

the family potter

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the family potter

by [dirgewithoutmusic](#)

Summary

Lily remembered her sister, how there had been a time she was curious and delighted about magic, before it slowly sank in that she could look and not touch.

The last thing Petunia had said to Lily before she died was a chilly goodbye, ending a holiday dinner where they'd had a shrieking row in the entryway. Petunia had said 'freak' and Lily had hissed 'better than this, better than this being my whole fucking world, Tune, do you even see yourself, are you happy--'

And now here was Dudley Vernon Dursley fussing himself to sleep as Lily walked the halls of the Godric's Hollow house. His tiny soft hands with their tiny soft fingernails curled under her chin, the same way Harry's always had.

She passed James, who was gently bouncing his way up the hall the opposite way. "I think he's asleep," James mouthed over Harry's tousled head. His hair was the same mess, his head bent down as he peered at his sleeping son.

Lily stopped where she stood, her nephew heavy on her chest, her husband smiling, her sister buried. "James," she said. "How are we going to do this?"

Notes

To answer the prompt:

procraesthetics said:

I wonder what would happen if Dudley grew up in the wizarding world but still as a muggle? like kind of reverse AU where his parents are dead and he has to go to Lily for whatever reason? do you think he would become bitter like Petunia about magic?

- Translation into Português brasileiro available: [a família potter](#) by [FallDownDead](#)
- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [the family potter](#) by [Fluffil](#)

Lily remembered her sister, how there had been a time she was curious and delighted about magic, before it slowly sank in that she could look and not touch.

The last thing Petunia had said to Lily before she died was a chilly goodbye, ending a holiday dinner where they'd had a shrieking row in the entryway. Petunia had said *freak* and Lily had hissed *better than this, better than this being my whole fucking world, Tune, do you even see yourself, are you happy--*

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Lily stopped where she stood, her nephew heavy on her chest, her husband smiling, her sister buried. "James," she said. "How are we going to do this?"

"Oh," he said. "Hey. Don't you cry, you'll start them off-- unless you need to cry, I mean, you go ahead, hey, sweetheart, hey, it's alright, you just let it out." He stepped forward, shifting Harry gently to his other shoulder, and pressed his forehead to hers. "We tuck them in, okay, that's what we do next. Then we go to our own bed, okay, and go to sleep, and when we wake up it'll be a new day."

"A new day," she said. "Another day-- James, that's the-- I'm so *tired*."

"So let's sleep. It'll look better in the morning," he said. "And if it doesn't look better this morning, it'll look better in the next one."

"You promise?"

"Better than that. I'll show you. Every day," he said and kissed her cold forehead.

--

Dudley had not shown up on the Potters' doorstep with the milk bottles. Lily had gotten a phone call from the landline she still had installed in Godric's Hollow, about an accident, and she had gone down to the Muggle police station to identify the bodies.

The cupboard under the stairs was filled with spiders, broomsticks, and the sewing machine Lily's mother had given her when she married James-- that's all. Dudley slept downstairs. Uncle Remus taught Dudley and Harry to knock out coded messages through the wall their rooms shared.

In the backyard, beside a rickety porch and an ambitious hedge, James taught them to fly-- first on little tot brooms where their toes brushed the grass the whole time, then out of the barrels of practice brooms James used for lessons and coaching Little League Quidditch.

When the boys turned ten, five weeks apart, they both got shiny new Nimbuses on Dudley's birthday (which came first), and a set of enchanted Quidditch balls on Harry's, to share. The Bludgers were enchanted to be very kind but Dudley spent long afternoons whacking them far afield while Harry chased the Snitch at his back.

Harry had a scar on his forehead, like a jagged bit of lightning. Dudley had no scars-- the car crash that had killed his parents hadn't touched him where he sat strapped into a car seat in the back, chewing on a stuffed dinosaur toy.

Lily did not believe in lying to the children. She was bare years off being a child herself, and spare moments on the far side of a war. When Dudley asked about his parents, she told him there had been an accident. She pulled pictures off the shelf and wrote Petunia's old university friends for more.

Photographs came by mailman, the images still and unnatural to Dudley's eye. Every day he'd gone out to play, for years, he'd been waving at the picture near the back door of his aunt and uncle on their wedding day, and they waved back every time.

"She was very clever," Lily said. "Your mom liked to know everything."

"And my dad?"

"Vernon liked... cars?" James offered. "That's the word, right, Lily?"

"I didn't know him very well," Lily said. "He liked drills, I think; he worked for a firm that made them, and he talked about that a lot."

Dudley brushed his thumbs over the dull edges of the photos. When Lily went off to Auror headquarters the next morning for work, James bundled the boys up and took them on an impromptu invisible tour of Grunnings Drill Manufacturing Inc.

They tiptoed down halls and past water coolers and ringing fellytones. They held hands under the Cloak as they dodged around the machines on the manufacturing floor, thumping and pounding and whirring away loudly enough that Harry and Dudley could whisper to each other under the noise. An elevator took them all the way up to the top floor. Harry whistled cheerily and eerily along with the elevator music while the Muggles slowly edged toward the doors and pressed floor buttons lower than they'd originally wanted.

There were boxes and cabinets and folders and desks and staticky monitor screens full of numbers strewn in endless grids. "Merlin's knuckles," said Harry, who was seven and a half and rather proud of this expletive. "People can look at this *all day*, their *whole lives*, and not *die*?"

"Work is hard work," said James.

"At least mum gets to *curse things*."

"But my dad liked it?" Dudley said, peering at a white board that was bleeding enthusiastic marker. "There's a lot of things, here. Maybe he liked knowing things, too."

When the boys asked about the scar on Harry's forehead, Lily and James looked at each other. "You know how sometimes we sit with Uncle Remus and talk about a war?" James said. "Or with Ms. Amelia or Mr. Mundungus."

"Mr. Mundungus is kinda smelly," Harry said helpfully.

"It's not nice to say so though," said James, and Lily made a face.

"Are we raising them to be nice?" Lily said.

"I'm *trying*," said James.

"You talk about a war," said Harry and shrugged. Dudley nodded.

"There was a very bad man, in those days," said James.

