

A Very Harry Christmas

For months before Christmas, Harry Potter spent every spare minute working on special gifts for his four-year-old twin daughters. He had to wait until the children were in bed, but once they were asleep, he was in the comfortable workshop he'd had built behind his big, rambling home in Godric's Hollow. Two beautiful dolls houses were forming under Harry's loving hands, with tiny furniture and working windows and doors. Thanks to a spell he'd put on them, the taps ran with real water which disappeared when it ran into the drains. Another spell gave the illusion that the houses' miniature lamps and torches lit when the switch on one wall was touched. Each house closed up to safely store the furniture inside, or opened wide so his little girls could arrange things to their hearts' content. Ginny was making curtains, bedspreads and tiny pillows for the houses.

Dobby stayed in the workshop with Harry most evenings, watching him and helping whenever possible. Dobby and Winky had six children, the oldest of whom was now thirteen years old and nearly as tall as his dad.

"Harry Potter sir?" Dobby asked one evening as he watched his master work.

"Hmm?" Harry replied, his tongue held between his teeth in concentration as he tried to fit a miniscule handle on the front door of one of the dolls houses.

"Could Dobby use the scraps from these houses to make one for Flower?" Flower was his and Winky's youngest child, a cute little girl elf who was the same age as Harry's daughters.

Harry turned and smiled at Dobby. "Of course! The girls will enjoy playing together with their houses," he replied. "Take whatever you need."

"Yes, they will," Dobby agreed with a wide smile. "Thank you, Harry Potter sir!"

Dobby's house project was more oddly shaped than Harry's, and wildly more colourful, but he took great pride in it and enjoyed working side-by-side with his master. With luck, his dolls house would be finished in time for Christmas, so his youngest daughter would receive her house the same day as the Potter girls.

* * * * *

The weather was unusually warm for this time of year, with only a slight chill in the air on this beautiful December day. Harry, his children and Dobby's children were in the back garden playing a rousing game of "catch the beanbag" when one of the older children threw the bag too hard, tossing it onto the roof of the two-storey house. Harry changed into a raven and flew up to get it, but hesitated when he reached the roof. He changed back into himself and studied something in front of him, then walked toward the roof's edge.

"I've got to do something up here for a while. You lot go on with the game," he called as he tossed the beanbag down to the waiting children.

"Do you need help?" Jamie, his oldest boy, said hopefully.

"No, I can manage alone. Thanks, though," Harry said with a warm smile. He watched as the boy shrugged, then got involved in the ongoing game once more.

Harry turned away from the game to look at his roof. There had been heavy storms recently, and several of his roof tiles were damaged or missing. He walked all over the house, checking to see if there was any more damage. He found three other areas with storm damage. Sighing, he became a raven again and flew to his workshop. He'd looked forward to spending the afternoon playing with his children, but more storms were expected soon, so he needed to mend the roof before they came.

He grabbed his tool box and the tiles that were left over after the house had been built and Levitated them to the roof, then went to get his ladder. Soon he was hard at work, replacing the damaged tiles, repairing the loose ones, and using wandless magic to seal the edges of all the mended places securely.

Harry stopped and looked into his back garden, enjoying the sight of all the children playing together so well, the big ones helping the little ones, Potter children and house-elf children intermingling freely. He'd always wanted a family, and now he had a big, rowdy, happy one. He grinned when he saw one of his children pick up a tiny house-elf child and gently swing her around, making the little elf squeal with glee. *This is the life!* he thought happily, squatting down to watch them. He rarely had the chance to just observe them like this. If he was anywhere near them when they wanted to play, it was no time at all before he was just as involved in whatever they were doing as the children, and enjoying every minute of it.

Squatting on a steeply pitched roof isn't the most comfortable position in the world, and Harry's legs were soon complaining about him staying there for so long. He straightened and moved to the ladder, carefully Levitating the extra tiles to the ground before turning to put his foot on the ladder. Just as he took his other foot off the roof, the world tilted crazily and he began to fall. Harry struggled to right the ladder, but the tool box in his hand unbalanced him even more. He tried to look beneath him to check for children before dropping the tools, but before he could do more than glance down, his head hit the edge of the roof and everything went black.

