

My Sister's Baby

by JackieJLH

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"What happened?"

I glance quickly over my shoulder to where my husband stands at the top of the stairs, frowning, and then look back the broken bottles at my feet.

"I..." He can't see beyond me, I realize. He can't see what's on the step. If he could, he wouldn't be able to just ~~stand~~ *stand there*. "There was a spider. It startled me."

"Mum, Mum, Mum, Mum!" the baby shouts from his cot, and Vernon, rolling his eyes a bit and mumbling about women and spiders and the cost of replacing the milk bottles, goes to retrieve him. A moment later he is coming down the stairs behind me, his dressing gown tied tightly around him and Dudley settled in the crook of one arm.

"You're letting the heat out," he mutters, and when I don't move or answer him, asks, "Are you all right? Did you get cut?" with concern in his voice.

I can't seem to bring myself to respond, or even move. It takes him a moment to get over the stair gate with a baby in hand, and I want to say something, anything, to prepare him for what's waiting at our door, but I don't know how.

Without warning, the letter in my hand disintegrates and falls like ashes to the floor, and I let out a small gasp at the first evidence I've seen of magic in years.

Vernon puts Dudley down on the floor and nudges him towards the sitting room, away from the open door and the broken glass.

"Mum! Mummy, Mum, Mum!" he starts chanting, his little arms raised as he waits a few feet away, impatient to be picked up and trying to get around Vernon's hand in order to reach me, but I barely hear him.

"Petunia?" Vernon says again, and then freezes when he follows my line of sight and sees what I've been staring at. There's a baby on the doorstep. My sister's baby *My sister's baby*.

"Has... has it been out here all night?" he asks, glancing around as if to see if whoever left the child here is still around.

Those, for some reason, are the words that put me into action, and I bend down and lift the baby out of the basket, alarmed at how cold he feels. Hurrying inside, I hear Vernon pull the basket into the house and then follow me, Dudley close behind. Grabbing one of the baby blankets out of the playpen in the sitting room, I wrap it around my nephew, who has finally woken up and is rubbing his forehead with the back of his hand, beginning to cry. Frowning, I pull his hand back to reveal a bright red scar, shaped like a lightning bolt, etched into his skin.

"Petunia, whose baby is that?" Vernon asks, standing a few feet away as if he's afraid of the child.

"It's Harry," I say softly.

"The Potters' boy?" he says, his voice hardening, and then leans down to pick up Dudley, protectively holding him close to his chest. "What is he doing here? They don't think they can just drop him off here and we'll take watch after him, do they? No responsibility, that's their problem. All that funny business, can't even take care of their own —"

"They're dead!" I snap, and he falls silent. Trying my hardest not to cry, I rock my small nephew, and, when he won't stop wailing, get up and carry him into the kitchen. Depositing him into Dudley's high chair, I get a new jar of baby food and start feeding the boy.

Harry, his name is Harry. I have to get used to thinking of him that way, I tell myself.

Vernon's standing in the doorway now, his gaze shifting from me to Harry and back again, and he looks both irate and worried. Finally, he just asks, "How did they die?"

"They were murdered," I answer shortly, not knowing how to elaborate on that without talking about... things that would make my husband uncomfortable. "We're the boy's only relatives now."

"So we're supposed to disrupt our lives because his insane parents got themselves killed?" he grumbles. Shaking his head and muttering under his breath, he grabs the second-to-last *(we'll need to buy more this afternoon and we weren't planning on spending as much as it will take to feed two babies, what will we do?)* jar of baby food and a spoon, then balances Dudley on his knee at the table and begins to feed him.

"We don't have much of a choice, do we?" I say softly, frowning as both babies start babbling at once. I wonder if I'll go crazy, being home alone with not one ~~but~~ two babies all day, every day.

"We bloody well do!"

"He's family." I can't offer him any other explanation. He wouldn't believe it anyway. I know very little about magic, but he knows even less—and doesn't want to know, for that matter. I'll try to make him understand later, when I've had time to come up a way to tell him that I don't think will result in a heart attack. "He looks tired. I'm going to put him in Dudley's cot for now. We'll need to get another today," I say matter-of-factly, scooping Harry out of the high chair. There's baby food everywhere, which I would usually clean up before even leaving the kitchen, but today I just can't bring myself to care.

It's not until I have Harry tucked in the cot, wearing a clean nappy and a set of Dudley's pyjamas that are far too big but will do for now, that I let myself think about the letter in the basket. A war... ancient magic, blood protections.... This isn't *my* life. This doesn't have anything to do with *my* family!

What if they come after us, these people who killed my sister? If Lily and her husband, fully trained in magic, couldn't protect themselves, how will we manage? How could Lily do this to us?

She died, that's how.... My sister's dead. It seems to hurt more every time I say it, even if I'm only saying it in my head.

"Petunia?" Vernon calls from behind me.

"Where's Dudley?"

"In his playpen. Are you... are you all right?"

Instead of answering, I turn around and sink into his embrace, the sobs I've been holding back since I first went out to get the milk this morning all pouring out of me.

"A *letter*," I say through my tears, leaning my head on his shoulder. "That's how they tell me my only sister is dead. *A letter*."

"Thoughtless and damn insensitive, that's what they are. The whole lot of them," he answers, and I know he's trying to comfort me in his own way, but right now I just want him to *hold me*.

"What are we going to do, Vernon? We can't afford another baby. We can barely afford the baby we already have."

"We'll make do. He's a bit younger than Dudley, he can wear his old clothes for now, and we'll figure out the rest as we go." There's a pause, and then he asks, "Is he... one of *them*?"

I lift my head and twist around in his arms to look at the sleeping baby that has suddenly found his way into our lives.

"I think so. With both of his parents being *that way*, I'd imagine he would inherit it." I hadn't really thought about that until now, and suddenly I'm being flooded with memories of the times a window or dish or toy would seemingly just explode during some of Lily's bigger tantrums as a child. I decide it would be better to not mention that to Vernon right now. Maybe we'll be lucky. Maybe the boy won't be a freak like his parents.

"That's just great," he says sarcastically, shaking his head. With a sigh, he continues, "I called Grunnings and told them I wouldn't be in today. Family emergency; they understood. C'mon, Dudley's been calling for you."

Nodding, I let him lead me out of the room, not daring to take a glance back at the boy for fear that I'll see Dudley's toys floating over the cot.