"Voldemort," said Lily, and James made a face.

"He was so scary a lot of people don't like to say his name, even now," said James. "And he was coming after us because we had been fighting against him, in the war. He came to the house and he tried to hurt you, Harry. But it didn't work. It hurt him instead, and gave you that scar."

"Is he going to come back?" said Dudley, who was paler than his normal pink.

"No one's heard of him since then," said Lily.

"Where were you?" said Harry, because all his life they had been right there.

"Oh," said Lily, but her throat closed up.

"We were at Dudley's mum and dad's funeral," said James. "Our friend-- our friend Sirius was watching you two. The bad man, he came to the house. He. Well. I."

"Sirius died," said Lily, one hand squeezing James's knee and the other reaching down to brush hair off Dudley's forehead. "You lived, Harry, and Voldemort vanished. And that's why sometimes people stare in the streets, baby." James tweaked Harry's collar absently.

--

Two days after they had buried Lily's sister, the Potters had stood together in the first chills of November and buried James's brother.

Sirius had been burned off the Black family tree years before. Lily and James had talked to his cousin Andromeda, to Remus, and then they had laid him to rest in the Potter family plot. At the wake, they'd told old jokes about squirrel breath, shedding, and man's best friend. Remus had fallen asleep on their couch and stayed for a month.

--

It took a two hour row with HR for Lily to get two passes to the Ministry's Bring Your Kid To Work Day.

"He's a Muggle."

"He's not," Lily snapped. "He's family."

She had to get permission, sign a million forms, and she also had to take the boys in early so that Dudley could get smothered in the spells that would keep the Anti-Muggle wards around the Ministry from activating on him. "If a Muggle stumbles in somehow, they just see a funny-smelling supply cabinet and turn back around," Lily told Dudley. He nodded and dragged Harry off by the wrist to go look at the fountain.

The windows were pouring sunlight into the underground room-- the maintenance workers had just gotten a win on their contract negotiations and had banished the grimy rain-spattered windows of the previous weeks. The light hit the falling water, the golden statues, and the small excitable crowd of Ministry dependents who were gathering in the atrium. Dudley was fishing about in the fountain for Knuts to toss back out again, elbow-deep, and Harry was laughing and coming up with weird wishes to make on them.

Lily hadn't said *son*. She'd said *family*, and that was true enough, wasn't it? She didn't say *son*-- she had a son, and she had a nephew, a ward, another child who came to her after nightmares and scraped knees. It was not less, it was just words.

Lily worried about stealing more things from Petunia. Tuney had shrieked at her, in ladies' restrooms and suburban foyers, had hissed at her in grocery store aisles and family dinners, because Lily got everything. And now Lily had her son.

Lily could just imagine it-- could just see Petunia's face twisting and chin stabbing at the air. *You could have anything, and you took my son-- my son!*

"You left him to me," Lily whispered, but that wasn't quite right. "You left," she whispered, and that wasn't quite right either, so she strode off toward the fountain to ask the boys if they wanted to go see the Auror spellwork ranges. Dudley's sodden shirt sleeves dripped all over the Ministry floors. Harry's hair fell down into his eyes and they both grinned bright enough to rival the spelled sunlight.

When Harry was eleven years old, his Hogwarts letter came by owl. He'd been accidentally blowing windows open and lighting cauliflower on fire for years. James took Harry to go get his wand at Ollivanders, and Lily took Dudley to the Owl Emporium where he tried to convince her they should build an aviary in the backyard. They came home with a fat black cat who hissed at everyone. Dudley named him Spooks, and Lily called him Monster.

"Did you have to?" said James. "That is the meanest beast I've ever met, and I've known Remus unmedicated on full moons and a pubescent Sirius thwarted in love."

Lily, who had ink on her cheek and a ballpoint pen stuck behind her ear, waved vaguely at the living room without looking up from her arrest report. Dudley was asleep in an armchair. The

cat sprawled across his lap. Both its front paws were wrapped around Dudley's arm as it cleaned his wrist with aggressive fondness.

"Alright," said James. "Yeah, you had to."

When Ginny Weasley ran shouting after the train carrying her littlest big brother away to his first year of school, her arms waving madly, her heart desperate to go along, there was a pudgy, pink-cheeked boy racing next to her. Ginny's arms were little twigs compared to Dudley's and they waved and waved, bumping elbows and giggling as their shouts grew competitively louder.

"Send me letters!"

"Send me a real Snitch!"

"Send me a *hippogriff*!"

"We'll send you a toilet seat!" Fred hollered back over the rumble and shriek of the train, and Dudley giggled so hard he had to sit down.

"Hi," she said. "I'm Ginny Weasley."

"Dudley Dursley," he said and took the hand she offered.

Every visible speck of her was freckly, her hair in a bushy red tail down her back. Dudley liked her immediately. "I'm so mad," Ginny said cheerfully, while Dudley dusted off his backside. "I want *on that train*."

Dudley didn't say "me, too," but he did bounce back to where their parents--his guardians--had clustered together to see if they could all get some ice cream.

It was the first year the boys wouldn't be home together, getting homeschooled by James and taken on educational adventures. Harry wrote home about the Gryffindor Quidditch team, about trolls, feasts, and a Professor Snape. For the first, they shipped him his broom. For the last, Lily charged down to the school to yell at someone named Severus.

Dudley and James did homeschool most mornings, scribbling at the kitchen table or with James conjuring presentations and scrawling light into the air of the backyard. Dudley's afternoons he split between Little League Quidditch practice or frowning over his homework either on the grass sidelines near one of James's flying lessons or some spare spot in the Ministry. Sometimes he went on field trips with Uncle Remus, who tried very hard to get Dudley to call Harry's dad Uncle Jimmy.

Lily had a bit of extra desk space in her cubicle, but her papers tended to spread everywhere, even when they weren't flying enchanted memos. Dudley would sit in the cafe in the atrium (where people chewed on soggy sandwiches and burnt coffee), or in the spare keys room when Miss Higgins was on shift (her daughter was off at Hogwarts now, and she said she missed the company), or down in the dark quiet of the archives (on days when the noises felt

noisier and the lights felt harsher and every time someone slurped a coffee just wrong Dudley wanted to hit something, but instead he had to read limericks).