Ginny was sorting laundry with Winky when she heard a heavy thump against the house, another outside the sitting room window and children shrieking, the sounds ripping through her like dozens of knives. Those weren't playful shrieks, but terrified ones! What could scare the children that badly? Harry was outside with them, and the wards around their home were strong. Nobody could enter without permission, Harry had made certain of that. She drew her wand as she checked the Foe Glass – nobody stood outside the garden gate. A glance out of the window showed her that the children were clustered around something lying on the ground near the house, their faces shocked and white, or already streaked with tears. “Oh, no. *Harry!*” she cried and raced through the door, certain that he was the one who was hurt.

Once outside, she hurried toward the gathered children. She could see someone with a shock of messy black hair lying on the ground past the children's legs. As she ran, she quickly counted her sons – all of them were standing or kneeling by the still form. *It's Harry. I knew it was Harry*, she thought as she pushed through the children and dropped to her knees by her husband's body.

“Harry? Harry!” she cried, already beginning to examine him. She cast a Warming Charm and then used a Severing Charm to cut open his jacket and shirt, leaving them spread out under him to protect him from the cold ground. Once this was done, she glanced up at Jamie, who was kneeling beside his father. “What happened?”

“The ladder slipped and he fell,” the boy said, his green eyes dark and serious.

“Is he . . . dead?” Beth, her youngest, asked in a quavering voice.

“No, sweetheart, but he's badly hurt,” Ginny replied. She glanced around at the children, then looked back at Harry. “Somebody bring me my medical kit.”

“I'll do it,” Dan, her third son, said, then raced inside the house.

“MERLIN!” Ginny cried, “Harry needs you!” The phoenix was on his perch just inside the door, so he should come without her using a wand to call him.

Harry was bleeding from several wounds and lying on his side, his body bent in an odd position. She was afraid he at least had broken ribs, in addition to his apparently dislocated shoulder.

As Merlin began to drip tears onto Harry's wounds, Lily, Beth's twin, knelt by her father's head and began stroking his hair gently. Beth sat next to her, crying hard, her little hand patting her daddy's cheek.

“Wake up, Daddy, please wake up!” Beth cried. “Please, Daddy! I didn't mean to hurt you!”

Ginny looked up sharply at the girl. “What do you mean, you hurt him? I thought he fell from the ladder.”

Pip and Flower, two of Dobby's children, hung their heads and twisted their ears nervously. Beth cried harder, unable to speak as she incessantly patted her father's cheek.

Ginny noticed the youngest elves' guilty looks as well as Beth's. “Did you do something that made him fall? And, Beth, stop that. You'll hurt him,” Ginny said, more crossly than she intended.

The little girl snatched her hand back as if her father's cheek had burned her. “I didn't mean to! It was an a-a-a-accident!” she wailed.

Ignoring her daughter's cry, Ginny took the medical kit Dan handed her. She pulled out her diagnostic crystal, examining Harry as quickly as she could, then looked at her sons. “Boys, take hold of your father's other arm and hold on tight. I need to set his shoulder,” she said as she gently straightened his injured arm. “Hold on tight now,” she instructed as she gave her husband's arm a firm pull, popping the bone back into place. “That's good. You can let go now,” she told her sons, giving them a brief smile as they stepped back from their father's body. “It's a good job he was unconscious for that,” she muttered.

With Harry's most obvious injury taken care of, Ginny finally absorbed what Beth had said moments before. She glanced up at the stricken faces of the children surrounding her and said, “Somebody please tell me how this happened.” Everyone was silent for a long moment, but then Jamie cleared his throat nervously.

“We were all running, playing tag after we got tired of playing with the beanbag,” Jamie said. He was the oldest. It was his responsibility to look after the children when his dad wasn't with them. He looked sadly at his baby sister and the two youngest elves, wishing there was some way to comfort them. “I was running farther out in the garden and saw what happened. Dad was getting on the ladder when it went sideways, then fell down. I think they must have bumped into the ladder when he was just stepping onto it. He hit his head before he fell.”

“None of us was close enough to stop it,” his twin added, his voice low and sad.

“I thought he must have hit his head,” Ginny murmured as she continued to examine him. Remembering that she had upset children to deal with, she glanced up at her two oldest boys again. “Which little ones?”

“Beth, Flower and Pip,” Jamie said reluctantly.

Ginny sighed, dropping her eyes to the crystal in her hand once more. Harry had several badly broken ribs, some internal injuries, the injured shoulder, a broken hip and a concussion, possibly other injuries. Merlin had stopped the bleeding from his head and arm wounds. She sighed again, then studied her children's faces, her eyes finally resting on Beth, Flower and Pip.

