pleading eyes he has no choice but to change his plans.

He shares a look with Hermione, silently communicating, before he sighs and says, "All right. I guess we can make a visit."

"You hear that, Gus?" Rose leans towards her baby brother. "We're going to visit our other grandparents!"

Harry apparates his family to a field at the outskirts of Godric's Hollow. They make their way to the graveyard silently and even little Augustus, with his green eyes and black hair just like his own, is quiet against Hermione's shoulder.

He has returned to this place many times, but today Harry's steps feel especially heavy as he makes his way to the graves marked:

James Potter, born 27 March 1960, died 31 October 1981

Lily Potter, born 30 January 1960, died 31 October 1981

"Hello mum. Hello dad." He says softly, barely loud enough to be heard over the wind that sweeps in at that moment and blows his hair in stray directions.

Harry stands there and remembers a different time. A time where his seventeen-year-old self had come to this very graveyard, desperate for some comfort or closure by meeting his family, and had only been faced with the grim knowledge that his parents were gone, that their bones lay moldering below the earth, that they were perhaps already reduced to dust with no idea that their adult son was before them. Wishing that he could join them, thinking that maybe it would be better for him too to fall asleep, lie under the snow and join them in their slumber. Home at last.

Rose squeezes his hand and he is jolted back to the present when she speaks: "Hello Grandma and Grandpa. It's me, your granddaughter Rose."

James introduces himself too and soon the twins are rambling, telling their grandparents about their day so far, how they've been told so many stories about their namesakes, how they'll be sure to make them proud.

"Don't worry about Daddy," Rose looks up at Harry and back to the gravestone with a determined expression. "We'll take good care of him. Right, James?"

James takes the wreath he brought with him and places it on the grave. "Of course we will. That's what family does."

Hermione's eyes are watery; she too is lost in memories. "I promised that we would be happy together. And I'll keep that promise."

"You *are* happy, aren't you?" Rose bites her lip and asks Harry.

He steps forward and places his hand on the marble grave stone: the vestiges of the life he could have had lying in front of him and the life he has now-the family that so fiercely loves and cherishes him-waiting behind him.

Harry wishes he could go back in time and tell his younger self-always so lost, desperately searching for a family and a place to belong-that the answer was there all along. Right there next to him.

"I am," Hot tears spill down his cheeks and for once he doesn't try to hold them back. "I am happy."

They take their time going back to the field. Along the way, Rose gets tired of walking and Harry raises her onto his shoulders, listening as she points at the clouds in the distance and tells him what they look like. James grows bored and wants to ride his broom once he gets to the clearing; Hermione gives him an ultimatum to be careful, but takes out the broom and snitch from her beaded bag anyway. Augustus is clearly tired of the excursion and pouts on Hermione's shoulder.

Harry closes his eyes and when he opens them again, nothing has changed. It's not a dream. The sun is going down and he's still surrounded by the chatter and laughter of his family.

Hermione holds her hand out to him and he takes it.

Harry smiles.

"Let's go home."

~**A/N**~ The art by Hastyhand for this chapter is based on two moments: "Welcome to the Family" and "Not a Dream." You can find the links to them on my profile or on the #homeishhr tag on [instagram](#)/[tumblr](#)

I wonder if anyone caught the reference to the story title's meaning here. The first time Harry visits the graveyard he wants to lie beneath the snow and make his home there, but things are different the second time around; his heart isn't with the dead anymore, but with the living. Harry's home is wherever Hermione and their family is.