On weekends (or particularly glorious weekdays), the Weasley's battered family owl would swoop through the Potters' open kitchen window because Ginny required a playmate.

She'd gone shy for a week after figuring out Dudley's cousin was The Harry Potter, but his uncle's spare brooms and Harry and Dudley's set of Quaffle, Bludgers, and Snitch was really too much to resist. James would bring Dudley and their trunk of Quidditch supplies over and sit with Mrs. Weasley until their kids stumbled in, sweaty and beaming, looking for sweets and soft surfaces to collapse on.

If Dudley finished his homework early when he was at work with Lily, he'd help the cafe staff count the sacks of coffee beans in the pantry, or run spare keys places for Miss Higgins, or go down and lug file boxes around for Ms. Gorbachek, who ruled the archives with a steely squint and gravelly voice.

The day Mrs. Gorbachek let him do some *sorting* not just *carrying* he skipped all the way up the stairs to Lily's desk to tell her. Lily wrapped her scarf around her neck, shaking her head. "Got your pop's eye for boring detail, I guess," Lily said.

But she smiled and kissed him on top of the head, so Dudley pushed out his chest proudly and said, "Yep."

Harry came home that summer with stories of a third floor corridor, a magic stone, a man with two faces. Lily and James had worried little discussions in the kitchen and some talks with Harry about Common Sense and Not Dying Young.

They spent a good half the summer at the Burrow, or with redheads filling the Godric's Hollow house with noise. Harry and Ron bumped elbows while Dudley circled and nibbled on his thumbnails, considering this new Best Friend of his cousin's. "He's alright?" he asked Ginny and Ginny shrugged.

"For a big brother," she said. But then Harry turned their way so she went bright red and vanished to help her mother with the dishes.

Fred and George were loud, but alright. They taught Dudley some tricks with the Bludger that he absorbed with a furrowed brow. Percy seemed like he might be fun to talk about boring detail things with, but he didn't seem to care about the Ministry archiving system when Dudley tried to bring it up.

Dudley also met Hermione Granger that summer, when she came to visit. She talked too fast and had more impressive hair than Lily even. "We fought off a mountain troll together," said Harry. "And a three-headed dog!"

"What," said Dudley. "Can we get one? Harry, ask your mum. AUNT LILY CAN WE GET A THREE HEADED DOG PLEASE."

"I don't think Monster would approve," Lily said without looking up from her paperwork. James flipped pancakes on the stove while Hermione chattered happily at him about the culinary anthropology of the dish.

"Oh, yeah," said Dudley, and went to go give Monster some head scratches in apology. The cat purred loud enough shake the walls and hissed when Harry came over to say hello.

--

It was a full moon, and with a bellyful of potion Remus was sleeping harmless on their hearth. Dudley had his head pillowed on Remus's shaggy belly and Lily could hear her sister whispering *freak*.

Lily got a blanket to cover them, and then she sat in the crackling firelight and spoke to her ghosts.

I don't know what you would have wanted, Petunia. I don't know if you would've hated me for this, but you're not here and we are.

Dudley has got me and James and Harry and Remus. He's got a terrible monster cat that loves him to pieces. He can fly-- and maybe you would have hated that I gave him a broomstick, but I saw you break your own heart, once, and I think it was my fault.

I would've made you flowers from leaves every morning, Tuney. I would've walked you up and down Diagon Alley every Sunday, looked in the windows, taught you how to feed the owls out of the palm of your hand. James would have snuck you into Hogwarts and we could have sat out by the lake and watched the water.

Would that have helped?

--

Ginny went off to Hogwarts, too, the next year. Dudley moped around for months, even though Mrs. Weasley had him and James over for tea on the regular. Ginny's letters grew weird, and then stopped coming. Dudley figured it was probably something he had written. The government testers who came by now and then to check on his homeschooling said he was below grade level average for writing, but he was trying.

The homeschooled wizards on his youth Quidditch team said they had magical school authorities coming to test them (Dudley had Muggle ones), but James had registered Dudley with the Ministry as a squib (lacking other useful options) so they didn't bother. Dudley was grateful about not having to go through two rounds of testing, but something still sat weird on his stomach about it all. The homeschooled squibs on Dudley's team shrugged and said no one bothered to come grade them at all.

That year, they made it to the semi-finals before they got kicked out. Lily took afternoons out of office to see them play. She sat in the stands and thought *look, Tuney*.

Dudley noticed the Bludgers were getting cleverer, so he spent more time in the backyard after James helped him change the settings on his practice Bludger. The youth Cup that year went to a fierce little team from a cottage schoolhouse in one of the wizarding villages. James and Dudley watched the final match and talked smugly about how Harry was a better Seeker, and scornfully about their Beaters' lacks of good form.

Harry came home for Christmas as always, with little packets for each of them. "There's a Muggleborn photographer at school," Harry said, as Dudley scrabbled with his gift's wrapping paper. "This first-year. He's been turning his Muggle photos into moving ones all year, so I asked him how. He made me sign some stuff.

The gift ripped open in Dudley's lap and a book of photos fell open in his lap-- moving pictures, like every picture he knew except (until now) the ones that held these two faces. Petunia and Vernon squinted up at their son and Dudley stared. Harry smiled.

At the end of the school year, Dudley learned why Ginny had gone quiet. Harry came home with stories again (Lily and James had more stressed conferences in the kitchen), and with a sinking stomach Dudley listened to him talk about basilisks and diaries and blood-red writing on the wall. There was a lot of stomach to sink. Even with weekly Quidditch and file boxes to lug about, Dudley was growing up and out. He had big meaty hands and a few spare hairs coming in on his chin, while Harry was still small and bony, grinning and shoving his hair out of his eyes.

Dudley tugged on James's sleeve, after Harry's welcome home dinner. "Can we go visit the Burrow tomorrow?"

"If they're up for company," James said.

Dudley brought all their Quidditch equipment-- the balls, the bats, the brooms. Mrs. Weasley fussed around the kitchen, seeming unable to keep still. Ginny didn't touch her tea but she could be tempted out by a good broom and a blue sky.