"You weren't looking where you were going, were you?" she asked quietly. All three of them shook their heads. "Have you learned your lesson?" Three nods. "All right then. Don't worry about it anymore. I'm sure he won't blame you, nor do I."

All three children stared at her in disbelief, then began crying harder. Dobby and Winky comforted their children as well as they could, while Lily and Dan did their best to calm Beth.

Hermione Apparated into the garden just then. In the distance, her children were running toward the Potter house across their adjoining gardens. "The children said they heard screams from here when they were back by the Quidditch pitch," she said before her eyes fell on her best friend's still form on the ground. "Oh no! Harry!" She fell to her knees beside Ginny and wrapped her arm around the other woman's shoulders. "I'm so sorry! What happened?"

"He fell from the roof," Ginny said, her breath catching as she gazed at his bloodied face. "He has a head injury. That's probably why he didn't try to change into a bird or soften his landing somehow."

"How bad is he?" Hermione said quietly. "What can I do?"

"He needs to go to St. Mungo's," Ginny said, sitting back on her heels and pushing her hair out of her eyes with the back of her wrist. Her hands were bloody now from working on Harry. She glanced at her sister-in-law. "Can you stay with this lot while we're gone? They're pretty upset."

"Of course! Shall I take them home with me?"

"Whatever you want," Ginny said, sounding very tired all of a sudden.

Little Beth stretched out on the lawn, her face turned toward her father's, still sniffing but a bit calmer now. "Hi, Daddy," she said suddenly, a sob in her voice. "I'm sorry."

"It's OK, baby," Harry breathed, blinking slowly as he tried to focus his eyes. "Don't cry. I've been hurt . . . lots worse than this."

"How are you feeling, Harry?" Ginny asked, relieved that he was awake.

"Could you move me? I'm on something hard and lumpy – my tools, I think," he said, trying not to gasp with pain and frighten his children further.

"Hang on," Ginny said, then lifted her wand and Levitated him off of the tools that had spilled from his tool box as he fell. Ginny shook her head, disgusted with herself for worrying about his injuries too much to notice the uncomfortable situation he was in. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. I should have noticed and moved you before, but I wanted to examine you first."

Harry couldn't stifle his gasps and moans of pain when he was moved and finally settled on the grass. When he got his breath back, he reached across his body and grasped Ginny's hand briefly with his uninjured one. "It's OK," he said, trying to smile. He looked at the gathered children surrounding him, both human and elf, at Dobby and Winky, who were staring at him in horror, and at Hermione's sympathetic, worried face. "It's OK, really. I just . . . took a bad step."

"It was m-m-my fault, Daddy. I r-ran into the l-ladder," Beth said, doing her best to be brave.

"It was an accident," Harry insisted, his voice stronger now, "and if I weren't so thick-headed, I would have had someone at the bottom of the ladder to steady it. If it's anyone's fault, it's mine." He smiled at his youngest daughter and then glanced up at Lily, who had gone back to stroking his hair very gently. "That feels good."

"I know you like it when Mummy does this. I thought it might help," the little girl said very seriously.

"It is helping. Thank you," Harry said, equally serious. He looked at Beth, who still wore a guilt-ridden, horrified expression. "Could you hold my hand? That would make me feel better too."

"Yes!" she said eagerly, then lifted his big hand in both of her small ones, holding it tightly against her narrow chest. "Is this all right?"

"Perfect. Thank you," he said, giving her a tender smile. He could feel her little heart pounding frantically in her chest. He wished he could find more ways to comfort her, but he was in no position to comfort anyone at the moment.

Ginny examined him carefully once more. "You have several broken bones, a concussion and some internal injuries – nothing you haven't been through before, tough guy," she said, giving him a saucy wink, trying to be cheerful and encouraging. "It's St. Mungo's for you, love. I don't have all the potions you'll need."

"OK," he agreed, then glanced around at all the children surrounding him – his and Ginny's, Dobby and Winky's, and now Ron and Hermione's as well. "Where's Ron? He's missing the show," he said, trying to be funny as he smiled weakly at Hermione.

"He had to work today. Don't you worry about the children, I'll take good care of them," Hermione promised him.

"Call Mum if this lot gets to be too much for you," Ginny told her. Pulling a roll of gauze out of her bag, she Levitated Harry and sent the bandage flying around his rib cage, wrapping him tightly enough to support his ribs and support his injured arm for the trip to the hospital. She also put a brace on him to protect his broken hip from movement.

As she worked, Harry tried to stifle his groans as much as possible. The children looked scared enough without hearing their father moaning in pain.

