

So Long As She Smiles

by Jenwryn

Harry/Luna. Written by request, this story is set after the Battle of Hogwarts. "Three weeks are just long enough for the numbness to pass and the shaking to set in..."

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Dedication: This one's for my friend J., who asked for it back before Christmas, and I think I've fulfilled all her requirements bar one. She asked for *Harry/Luna; key phrase - sometimes heroes needed to be looked at sideways to be looked at properly; mood/setting - slightly humorous, after the war.* And I have mostly succeeded except for the humour. No humour here, just the resident angst!bunny. Do forgive me, my dear.

Three weeks. Three weeks was just long enough for the numbness to pass and the shaking to set in. He'd seen it in the faces of so many of his friends as he'd passed them at their work amongst the castle's slowly healing wounds. He'd seen them standing, rooted to the spot, their faces blank as they tried to remember exactly what it was they'd been in the middle of, their thoughts lost with the faces of the loved ones buried and out of reach. It was a sight that never ceased to make him ache inside, and now he stopped still, amongst the rubble still scattered at the base of the Great Staircase, and swore softly under his breath. Luna.

"I'd want some peace and quiet, if it were me," she'd said. "I'll distract them all. Use your cloak."

It wasn't the first time Luna's words had popped up unannounced into Harry's head, and now he looked up at where she sat, hunch-shouldered, on the marble stairs, and he shook his head slowly. Peace. That was what they all needed. The fighting was over but peace as he understood it was more than just the absence of war. And Luna had saved him, saved him with her urgings for happy thoughts in the midst of Dementors, and now she sat there looking like that. Harry brushed a strand of long, black hair from his eyes the hair that he'd kept, with the beard, like a souvenir from their months on the run, despite the various witches who'd begged to let them cut it, because it was a badge of the change he'd undergone, and a kind of connection to all those he'd loved and lost *en route* (DobbyLupinFredTonkssomanyRestInPeace). He brushed the strand away and rubbed the side of his hand against his face and paused and stood, and then decided, and walked slowly up the staircase.

Luna sat half way up, or half way down, and gazed blankly at her feet.

Harry said her name in a gentle tone, asked "What's the matter?" as though there weren't a thousand and one things to be the matter with their world turned on its head and its guts wrenched out. He lowered himself down to her level, squatting on his haunches a few steps below her, his hands spread flat on the marble on either side of her feet to keep his balance, and his eyes searching hers out from behind the curtains of bloneness.

Her bare feet twitched at the sound of his voice, and she shivered slightly, like a witch rising up from the depths of troubled sleep. Her wand trembled in her pale fingers. "Harry," she said, and his name was a talisman. The bells at her ankles tinkled forlornly and made his fingers want to move inwards and stroke them into steadiness. "Harry," she repeated, and his name was a prayer. "It's the bloodstains. The castle doesn't like them."

The Boy Who Lived And Lived Again glanced down and surveyed the world spread beneath his sneakers. The blood itself was, of course, long gone. *That* had been one of the first things they'd thrown themselves into dealing with, after the bodies and before the structural damage. But, in many cases, where the blood had been spilt and lost in conjunction with Dark Arts, it had left indelible, blackish smears and spatters, marking itself deep on the castle's soul. Harry stared at it now, reached out and traced a thumb along a trail of drops. To be honest, in amongst the thousands of bigger problems all pushing against his brain, jostling there for his attention, the colouring of the staircase beneath his shoes as he staggered up to the dorms each night had not been particularly high upon his list of concerns.

Trust Luna to have noticed.

Her hand trembled again and, to his horror, he realised that her lip seemed to be trembling too. "I can't make it budge," she whispered. The grief in her words, the pain in how she spoke them, caught Harry hard, somewhere between his ribs, and left him oddly helpless. For a moment he considered trying out the admittedly few cleaning spells that he knew, but then he remembered that Luna had been the housewifely one in her home since her mother had died, and there was a fair chance that anything he could try, she would already have beaten him to, even if she did seem to have missed out on the basic application of hairbrushes. He looked at her through the tangled waves of blonde and, at the thought of her home, he remembered his own face painted upon her bedroom wall. How often had that image risen in his mind and, with it, the mantra of *friends, friends, friends* winding through his thoughts in ink of gold. The Boy Who Lived And Sometimes Wondered Why lifted one of his hands from the step and placed it, a little awkwardly at first, beneath her chin. The warmth of her skin seeping into his fingerprints gave him confidence, and he lifted her face upwards a little, tilting her gaze towards him so that her silvery-grey eyes met his green.

He smiled, and the smile was for her. "Don't be sad, Luna. We'll we'll go and talk to Professor McGonagall. What do you think? I'm sure she'll know some solution. And..." he paused, feeling around in his exhausted brain for something that would make her happy again, anything really, anything to make her smile, smile back at him. Flailing mentally, he smiled again and felt like an idiot. "At worst," he suggested, "we could always lay down a carpet. I don't think the castle would mind a nice bit of carpet, do you? It would certainly make the students sound less like a herd of hippogriffs when they come back in September."