"You wanna talk about it?" said Dudley, when they were getting the Quaffle out of a tree it had gotten stuck in.

Ginny shifted laterally through the air, thighs clamped tight around the broom. The brisk breeze tossed the tree's heavy limbs and threw her hair about. "No," she said.

"I'm not very good at talking anyway," he said.

"You're fine, Duds."

He came back all that summer, sometimes with Harry and sometimes without. They played Quidditch out in the orchard, or walked out to the edges of the fields, swordfighting with long stalks of grass, or Dudley studied at the Weasley kitchen table, trying to wrap his mind around subordinate clauses and bezoars.

There were no dementors at Hogwarts in Harry's third year, but on a visit to his mother's office he and Dudley got lost in the lowest courtroom levels-- well, Dudley let Harry lead and

grinningly watched him get lost. A pair of dementors were part of the escort of an Azkaban prisoner there for a deposition, and when Harry passed them by he dropped limp onto the floor. Cold sank ugly fingers into Dudley's stomach, but he hauled his skinny cousin up by the armpits and ran for the stairs.

"I heard Uncle Sirius," Harry said on the couch later, wrapped in blankets. Lily broke off another chocolate square for him and Dudley hovered. "When the dementors were-- I heard the night he died, I think. Dudley crying, and Sirius cursing. He curses just like Mum."

"He ought to," Lily said. "I taught him everything he knew."

She broke off a few more chocolate squares; one went to James. "I'll go start dinner," James said, but when Dudley went to follow, Lily wrapped a warm hand around his wrist.

"Sit with Harry, okay? Thank you, sweetheart."

James went out flying that night, so late that Lily couldn't wait up. When he came back to bed, his skin was cold from high, thin air but she wrapped herself all around him anyway. They slept in a tangle of long limbs and when they woke in the morning they were both warm.

Harry told his Uncle Remus the same story, leading up to asking about Patronus lessons at school. Remus said, "Yes, he did. Curse, you know," and then asked Harry to come back later. He had to find a boggart for their lessons. He had to sit, quiet, and watch the trees shake outside the window.

Thirteen was the year when Lily gave Dudley his own sack of Floo powder and taught him how to use it. "It's magical all by itself," said Lily. "So you don't have to be."

Dudley nodded seriously. "Uncle James taught me about it's occultochemical properties last year."

"Leaving me to teach you the useful bits, of course," Lily said (James, in the next room, laughed).

Even with Ginny at school, Dudley used his newfound Floo freedoms to go visit the Burrow. Mrs. Weasley patted his cheeks (survivable), offered him whatever food they had on hand (ideal), and showed him the photographs of dragons, tombs, and baklava that Charlie and Bill sent with their letters (excellent).

"Uncle James says my dad liked cars," said Dudley around a mouthful of treacle. "Harry says you have one?"

"Oh, yes," Molly said blackly, but Arthur beamed at Dudley as though unaware of the look his wife was giving him.

"Here, yes," said Arthur. "Out in the shed, up, c'mon."

"Finish your tea first!"

He and Harry coordinated to meet up in Hogsmeade during Hogwarts's day trips there. They sampled their way through Honeydukes, poked through the joke shop, and threw snow balls in the streets. Harry went up the hill to roll his eyes at the Shrieking Shack with Ginny, Ron, and Hermione, but Dudley ducked out and waited for him in the Three Broomsticks instead, nursing a butterbeer and glaring at his homework.

Everyone always recognized Harry-- when the kid knocked the doors open and stamped snow off his boots, Dudley could see strangers watching his cousin. The only people who recognized Dudley were the ones who sometimes brought signs to his Quidditch games that made James go tight around his mouth. Dudley spun his mug slowly on the wood, trying to watch it and not to watch Harry make his way through a sea of stares and smiles.

--

"Field trip," said James. "Up, up, up and at 'em, kiddo."

Dudley pulled himself up to sitting, among his heavy blankets and soft comforter. "Wha?"

"There's some friends of mine I'd like you to meet," James said, stretching his grin and wagging his eyebrows in a way the boys had tried to mimic back as children. Harry could almost do it. Dudley wiggled his eyebrows now in pale approximation and James said, "Misters Moony, Padfoot, Wormtail, and Prongs."

They went out to Hogsmeade, which Dudley knew rather well now. While James gave distracted storytelling and explanation Dudley gathered up all the fragments he was going to have to tell Harry later-- "They came up with fancy nicknames for themselves, Harry, like dweebs," he scripted in his head. "Also Uncle James can turn into a giant deer."

They went down into the cellar of Honeydukes under the Invisibility Cloak and then down the long hidden passage to the school. "Are we supposed to be here?" said Dudley. The stones in the walls were getting bigger, like the castle knew it was important and wanted to let you know as you approached. He could feel the Anti-Anti-Muggle-ward-wards Aunt Lily had gotten for him shifting under new weight.

"What's *supposed to*?" said James. "C'mon, pop quiz time. Let's be responsible members of an educational system. When was Hogwarts founded?"

"Um, around 990 C.E. The castle was conjured and created, rather than built, and maintains a degree of personality and," Dudley gulped, eyeing the shadows, "*life*."

Every moment of life Dudley could remember had been lived in a magical world. He'd scrubbed at Molly Weasley's kitchen counter while dishes washed themselves in the sink. He'd napped in the great black belly of the Ministry, where sometimes the walls whispered, where memos flew and wizards carried sparking boxes that were bigger on the inside and also full of dragons.

But he stepped out into Hogwarts and his heart almost stopped under the heavy velvet of the Cloak.

"I'll show you how to break into the kitchens," James said. "We can say hi to the House Elves, and then we'll go surprise Harry on his free period."

Dudley followed him silently down the hallways, past paintings and ghosts and suits of armor. He thought about Ginny on the train platform saying, "I'm so mad." He thought about Ginny sleeping warm and high in the Gryffindor Tower now, which he had only read about. He wasn't mad--he didn't think he was mad--but his stomach rolled and rolled. He tried to swallow it down. He tried to smile when Harry startled out of his seat when they found him. He went home and practiced with his bat and the Bludger until it got dark.