Finally, Ginny was finished. “That should hold you for now. I’ll give you a small dose of pain potion, as well, just enough to keep you more comfortable during the transport to the hospital. I don’t want to give you enough to mask any symptoms for the other healers. Stick out your tongue, handsome,” she said, a teasing glint in her eye.

“I just love your bedside manner,” Harry retorted before obediently holding his tongue out for the few drops of potion she was giving him. After a moment, he sighed. “Thanks. That helped.”

“Good,” Ginny said, checking him once more with her crystal. “I think you’re stable enough to travel now.” She glanced around at her children. “You lot behave yourself and listen to Aunt Hermione, Dobby and Winky, all right? I expect the hospital will want to keep your dad overnight, and I won’t leave him there without someone to watch him.” They all nodded solemnly. “All right, everyone move back. I’m going to have Merlin flash us there.”

“Bye, Daddy. Feel better soon!” Lily said, bending over and kissing her father’s forehead.

Beth held his hand up to her cheek. “I’m so sorry, Daddy,” she said, crying again. “Please get well soon!”

“I’ll do my best, baby. Don’t cry, you’ll give yourself a headache,” Harry replied, rubbing her soft cheek with his thumb.

“I already have one,” she admitted with a slight smile. She finally let go of his hand and stepped back.

“You boys take care of your sisters, all right?” Harry said, looking at his oldest sons.

“Yes, Dad,” Jamie and Siri said together, each one draping a brotherly arm around a little redhead’s shoulders. They held their sisters close, comforting them as their parents disappeared.

With a flash, Harry, Ginny and Merlin were gone.

* * * * *

“Hi, Harry,” Marcus Pomfrey said when he entered the private room where Harry had been put to bed at St. Mungo’s. “It’s been a while. What happened?”

Ginny filled Marcus in while he examined his patient. “You’re right, Ginny. Broken ribs and hip, injured shoulder, a few internal injuries – bruised kidneys and spleen – and a concussion. Painful, but not too difficult to heal,” he said with a smile at Harry, who looked relieved. “You’ll be home in a day or two, my friend,” he said, patting Harry on the leg as he left to get the necessary potions.

“That’s good news, isn’t it, sweetie?” Ginny said encouragingly. “You’ll be home in plenty of time for Christmas.”

“I need to get home *before* Christmas,” he protested. “I still have some things to finish on the dolls houses.”

“Harry,” Ginny said in a warning tone, “you’ll go home when you’re well, not before.”

He sighed, knowing he wasn’t going to win this one. “Yes, Madam Healer,” he said meekly, earning a smile from his wife.

Harry was soon treated, given a heavier dose of pain potion and sleeping soundly. Ginny sighed and sat back in the chair by his bed, finally allowing the tears to come.

“He’s going to be fine, Ginny,” Marcus assured her. “You did a wonderful job of stabilizing him, and his injuries weren’t nearly as bad as they might have been.”

“I know,” she said, wiping her eyes furiously. “It was just . . . so frightening, him lying so still, all broken and bloody like that, and the children so upset, and”

“You’ve had a hard day,” Marcus sympathized. “Can I get you anything?”

She smiled at her old friend and mentor gratefully. “No, I’ll be fine. I just need to watch him sleep. That’s the best medicine I can have now.”

“All right. Let me know if either of you need anything,” he said warmly as he left Harry’s room.

Ginny stood up and leaned over her husband’s still form, studying that beloved face, now so peaceful in sleep. “We haven’t done this in quite a while,” she said, running her fingers gently through his hair. “Believe me, I haven’t missed sitting by your bedside while you heal.” She brushed away her tears and kissed his forehead. “I love you so much, Harry. I’m glad you’re going to be well soon. I don’t need scares like this!” She rested her cheek against his for a moment, then sighed and settled back in her chair.

* * * * *

“How is he?” Ron whispered as he entered Harry’s room a short while later. “Hermione sent word to the office that he was hurt.”

“He’s going to be fine in a day or two,” Ginny assured him. “He fell from the roof.”

“He can bloody well fly like a bird!” Ron cried, doing his best to keep his voice down. “How the hell did he fall?”

“He was knocked out. Jamie and Siri said he hit his head on the roof when the ladder slipped,” she said with a shrug. “He’s so lucky. He could’ve been hurt so much worse. He could’ve broken his back. He could’ve died!” She stifled a sob and tried to force herself to be calm.

Her brother pulled her up into his arms. "I'm sorry. I know this is hard on you."