But, to his dismay, her hands just shook harder, and a great, big tear broke through her lashes and rolled slowly down the curve of her face. Harry's hand tightened slightly where he held her, and then he let go, moved, and sat himself down on the step beside her. "Merlin, Luna..." For a second he vacillated, then reached out and put his arm around her, hugging her in against him sideways. To his surprise, she turned towards him beneath his embrace and flung her arms around him as best she could, her wand clattering to the marble between his feet. With a sound like a child breaking, she buried her face against his chest. It was a rather awkward way to hold her, and Harry caught his brain stuck somewhere between the random observation that it would have been easier if he'd hugged her while he was still in front of her and the equally random realisation that her hair smelt faintly of dandelions.

She burst loudly into tears.

Harry shifted as best he could, reaching his other hand up to pat her hair. He felt like a clumsy dolt, the pats turning into soft strokes as she clung to him, and he tried to shape his body around her hold. He put his face against the crown of her head and muttered, without thinking it through, not even a little bit, "You're not supposed to cry, Luna, not you, you're the happy one."

Her tears were seeping through his shirt and onto his chest.

She had her hands tight against his neck. "I got an owl today," she sobbed in between loud sniffles and hiccuped tears. Harry tried to push down the panic that had begun to rise with the sight of her tears and which was now clawing at his throat at the sound of her, Luna, uttering words in a cold, blank voice that could have come from any girl, any other girl. He put on his best face as she glanced up at him, her fingers knotting themselves in his hair where it hung to his shoulders, gripping hold of him like a drowning girl grasping for the shoreline. "It was from the Ministry," she continued in that horror tone, "telling me they found my Dad."

Harry's heart dropped with a damp clunk to the pit of his stomach. Oh, damnbuggercrap. He'd known that there had been doubt about what, exactly, had happened to Xenophilius Lovegood in the end, but, well, Luna had been so blithe about it all that Harry had rather chosen to presume that the old fellow would simply turn up at some stage, perhaps a wee bit madder than he'd been before, but basically safe and sound. Now he realised that he should have known better, but he stayed silent and hoped that she would continue talking so that he didn't have to find the words.

She was still crying, too, but silently now, and because she'd smeared the tears across her cheeks, they didn't fall as individual drops anymore but just shimmered down her skin in a sheen of dampness. "I'm not of age," she said softly and, for a moment, Harry failed to see the relevance of this observation. "They're going to be allocating me a legal guardian," she continued. "Not that I could go home anyway. It's all quite destroyed, worse than here." It was disturbing to hear the words on her lips, witness the cold acknowledgement of reality stemming from her soul.

So her father was dead, then, and she was an orphan like him. Harry felt a sigh of guilt well up inside him: another soul on his conscience. He dug an almost-clean handkerchief out of his jeans pocket and offered it to her. She took it, blew her nose loudly, and then wiped her reddening eyes. "I asked for Hagrid, but I don't know if they'll agree."

"Hagrid?" Harry repeated, momentarily bemused, but then realised that it made sense. Typical Luna, to have hit the nail on the head on the first go around. Hagrid would do her well as a father substitute they had similar interests, and the half-giant wouldn't try and make her something that she wasn't, like another grown witch or wizard might be inclined to do. The Boy Who Lived When Others Died half-smiled at the thought of the pair of them let loose on the wild-things of Hogwarts and beyond.

At that moment, a group of girls appeared in the hallway. With a whispery cloud of chatter surrounding them like vocalised halos, the girls came to a concerned-looking halt at the base of the stairs. "Oh, *Luna*," said Hannah Abbott loudly, eyes wide. "We just heard."

The blonde in his arms crumpled up her eyes rather than look at the sympathy on their faces, and it was a reaction that Harry understood all too well. Damn it, he knew people meant well, but all that cloying concern didn't really help anyone and...

"If it were me," he whispered softly in Luna's ear, "I'd want some peace and quiet."

She blinked up at him and smiled weakly. "I'd love some."

Harry felt a leap in the region of his heart at the sight of the watery, little smile. "Don't worry about distracting them," he whispered with his face close to hers, "I'll just use my cloak." And he pulled the shimmery-satiny substance from a pouch at his belt, flapped it out with a practised flick of his wrist, and swung it over them.

The group of girls at the base of the stairs exchanged looks of astonishment. "Well, of all the rude responses...!"

Luna and Harry observed them for a moment from beneath the cloak and then shared a small, tentative grin. "Shall we go to the astronomy tower?" Harry asked, inhaling the scent of dandelions smuggled in with the air he was breathing.

Luna nodded. She wiped her nose one last time, then picked up her wand from where it had fallen. Putting the wand and the handkerchief away in her pocket, she looked up at him again, and then reached out pale fingers to touch his short beard, so startlingly dark on his face. "You look like your godfather," she proclaimed softly in her old, familiar, sing-songy voice, and when a faraway light appeared in her eyes, Harry found himself beaming with relief. He took her hand gently and pulled her to her feet. Cradling her fingers in amongst his, he didn't let go, but squeezed gently, and led her up the staircase. She squeezed back, and he thought he caught the shadow of a smile on her face when he glanced at her from the corner of his eye. So long as he smiles, he told himself, it will all be okay. And he watched her as he walked with her, the pair of them there beneath the cloak, the Boy Who Lived Because Of Love and The Girl Who Saved Him, his hand letting go of hers and sliding around her waist instead, pulling her closer. And he rather thought that her shadow of a smile became a little realer, and he studied her sideways as they walked. Because, as she would put it, sometimes heroes have to be looked at sideways to be looked at properly.