--

In the late fall of Harry's third year at Hogwarts, Auror Lily Potter came across a report of a sighting of a unregistered rat Animagus in Scotland. Between rookie trainings and other cases, she pored over the reports and Apparated out to conduct interviews. Ignoring proper protocol, she told her husband about it over Christmas dinner, when her son and that year's Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher had come home to visit.

Peter had stood behind Sirius and Remus, the day Lily married James. He'd given a speech. She'd seen him tagging at James's heels, always-- back in the days when she'd hated them all; during the war when they'd all gotten quieter and quieter except for Sirius, who had started bursting and burning at the seams; and all those days between.

In the early spring, she found him. Peter was laid out in a meadow behind a little stone church, his eyes open to the sky. The body was unmarked. Lily stood in the cold morning air, breathing out curls of mist, and thought about what it meant to do the unforgivable.

When they came home from Petunia's funeral, the doors of their house had been open to the night. Muggle children had been playing trick or treat at the unhidden houses on the street. They had come home, Lily tucked under James's arm, to that door, to two twin wails pouring down the stairs. They were supposed to be hidden, supposed to be safe, supposed to be a secret kept in a friend's pocket. They had hit the stairs at a run, wands out. Sirius had been laid out on the polka dot rug of the nursery, eyes open. The body had been unmarked. Two days after Lily buried her sister, James had buried his brother.

Lily called the scene in from the little meadow while the morning dew sank into the hems of her robes.

A few days later, she heard from Harry's letters that Remus had been out sick for a week, locked up in his rooms, quiet, quiet, quiet, too sick to open the door to anyone. "Tell him to rest up," she wrote, and let the Pettigrew case report slip beneath the other papers on her desk.

--

The Quidditch World Cup was a massive deal. Dudley's Quidditch team kept nearly falling off their brooms from excitement at summer practice. Several of the kids showed up with their faces painted green all week long. Their Seeker and Seeker sub both showed up with

red-painted faces soon after and when asked why just took turns repeating "Krum, Krum. Krum."

The Weasleys and the Potters got nosebleed seats together, sharing a massive tent between themselves and Hermione. Either she had learned to speak slower, or Dudley was able to catch more of it. When she heard he'd been helping the Ministry archivists on odd afternoons, she dragged him off for an interrogation that turned gleeful on both sides.

But in the night, the Death Eaters came. James had been taking Dudley through wizarding history lessons for years, both modern and ancient. He recognized the sign that lit up the sky. He recognized the masks and hoods. They sent a family of unconscious Muggles spiraling through the air and Dudley stared up at them even as James dragged him through the crowd.

Dudley had been seeing Charlie's postcards for ages at Mrs. Weasley's table. He had heard about Norbert the illegal dragon baby from Harry, squashed under a blanket on the sofa during a summer rainstorm. So while his guardians had stressed conferences in the kitchen about the Triwizard tournament Harry was nominally too young to have even entered, Dudley sat petting Monster's fur excitedly in the wrong direction because Mr. Weasley had said *Charlie* was coming to help with the first task.

When they met Charlie after the first task (Harry had outflown a dragon, Aunt Lily had cursed the air around her blue in the spectator stands, etc), he didn't disappoint. "You're Ginny's friend!" he said and shook Dudley's hand enthusiastically. "Want to meet some dragons?" He did, in fact.

I wish you could see how he's grown up, Tune, Lily said while Dudley burned bacon at breakfast with Monster wailing distressed counterpoint at his feet.

I wish you were here, Lily said, watching Dudley wobble through the archive stacks with his arms piled high with file boxes, muttering shelving shorthand to himself. She passed Mrs. Gorbachek a set of returned files across the polished wood of her desk. *I wish you had gotten to know him*.

Lily oversaw autopsies and Quidditch matches, planned birthday parties and stings, stood in line at the butcher's shop and at the stand in the courts on the lowest floor of the Ministry.

I wish you weren't dead, Tune.

Dudley turned fourteen, and Harry did the same five weeks later. They baked him a big squishy molasses cake and sent it up to Hogwarts by stasis spell and owl. For Dudley they made a big chocolate cake and had it for breakfast for a week.

I wish, I wish, I wish.

That year, Dudley's Quidditch team took second in the national league. Harry got third in the second Triwizard task, while Dudley and the Potters and the Weasleys all watched from shore. Dudley watched Lily and James hug Harry, ruffle his hair, call him brave-- he tried not to, but he watched, and the hugs looked just the same as when he had landed on the green

field, gripping his bat, knowing he'd fought his hardest. He punched Harry lightly in the arm and said, "Who knew you could swim."

Dudley dreamed of the World Cup, the green light twisting in the sky, a Muggle woman's floral print dress and her slack face a lethal distance from the ground

When he woke sweaty and wheezing under the blanket Ms. Gorbachek had quilted for him, he padded out to make himself some warm milk. He told himself Aunt Lily didn't wear floral dresses, and she wasn't a Muggle anyway. Monster circled his ankles and he told himself that Uncle James was asleep upstairs, and he'd been right at Dudley's elbow all through that panicked, crushed rush back to the Portkey. He sipped his hot milk and thought about those circling, limp bodies, and the hate marching and singing below. He thought *it wasn't them, it couldn't have been them*. He thought *but it could've been me*, and then he went back to bed with Monster grumbling at his heels.

When Harry came back that summer, he was quieter. Dudley found him in the kitchen some nights, when he padded out to make hot milk. Harry nibbled at the giant pile of chocolate Uncle Remus had carted over at the start of June, and Dudley made two mugs of milk. Dudley asked who Cedric was, because the wall between their rooms was thin. If they sat long enough and quiet enough, Monster would even come out and rub up against Harry's shins.

With the next year came Dolores Umbridge.

Lily went up the the school to shout, and James went to give Harry some chocolate and also the Invisibility Cloak and the Map. And then they both went up to the Ministry to shout some more, and Dudley went down to the archive level to read about eighty years of educational policies. Ginny wrote him scathing letters about Professor Toadface and gave vague indifferent mentions to the detentions and punishments. Harry wrote about Quidditch, no matter what questions Dudley sent his way. Dudley sent back first aid kits that Miss Higgins at the spare keys room helped him put together, and gingersnaps Remus helped him bake. Lily had already gotten a restraining order from Rita Skeeter during the Tournament the previous year, or she'd have camped outside her office. As it was, she just sent weekly Howlers.