"Thanks," she sighed, relaxing in his embrace. "You give good hugs, did you know that?"

He chuckled softly. "Hermione seems to think so." Pushing her back so he could see her face, Ron smiled at his sister as he wiped the tears from her cheeks. "Better?"

"Yeah." She rested her head against his shoulder again, soaking up the comfort he was offering.

"Sup, mate?" Harry muttered, his voice slurred and sleepy.

"What are you doing awake, sir?" Ginny demanded.

"Missing the party, apparently," he replied, smiling sweetly at her.

Ron grinned at him. "You'll do anything to get a day off work, won't you?" he teased.

"D'you really think taking a header off the roof is a good way to get a little vacation?" Harry countered, more awake now. "I don't recommend it, honestly." He chuckled, then groaned. "Remind me not to laugh, OK?"

"Harry?" Ron said, leaning toward him, his eyes full of mischief. "Don't laugh."

Harry grinned, glad Ron had come to visit.

* * * * *

Ron managed to cheer both Harry and Ginny while he was there, and made certain both of them ate a decent dinner before he left.

"Thanks for coming, mate," Harry said, reaching out to squeeze Ron's arm with his good hand.

"No problem. You'd do the same for me," Ron replied, patting Harry's hand. "Take care of yourself."

"Yeah, thanks," Harry said.

"Tell Hermione we really appreciate her taking care of the children. You should probably call Mum and Dad to give her a break from them," Ginny said, looking tired now.

"Don't worry about the kids. We know how to deal with them. If they give us any trouble, we'll just lock 'em in the broom shed," Ron teased. He waited, watching for Ginny's reaction.

"Ronald Weasley!" she said in an exact impression of her mother. "You wouldn't!"

"No, I wouldn't, but I just love to tweak your nose every so often," he said, reaching out and pinching the end of her nose very gently. "OK, I'll stop spreading cheer in here now and go home. Let us know if you need anything, all right?"

Harry just smiled. He was getting sleepy again, having just been given another dose of his potions.

"Thanks for coming, Ron," Ginny said, giving her brother a hug. "I needed to laugh a bit."

"I knew that," he said with a cheeky grin. "See you later, Harry. Take care! Ginny, get some rest! Bye."

* * * * *

The next day, Harry felt better, but he was still sleeping a lot. He was startled awake from a nap by the sound of many whispering voices.

"Huh?" he said, looking blearily around. "Who's there?"

"It's all right," Ginny told him, smoothing his hair back and kissing his forehead. "You have some visitors." She helped him put his glasses on and then stood back so he could see who was in the room. Molly and Arthur had brought Harry's children to see him.

Harry smiled, his eyes lighting up at the sight of those beloved faces. "Hi! It's good to see you," he said, reaching toward them with his uninjured hand. His sons moved close to the bed and Harry ruffled their hair or touched their shoulders as they milled around near him.

Ginny lifted the younger ones one at a time so they could see their father better.

"We miss you, Daddy," six-year-old John said with solemn green eyes.

"I miss you too," he said, stroking the little boy's cheek gently while Ginny held him. As Ginny set John down, Harry looked around the room. "Where are the girls?"

"Here's Lily," Molly said, hefting the tiny four-year-old into her arms and holding her where Harry could reach her, "and Beth's hiding behind Grandpa."

Harry tickled Lily's nose with the end of her hair, then looked toward Arthur. "Why are you hiding, Beth?" he asked, twisting a bit to see her. "Beth?"

Come here, sweetheart. Daddy missed you."

"Come on, Beth," Ginny encouraged her. "Daddy can't get up and come to you yet."

Beth took a hesitant step toward him while the other children parted to make room for her to get to her father.

"Come on, baby. I need one of your hugs," he encouraged her.

"How are you, Daddy?" she said hesitantly.

"I'm fine," he said, smiling at her. He held out his arm and looked at Ginny, who lifted the little girl and deposited her on his bed very gently.

"Don't wiggle," Ginny warned her daughter. "You can hurt him if you do."

"Oh," Beth said, leaning away from her father. "I don't want to hurt you, Daddy."

"It's OK, sweetheart. I need a hug from you."

"No, I might hurt you," she said, then turned away from him and started to slide off the bed.

Harry wrapped his arm around her and pulled her to him, hugging her closely, grunting a bit as he did so. Ignoring the pain his movement had caused, he held his little girl closely, resting his cheek on her hair. "Mmmm, you always smell so good," he murmured as he cuddled her. Finally, she sat back from him, put her hands on his cheeks and studied his face.

