

okay?”

“It’ll do,” she assured. “I’m gonna hurt regardless, this can’t make it much worse.”

Well, that was one way to look at it.

They were as ready as it got, now.

“After this is all over, I want a proper birthday party,” Neville blurted suddenly, startling them all. “Like last year. A party for me and Harry, with everyone there, to celebrate us turning seventeen. This birthday has been shit.”

Harry laughed, grinning at his friend, seeing the girls smile too. “We’ll make it happen,” he promised. “Proper party, for the two of us. We’ll have it at my place; it’s got a swimming pool.” The Pottery’s pool was bigger than the one at Seren Du, even.

“Perfect,” Neville said with a satisfied nod. “Glad we got that sorted.”

And then he put both hands on the Wardstone.

Harry did the same, sinking into the now-familiar liminal space between his magic and the castle’s, bridging the gaps between them until every beat of his heart pulsed in the stones themselves. He bridged the gaps between the heirs, too, reaching for Hannah and Luna and Neville, his magic twining with theirs joyously.

There was no sudden flare of pain when the assault on the wards began. This time, they were ready. They softened the blow, drawing deep from the roots of the Forbidden Forest to press back against Voldemort’s cloying darkness.

Once again, time ceased to exist. Except for one moment, at eleven forty-four PM, when the heir of Gryffindor came of age.

At that moment, Neville’s full power rushed through the wards, bright as a flare, bursting through the tightly-woven net of magic and making the castle sing. The swirls of red in Harry’s vision grew brighter, bolder — all the excess magic that usually poured off someone at the moment of their maturation, siphoned directly into the Hogwarts wards themselves.

He wondered if Voldemort was getting angry, yet. He wasn’t trying nearly as hard to crack the wards as last time — he was waiting. Biding his time, with just enough pressure to let everyone know he was there. Practically knocking on the door.

Harry could envision it; Voldemort stood with his half-hearted attack on the wards, while all around him his followers gathered for their final fight. They would have trolls with them, most likely, and dementors. Perhaps even giants if the rumours were true.

It wouldn’t matter. They could handle it.

He didn’t even question that Voldemort knew exactly the moment of Harry’s birth. Snape would have told him. The only reason Harry himself knew was because Remus told him.