The night Harry dreamed of Uncle Remus writhing in the Department of Mysteries, the night they left Umbridge to the centaurs and Grawp, the night the beating heart of the DA flew thestrals over London, the night one of the last two Marauders died, Dudley slept well.

The hedge outside the window tapped familiarly on the glass. He didn't wake when Kingsley Shacklebolt's Patronus woke Lily and James, when they activated the wards over the house, or when their Apparations cracked the silence of the night. He rolled over in his heavy blankets and Monster paced the boundaries of his room, glaring at shadows.

Lily and James brought Harry home. He'd go back to Hogwarts in a week to finish out the remains of the year, but when Dudley woke up sandy-eyed in the morning his cousin was out on the sofa, wrapped up in a quilt, with Monster purring uproariously in his skinny lap. James and Lily were in the kitchen, bent over the empty table. Silence sat heavy in the air. They were all still in pajamas, but James had dirt on his knees as though he'd fallen.

"What happened?" said Dudley. The syllables dropped off his tongue like pebbles and he wished he was better at this, whatever this was.

They buried Remus in the same dirt as Sirius, the Potter family plot. It was an empty casket, but it was the thought that counted, surely.

You horrendous, angry boys, thought Lily to her ghosts. *Sirius, you loved James too much to like me, until I fought my way in. You selfish, arrogant prick, that was never your call, but you figured it out eventually.*

We don't laugh as much, with you gone. We try, but you're not here. You lost boy, you brave, brave man, you died for my children, thank you. But that had been so long ago.

Remus, she thought, and squeezed James's hand so hard it must hurt. *Remus, I don't know how we're going to do this without you.*

James squeezed back and they ached there, in the cold, until the sun had almost gone. Then they went home. Harry and Dudley knocked out good nights on their shared bedroom wall in a way they hadn't in years. Lily and James slept in a tangled pile, once they got to sleep at all. They woke up warm but it didn't mean much. They stayed wrapped up in each other until they heard their children banging about downstairs.

Harry burnt the bacon, and Dudley burnt the toast, and James tasted the tea with exaggerated trepidation. "Even we can't burn *water*," Harry said.

"But I have so much faith in you, my son," James said.

Harry had been quiet the previous summer, but this summer he was angry. It was less quiet. James turned the settings on the Bludger up as high as they would go and sent Harry out back with Dudley's bat to work things out.

When Dudley went with Lily to the Ministry next, he didn't head straight down to the archives after he left her at her desk, which was creaking under the weight of documents. He took the stairs slowly, past the squawking and smells of the magical creatures division, the Quidditch posters on the next floor, the flying memos and the swelling roll of workplace chatter.

The fountain in the atrium was flowing clean, over the gilded statues of witch, wizard, and creature. Dudley walked by it and got a doughy brownie from the dinky little cafe. Over midnights and warm milk, Harry had told him about Remus, about cold intent crawling in through his veins, about a voice behind his eyes that had twisted him all over this floor.

Chewing on his brownie, Dudley climbed down further, to the Department of Mysteries. Its operatives came down to the archives, sometimes, to pick up old dusty fileboxes and only sometimes to bring them back. He stood outside their unobtrusive doors and thought about sleeping sound in his bed. He thought about his family in dirty pajamas on a morning that should have been unremarkable. He thought about pebbles falling from his tongue, the ripples they made, and then he took the elevator to the archive room and buried the rest of his day into something that made sense.

James broke down crying over a bowl of Remus's gingersnap dough. Dudley broke his nose in Quidditch practice and Harry healed it up with a spell he'd learned from his mother. Lily got a commendation from the Auror's Office and Harry went back to school.

James had tea with Molly while Arthur and Dudley fiddled with the Ford Anglia. Dudley fell asleep at the table, narrowly missing a plateful of spaghetti, and Lily heard her sister whisper *you got everything*.

Lily got up and took the dishes to the sink. She turned on the hot water and watched the steam rise. There were spells for this, but she had grown up burying her hands in scalding water and suds.

I buried you, she told her ghosts. I loved you and I screamed at you and I buried you and I raised your child. I took him in, and I buried you.

She woke Dudley gently and pointed him toward bed. James wrapped his arms around her from behind and kissed her temple.

Go away, Petunia, she thought. Go to sleep. Leave me be. I'm not strong enough to think of all the ways you might have hated me for this.

I buried my sister. I buried my brothers. My sons are here, and that is where I need to live.

She pressed her cheek into James's sleeping shoulder that night and told herself, *you're alive, you're alive, you're alive*.

Harry wrote home about Horcruxes and Lily marched down to Hogwarts to have some Words with Dumbledore. Severus Snape, now the DADA teacher, tried to catch her attention in the hallways, but she snapped, "I hear you made Neville Longbottom cry in class again, Sev. Bad form," and kept walking.

She came home with balled fists and told James, "We've got some extracurriculars. Dudley, baby, you might have to do some more independent study this year."

"Mrs. Gorbachek wants to re-do the east archives into a new organizational scheme," Dudley said. "It's gonna be a lot of my time anyway."

Lily and James had a quiet conference in the kitchen, talking about snakes and cups and lockets. Dudley spent the next afternoon with Miss Higgins, putting together new first aid kits. Lily worked the very barest number of hours for the Aurors-- "Grief," she told them, batting damp eyelashes, when they asked after her performance-- and Dudley spent a lot of nights alone in the house. The ward spells buzzed at the windows and he and Monster sat up late, waiting for a pair of cracks to sound in the back yard.

They got the news of Harry and Ginny's new joint romantic adventure by owl post-- several owls. Ron wrote, and Hermione, and Fred and George though they weren't even in Hogwarts anymore, and a weird little snide note from Snape that Lily threw away. Harry and Ginny wrote, too, of course, and Dudley sat and chewed his cereal and thought. He was pretty sure someone was owed a protective older-brother-style speech here, but he wasn't sure who.