"I was so scared," she said in a small voice. "I thought I'd killed you."

"I thought we'd cleared all that up, baby," he said softly, tucking a stray hair behind her ear with a gentle hand. "I told you it was my fault."

"I love you, Daddy," she said, smiling at him at last.

"I love you too, Beth," he said quite seriously. He embraced her again so he could kiss her cheek, then opened his arm, releasing her so Ginny could set her back on her feet.

"Thanks for bringing this lot to see me," he said to his in-laws, who nodded and smiled at him.

Molly wiped tears from her eyes. She'd heard how badly Harry had been hurt, but seeing him made it all too real. She'd managed to control herself while dealing with the girls, but now that all the children were focused on their father, she could no longer hold her emotions in check.

"Mum, I'm OK, really," Harry said, seeing his mother-in-law's reaction.

"You know what a silly thing I am, dear," she said, waving her hand ineffectually in front of her face. "I'm glad you're feeling better." Arthur wrapped an arm around her shoulder and pulled her to him. She rested her head on his shoulder for a moment, then finally got herself under control once more.

"Grandma, are you crying?" Lily said, patting Molly's arm.

"Just a bit, dear. I'll be fine," Molly assured her, stroking the little girl's hair. "You and your sister look so pretty today," she added, as she fussed with the child's hair, successfully distracting both Lily and herself.

"When are you coming home, Dad?" Dan said, moving down the side of the bed a bit so his father could see him more comfortably.

"As soon as possible!" Harry said, grinning at his children.

The girls were small enough that Arthur and Molly picked them up and held them so they could see their daddy during the visit. The boys jostled for position next to the bed, each of them wanting to be where they could see their dad better. Small and medium-sized hands reached out to touch their father, gently patting his arm, leg, or grasping his hand.

Brian stumbled into the bed just then, making Harry grimace and groan in pain. The little boy backed up in horror, his eyes welling up with tears. "I'm sorry, Daddy! I didn't mean to hurt you!"

"Boys, stand still," Ginny snapped. She'd heard Harry's slight groan when he pulled Beth into his arm, but he was obviously in a lot more pain this time. Her sons instantly snatched their hands back and froze in place, each of them being careful to touch neither the bed nor their father.

It took a very long few moments for Harry to ride out the pain and get his breathing under control again. "I'm OK. It must be time for my potion, right?" he said, glancing at his wife.

She looked at her watch. "Yes. I'll go get your dose."

"I can get it," Arthur offered. "You stay here. You look tired."

"Thanks, Dad," she said gratefully, sinking back in her chair and pulling Brian into her arms. "I'm sorry I snapped at you. Please don't cry, sweetheart. Your daddy and I both know you didn't mean to hurt him. He's much better. We just have to be careful around him until he's well."

"When will he be well?" Brian asked, looking up at her with frightened, tearful eyes.

Like all of her sons, Brian looked so much like Harry, it tugged at Ginny's heart. She could easily picture Harry as a baby and little boy now, with five sons who were cast in the same mould as her husband. She touched the hint of a dimple in her little boy's chin and smiled at him. "He'll be well in a day or two. We have to be patient. Can you manage that?"

Brian nodded solemnly. "I'll try."

"That's all any of us can ask," she said, kissing his sweet-smelling cheek and holding him close.

"What have you lot been up to?" Harry said, smiling as he looked at each child in turn.

"We've taken care of all the animals, and straightened up the playroom," Jamie said, being the responsible oldest child.

"And we're making you a surprise!" John said, his face glowing with excitement.

Dan clamped a hand over his mouth and said, "Shhhh!"

"Oh, sorry," John said, looking chagrined.

Harry chuckled. "No problem," he said, grinning. "I promise to be surprised."

"How's the food in here?" Siri asked, trying to act very grown-up.

"Not bad. Your mum makes sure they take good care of me," Harry replied. "But I'll be glad to get home!"

"Dobby and Winky and their kids said to tell you 'hi' and that they're sorry they couldn't come," Dan said as he handed his dad a card. "They made this for you."

"Thanks," Harry said, opening the card and grinning at the drawings inside. Each of Dobby's children, as well as Dobby and Winky, had not only signed the card, but decorated it in every way they could think of. There was very little bare parchment showing. "That's great," Harry said as he handed the card to Ginny so she could see it.

"We made you cards too," Siri added, handing his dad a stack of parchments.