Dudley had never met the Hogwarts headmaster, but Harry came home gaunt after Dumbledore died. Dudley pried the story out of him over warm milk and excess chocolate, in the quiet before noisy dawns. "Hm," said Dudley finally. "I think you've seen enough people die in front of you, goodness gracious," Dudley said, and Harry choked on a laugh.

Dudley pushed some more chocolate at him. "I always wanted to go to Hogwarts," he said. "I wanted to be-- like you. Not just," he hesitated, "looking in, I guess."

"Duds, I'm sorry," said Harry. "I--"

Dudley crinkled the candy wrapper. "Not your fault. I figured that one out-- I'm not *dumb*."

"I know you're not."

"And anyway," said Dudley. "Your life kind of sucks. So I'm okay being me, I guess."

Lily sent in her resignation before the fading Ministry could fire her, or fall. They boarded up Godric's Hollow and went to Grimmauld Place, which Sirius had left to Remus, and which Remus had left to them.

The Weasleys came, and some of James's fellow homeschooling families, the remains of the Order of the Phoenix and half the DA.

Lily and Harry had a terrible row in a dusty sitting room, shaking cobwebs from the rafters, when Harry told her he was going after the last Horcruxes. Molly straightened couch cushions and made little approving noises whenever Lily said something effective. Dudley bumped elbows with James, and they all listened to the shouting.

"I'm seventeen--"

"I'm a trained *fucking Auror*, and I am *scared* of what may come to us, and you are a *schoolkid*. I'm not sending you out to--"

"How old were you?" Harry demanded. Lily threw her hands up in the air.

"There's only so much loss I can take," said James, very softly, and that shut them both up for a short moment.

"I'm sorry, dad," said Harry, sounding like he might need to catch his breath. "But I'm in this fight, whether you can take it or not."

"*Harry*--"

"We're *all* in this," said Dudley and the room went quiet again.

"Dudley," Molly said, wringing her skirts. "But you're a-- well, *dear*--"

"I'm a Potter," he said. "Or close enough," he said and Lily's face crumpled briefly. "I can't sit this out."

"Yes, you can, baby," said Lily.

Dudley shook his head. All his words felt like stones and he didn't know how to spit them out without bruising someone. "I won't," he said.

"Me, either," said Ginny, and that set off a whole other round of shouting.

When Bill and Fleur's wedding was broken up by bad news, Harry grabbed Hermione who grabbed Ron. Fred grabbed George who grabbed Ginny who grabbed Dudley, and the world puckered around them.

Dudley threw up in the bushes beside the little road they'd Apparated onto. Fred pat his back and said, "Us Beaters better stick together, eh?" George conjured him a wet cloth to clean his face and Ginny stood ready for a fight.

"Oh calm down, tiny," Fred said, flicking at a strand of her hair. "Like we're going to try to stop you. C'mon, Lee's got a *scheme*."

Lily and James had gotten the sword and the cup from Bellatrix's vault the previous year. Dumbledore had destroyed the ring, and Harry had unknowingly gotten to the diary when he was twelve years old (When Lily had heard more details of that night and that fight, from Dumbledore, she had nearly lit his old beard on fire).

While Dudley flew secrets, objects, and personnel among the operative of Lee Jordan's radio, Harry, Hermione, and Ron broke into Dolores Umbridge's office in the Ministry. Miss Higgins from the spare key desk got them in, and out, a tarnished locket tight in Hermione's fist.

Ron listened for Fred and George's voices on the radio, during those long cold days. Harry listened for Dudley, who brought reports and news back from his flights. He went out armed with a Beater's bat, normally paired up with Viktor Krum, who'd come over from the continent, and Ginny.

When they discovered the diadem was in Hogwarts, Hermione sent out the call. Dudley grabbed Krum and Ginny, Fred and George and Lee, and went for the passage in Honeydukes's cellar that James had shown him once.

Ron and Hermione got the basilisk fangs from the Chamber. Dudley swung his bat while Ginny sniped from over his shoulder, like they'd been doing all year. Neville reached into a Hat, and pulled out a sword, and killed a snake.

When the fighting died down there were bodies, and Dudley knew them mostly from letters--Lavender, who Ginny had penned so many jokes about during the Ron Debacle. Colin, who had showed Harry how to make Muggle photos move.

But as they stepped back into the Great Hall, where the living gathered, where the injured were laid out, where the bodies were laid out-- Dudley felt Ginny go still.

Molly Weasley was crying, and Dudley thought he would have liked to go his whole life without having to see her face crumple and break like that. "Fred," said Ginny, and she had been still like this all summer after her first year and Dudley hadn't known what to do then either. Ginny moved across the floor to her brother's body and Dudley stood by the edge of the milling room, trying to remember how to breathe.

He tried to guess the names that went to the faces around him. He looked at the long tables that had been shoved up against the walls-- Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Slytherin, Ravenclaw. Harry had gotten his letters and packages here in this room, eaten his eggs, and studied last minutes for tests, written Dudley exasperated notes about Ron and Hermione fighting *again*-- and there Harry was now, in the battered street clothes he'd arrived in, slipping out a side door.

Dudley gathered up all he could of his breath, his wits, and followed. He caught him a few turns down a small corridor, following his cousin's hunched shoulders and quick steps as they moved away from the light.

"Where are you going?" said Dudley, too loud, and Harry stopped. When he turned around he shrugged, a little helpless with it.

"Just because you go doesn't mean they'll let us be," Dudley said. "Do you really think you can kill him alone?"

"I know I can't," said Harry.

"Then why," said Dudley, but he didn't know how to finish the sentence.

Harry told him about Horcruxes, and Snape dying, and the ugly things that lived in him--that would die in him. "Remember how you said my life kind of sucks?"

Dudley thought about being nine years old in the back yard with a brand new set of Quidditch equipment. Harry had taken off after the Snitch, and Dudley had wrapped his plump fingers around a Beater's bat and guarded his back.

"I have to, Duds."

Dudley wanted to put milk on the stove to heat. He wanted to get the quilt from the back of the chair and put Monster in Harry's lap. He wanted to be home with the hedge tapping at the window.