Harry smiled and spent plenty of time examining each card in detail. He made complimentary comments about each one, making his children blush and smile with pleasure. Ginny set the cards on the window ledge where he could see them easily.

"What a treat! Thanks for the cards, you lot. They're wonderful," Harry said as he watched Ginny put the last one on the windowsill.

"We'll make you new ones for tomorrow!" John said eagerly.

"I'll enjoy looking at those, too," his dad promised.

Arthur arrived with the nurse close behind him.

"Here you go, Mr. Potter," the nurse said, poised for him to open his mouth.

"Is this the one that makes me sleepy?" Harry said.

"Unfortunately, yes. I know you have company, but they can't stay long," the nurse said. "What handsome boys you have, Mr. Potter!" she added as she looked around. "And what beautiful little girls!"

"Thanks," he said, smiling at his brood.

The nurse smiled apologetically at the children. "Your father needs to rest. He'll be asleep in a few minutes."

"But we just got here!" Dan protested, his blue eyes darting from the nurse to his dad, then to his mum. "Can't we—"

Arthur put a calming hand on his grandson's shoulder. "I told you lot before we left home that we wouldn't be able to stay but a few minutes. You all agreed to that, remember?" Five dark heads and two red ones nodded, their faces glum.

"I'm glad you came," Harry said, reaching out to ruffle the hair of each child he could reach. They moved around so he could get to all of them. "Give Dobby, Winky and their children my best."

"We will, Dad," Jamie promised, his face solemn.

"Mr. Potter, you'll regret it if you don't take this potion now. It's past time for it," the nurse warned him. He nodded and opened his mouth obediently, making a horrible face as he swallowed to make his children laugh. He chuckled, glad to hear their laughter.

"Don't go yet," Harry said when he saw the boys moving away from his bed. "Stay and talk to me for a bit."

"What shall we talk about?" Siri said, tilting his head as he studied his father's face.

"Anything," Harry replied, already drowsy. "I'm enjoying your company." His children complied, and he smiled as he listened to them. Their voices

became a pleasant buzz in his ears as he fell asleep.

* * * * *

The next day, it was Christmas Eve, and Harry was healthy enough to go home. Once he regained a bit of his strength, he used his own healing powers to speed up the process. Now he stood grinning happily at his wife as she checked to make certain they weren't leaving anything behind.

"Ready?" she said at last.

"Let's go home," he said, offering her his hand. Merlin lifted off, they grasped his tail and were soon flashed to their own entry hall.

"We're home!" Ginny called, setting their things down against the wall. She expected a rush of happy children, but was surprised when nobody came to greet them. Finally, Molly Weasley poked her head out of the sitting room.

"In here," she said with a grin. "Welcome home!"

"Thanks," Harry said, a puzzled look on his face. "Where are the kids?"

"You'll see," Molly said mysteriously, then disappeared inside the sitting room.

"What d'you reckon?" Harry said, looking down at his wife, amusement tickling the corners of his mouth.

"Let's go and find out," she said, leading him to the doorway.

When they stepped through the archway into the room, Christmas lights flicked on all around them. "Welcome home!" the children shouted, clustering around their parents excitedly. Arthur and Molly stood to one side, enjoying the jubilant greetings.

Harry grinned at his children, kneeling down to hug them in groups and individually. "It's so good to see you lot! I missed you!" he said, delighted with his welcome.

"We missed you too!" Jamie and Siri said in unison. The others chattered over each other until Harry couldn't understand a thing they were saying.

Harry hugged Arthur and Molly and thanked them for caring for the children, then looked around the room. When he'd left home, the Christmas tree had been cut and waiting on the porch to be brought in and decorated. Now it was decorated and the entire ceiling was hung with baubles that looked much too familiar. He saw the house-elves by the door to the kitchen.

"Dobby, did you do this?" he said, nodding toward the baubles hung from the ceiling.

Dobby nodded, looking a bit nervous. "The children all helped, Harry Potter sir."

Harry looked more closely at the baubles. As he'd feared, they each had a picture of him on them. Similar baubles were on the tree, the mantle, the side tables, everywhere. "Are they all the same?" Harry asked, his mouth twitching in amusement.

"Oh, no, Harry Potter, sir! Dobby and Winky is showing the children how to make them, and we made some with pictures of all of Harry Potter's children and Ginny Potter, as well!"

"Did you? Cool!" Harry said, bending over to inspect some of the ornaments on the tree. His children began pointing out which ones they'd made, and whose pictures were on each one. "They're beautiful," he said at last. "Well done, all of you!"

"We made them for the elves' tree, too, Dad," Dan offered. "Come and see!" Sure enough, the small tree in the elves' quarters had charming handmade ornaments with pictures of each of Dobby and Winky's children on them.

Flower and Pip stood uncertainly to one side while Harry and his family were visiting the elves' rooms. Harry went over and squatted in front of them. "How are you?"

"We is fine, Harry Potter, sir," Pip said quietly.

"We is glad you is home, Harry Potter, sir," Flower added. She pulled something from behind her. "Flower is making this for you, sir."

Harry took the proffered ornament and admired it. "It's beautiful!" he said. Flower had painted Hedwig on the ornament. Pip held out another ornament on which he'd painted Merlin. "That's beautiful too! Good job!"

"We is making them for you, Harry Potter, sir," Pip said.

"Thank you! I'll go and hang them on our tree," Harry said, giving each little elf a hug. As he held them, he whispered, "You're part of the family and I love you. Don't ever forget that." He released them and stood up, glad to see them smiling at him fully for the first time since his accident.

* * * * *

Harry and Ginny were sound asleep Christmas morning when seven young bodies launched themselves at their parents' bed.

"Wake up! It's Christmas! Presents!" the children called, their sweet young voices like music to Harry's ears. He grabbed as many as he could reach and wrestled playfully with them a bit before Levitating them off of the bed so he and Ginny could get up. He kept them Levitating, making all of them giggle, as he and Ginny put on their dressing gowns and slippers, being deliberately slow simply to tease the children. Finally, Harry

released the spell, setting the children down gently, and then followed his brood downstairs. He and Ginny stood in the doorway to the sitting room and watched as the children tore into their presents.

Harry had stayed up half the night finishing his daughters' dolls houses. Now they stood off to one side, partially hidden behind a chair. Lily and Beth hadn't noticed them yet.

As she crawled under the tree to retrieve a small present that had been pushed back too far to reach easily, Beth saw the dolls houses out of the corner of her eye. She gasped and sat up suddenly, making the whole tree rock from the impact. Hedwig and Pig, both of whom had decided the tree looked like a nice place to roost, took off when the tree began to move.

Harry stabilized the tree and its ornaments so nothing would fall on the children, cats and dogs crawling about underneath it, and smiled as he saw the delight on his daughters' faces.

"Are these for us?" Lily gasped as she sat down beside one of the houses.

"Yeah, look at the tags!" Beth told her happily. "B-E-T-H spells Beth! That's me!"

Lily beamed at her parents. "Thank you!"

"Yes, thank you!" Beth chimed in.

"Your daddy made them for you," Ginny said, kneeling by her daughters and joining them in exploring the houses.

"And your mum made the curtains, bedspreads and pillows," Harry added, squatting next to his girls. "Do you really like them?"

"Oh yes!" the twins cried excitedly. They bounced to their feet and wrapped their small arms around his neck. Since Harry was still squatting, they threw him off balance when their weight hit him. He rolled onto his back, holding them tightly so they wouldn't be hurt.

"Family pile-up!" Dan cried and all the other children joined the fun. They tried their best to tickle Harry, a favour he returned with interest until the Potter clan was a writhing, giggling mass on the floor. When they all settled down, they lay on the floor looking up at the ceiling, where dozens of Harry Potter faces gazed down on them.

"It's a very Harry Christmas," Jamie quipped, making his family laugh.

"A very Harry Christmas, indeed," Ginny agreed, giving Harry a lovely upside-down kiss.

"That was the best present you've given me so far today," Harry said, leering up at her and wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

Ginny just smiled. Their day would be full, with the entire Weasley clan coming over for dinner, as well as Remus and Tonks and their children, and various other friends. But this morning was for the family. She could see the deep contentment in her husband's eyes. Life for Harry Potter had been hard in his early years, but now life was sweet, and she could not be more delighted about that.

"Sometimes I think you're the biggest kid in the house," she teased.

"And your point is?" he said, grabbing her trailing hair and tugging her down into another kiss.

"Eauw, gross! They're snogging again!" the children said good-naturedly, getting up to play with their presents.

"Mmm, yeah, we're snogging again," Harry said contentedly, lifting his arm so she could snuggle in next to him on the floor. "Does life get any better than this?"

"I don't think so," she murmured, nestling her head into the crook of his shoulder and joining him in watching their children having a wonderful Christmas