He wanted this to be just another midnight talk, Harry telling stories he'd already won, enemies he'd already escaped, his cousin woken up from nightmares that haunted him but left him breathing-- Harry could gasp, or cry, or break out some of Lily's curses, be a smug brat, be cagey and stare out windows, make Dudley worry like hell, that was alright, but he needed to be breathing. He needed to wake up and pad out to the kitchen so Dudley could give him warm milk and find the chocolate in the cabinet.

"I could go with you," said Dudley.

"No, you can't," said Harry.

Dudley dug his thick fingers into his thicker arms.

Harry took a shaky breath and said, "Tell Ginny I'm sorry, okay? Take care of mum and dad."

Dudley nodded. Harry hugged him tight around the neck for just one moment and then he was gone.

Dudley went back through the corridors, their fallen rubble and askew doorways. He had his bat, and his eyes open, but no one was there.

He had come here at thirteen, through back passages, invisible. When he had stepped out onto this stone, his heart had almost stopped beating. It was massive and magical, big and beautiful and brave, and not for him. He had known that at thirteen, and he knew it now. He thought maybe that made him angry. He didn't want to be angry. He wanted to be home.

He wasn't supposed to be here, but he was here. He was here, and Harry was walking out to die, and that wasn't supposed to be, either. Ginny wasn't supposed to be holding onto her mother's elbow, every freckle stark on her pale face. Fred wasn't supposed to be lying on the cold floor at their feet, sightless eyes looking up, but he was.

He wondered if he should wait, to tell Ginny that Harry was sorry. He wondered if he should have gone after him anyway. A beater's bat. A meat shield. A distraction.

Lily looked up from where she'd been bent to speak with Percy. He didn't know what she saw, but she said, "Where's your cousin? Dudley? Where's Harry?"

James heard the tone in her voice and turned toward them, straightening.

"He's a Horcrux," said Dudley. "He had to."

"That's not a where," said Lily but her breath was stopping in her chest. "Dudley. I-- did he leave? *Did you see him leave?*"

Dudley nodded. "He went," he managed. He thought he might be crying.

James sat down where he stood. Lily went for the doors of the Great Hall but by the time she hit the courtyard they were already coming. Dudley stumbled in her wake, feeling too big, feeling so very small in his skin.

Hagrid carried Harry's body in his arms and Voldemort was smiling.

You-Know-Who might have been sneering something about *chosen*, about *thrice-defied*, but no one heard him over Lily's shriek. Later Dudley would realize she'd said, "Not my son," but in the moment all he saw was the green streak out of her wand.

What is unforgivable?

Voldemort slumped to the ground, a heap of dead flesh, and Lily clung to Dudley's arm to stay standing.

The rest of the gathered crowd broke free of the silence, then. Curses flew, multi-hued and shouted, and Dudley stood in the middle of it with his aunt weeping on his shoulder. He twisted his hands in the back of her robe. Around them, light flew and people fell and cried out, and Dudley pressed his face into the top of Lily's head. "It's done," he wanted to say, but he was choking on it. It was done. A man was dead, but so was Harry. They'd bury him with Remus, with Sirius, and they'd go back to a quieter house.

"Mum!"

Dudley lifted his head. His cousin stood, swimming in his blurred vision. The fight was dying down beyond him, the Death Eaters fleeing. James was striding towards them.

"Hey," said Harry. "It's okay. *Mum.*"

James thudded into Harry without even quite stopping, lifting him up and wrapping his arms around him. Lily had lifted her head. Dudley wasn't sure which of them was holding the other one up, so he took a stumbling step forward, dragging her with him. Harry reached out-- James wasn't letting go any time soon--and pulled them in, and the Potters stood there for a long time, holding on, holding tight.

After they let go, after the cleanup, after Harry kissed Ginny but before he washed all the dirt off his face, they went out to the Lake.

"Is there really a giant squid in it?" said Dudley.

"Almost ate James once," said Lily, and patted the grass next to her for Dudley to sit.

Harry sat down slowly, like he'd forgotten what grass felt like, like he hadn't expected to get this again-- to sit with his family and to look out at dark water. Dudley tried to watch the lake, but mostly he just watched Harry.

He'd tell Dudley, later, over hot milk long after midnight, about talking to the faded conjurings of Remus and Sirius in the forest. He'd tell him about a train station and Dudley would say, "I would have been so angry if you didn't come back."

But for that moment, no one said anything. James wrapped his arms around Lily's shoulders and kissed her gently on the temple. The trees shook in a quiet wind. The grass was soft under them. They sat, and watched the light on the water.

And Lily heard her sister whisper *you got everything*.

A breeze blew down, through the castle, over the grass, out across the Lake and past the four figures sitting at its shore.

Maybe I did, thought Lily, because she could still feel James's arm warm around her, could hear Dudley breathing and Harry picking strands of grass to fiddle with. *But I won't apologize for it. Not to you.*

You're dead, Petunia, and he's here. He needs a mother and you're not here. I am. I will be here for them, as long as I can.

Did you hate magic for all the reasons you said, Tune? Because it was weird and gross and ugly and freakish. Or did you hate it because you couldn't touch it? Because if you had let yourself love it, you'd have hurt forever.

You were bitter and angry and I missed you so much. Why couldn't you listen? Why didn't you try-- try harder? Didn't you love me enough not to hate me? Why did you lock this all away, and was it enough, what you had left? Were you happy-- He's happy, Tune.

Lily opened her eyes. There was light on the water, and ripples from a quiet wind, and her heart was aching. Her hands were warm, and held.

I gave him everything I could. Your son. He will always be yours, Tuney, but he has grown in my house. And maybe it wasn't enough, what we tried to do, what we tried to be, but we love him, and he loves us, Tuney.

I didn't steal anything from you. I gave it. I would've given you everything I had, if you had just let me. I gave him everything I had. That is what you do, when a little boy comes into your life with nothing but himself. You give him a home.

I didn't steal anything. He gave it, because he's got a heart big enough to level mountains. I like to think you would've known that, if you'd lived, if you'd known him. This isn't a fight, it's a family.

What would you think of me, now, Tune? What would you have done, if it was my son?

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