

# Hoping for Normal

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Chapter 1 of 1

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**Author's Notes:** Hello, hello, everyone. I'm back from a long hiatus caused by holidays and weeks-long illness. I will be updating other stories shortly, I swear, but first...

Okay, so as some of you may know, back in December, I posted a drabble series titled "Hoping for Normal" to OWL, about Harry's first year with the Dursleys. While I did like the idea of the story, because it was kind of done in a rush on the last day of the House Cup, it wasn't anything like what I really wanted it to be, which made me sad. So, on a whim, I began writing an 'extended version' of sorts. Originally this was intended just for me, so that I'd feel less regret over having written and posted the first version too quickly, but before I knew what was happening, the fic had lost its drabble format and more than doubled in size. And to be honest, I think it has only benefited from its makeover.

So, I'm posting it, for anyone who's interested. The basic plotline is the same, but with added scenes, more details, and better explanations of things, so even if you read the original, you might enjoy taking a look at the extended version. Okay, long author's note is long. Moving on....

Many thanks to Pyjamapants for beta-reading and Janus for Britpicking! You're both wonderful!

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### Hoping for Normal

#### (Extended Version)

For the fourteenth time in half as many days, Petunia wakes up to crying.

Not just crying. *Shrieking*. Pained wails that make the walls shake. As she wearily climbs out of bed, she's almost certain she can hear the window panes ringing from the sound. It's like a siren, tearing through the night in a way that sets her nerves on edge, a way that makes every muscle in her body ache with tension. Someone so small shouldn't be capable of being so very *loud*.

"Shh, shh, it's all right," she says before she's even made it to the cot, picking the baby up before he wakes everyone else in the house. He clings to her frantically, and his cries are deafening to her ears as he buries his face into the curve of her neck.

~

She'll never understand how Vernon sleeps through all the noise. Well, she *does* understand, in the way that she also understands why he never wakes up to the alarm clock and why it takes her at least two tries to actually get him to open his eyes in the morning: Vernon sleeps like the dead. He always has, and in a way, she envies him a little for it.

But she still can't *really* understand because there's nothing, absolutely *nothing* in the world that wakes her faster than a crying baby. That single sound will shock her into consciousness every time.

After Dudley had been born, she'd woken up at every little sound, despite always feeling exhausted. His cot had stood in the corner of the only bedroom in the horrid little flat they'd lived in, squeezed between her side of the bed and a too-drafty window, so close she could've reached out and touched him. Sometimes at night she'd lie awake and listen to the sound of him breathing for hours.

The detached house on Privet Drive had been like a dream come true...she almost hadn't believed it was really theirs until the day they moved all of their furniture in...but she'd barely slept for weeks, terrified that she wouldn't hear Dudley if he needed her. Even though he was only down the hall, it felt as though the distance could be measured in miles rather than feet. She'd never slept so far away from him, and it was days before she was able to resist the urge to get up and check on her son every hour.

Now, Dudley always sleeps through the night. The cries that drag her out of bed aren't his. They're Harry's.

~

It's never at exactly the same time, but without fail, once or twice a night, Harry wakes up screaming. If she's fast enough, she gets to him before Dudley's cries join in. The only thing worse than a screaming baby at three a.m., she's decided, is *two* screaming babies at three a.m., and sometimes it feels like her very sanity hinges on keeping at least one of them happy at all times.

There used to be a rocking chair in the corner of Dudley's room. She hadn't used in months, not since he'd stopped tolerating being rocked for long enough to require sitting down. Dudley developed a fascination with toys as soon as he could hold them; Mummy's coddling was too boring, maybe. It'd hurt, but the thought that he was growing up soothed the ache, tinged it with pride.

These days, the old rocking chair sits in Harry's room because that's where it finds the most use. He quiets down a little when he's held. Not entirely, but a little. His shrieking dissolves into hiccuping sobs, then whimpers. Eventually he falls asleep, one tiny thumb in his mouth and his other hand knotted into the fabric of her nightgown. Sometimes she tries to put him back in his cot, but often it's just easier to sleep there in the rocking chair; putting him to bed might wake him up and start the whole process over again.

Sometimes she wonders what scares Harry. Does he remember the night his parents died? Does he have nightmares about it? Does he remember the pain of whatever caused his scar? What does a ruined house *mean* when magic is involved, anyway? A bomb, a fire? What has he seen? Sometimes she desperately wishes that she knew because maybe knowing would help her find some way to stop his nightmares and let them all get some sleep. But other days, she's certain that it's better no one ever told her; knowing Lily was murdered is painful enough without having to hear a detailed account of her sister's suffering.

~

On night fifteen she lies in bed and listens to Harry cry for nearly half an hour. She's so tired that the idea of setting her feet on the floor makes her head ache more than the sound of screaming.

Vernon doesn't even stop snoring. She's overwhelmed by the urge to shake him awake and make him do something *anything* to help her, but she feels childish for even thinking such a thing, and so she lets him sleep. With his new, far more demanding position at Grunnings, he can hardly afford to lose hours of sleep every night dealing with crying babies.

Besides, she's fairly certain that Vernon's reaction to any complaint on her part would be to simply point out that Harry can be, should be sent away, and she doesn't have the energy to go through that argument again.

The plan to let Harry cry until he falls back to sleep backfires, of course. Dudley starts crying too, and neither boy gives any indication that they'll be stopping soon.

She sobs into her pillow for nearly ten minutes...exhausted, frustrated tears...before her guilt becomes too much to bear. Finally she hurries to Dudley's room, settles him on her hip, and then goes to retrieve Harry. All three of them end up sleeping in the rocking chair that night.

~

Harry is incredibly difficult to distract from his crying because he only occasionally plays with toys. He stares at her, sometimes, or at Dudley. He's terrified of Vernon for some reason that Petunia can't discern. He babbles on endlessly at his reflection in windows and mirrors and the oven door. But most of the time, he just cries. Cries of *Mummy* and *Daddy* and something that sounds like *'unseers'*, which she privately suspects means *Uncle Sirius*, along with a dozen other words.

Dudley can't say *Daddy* yet. He says *Mummy* and, recently, *shan't!* Once, he said *telly*. Just once. But he'll learn. Children always do, and he's not behind, the paediatrician assures her...Harry's just a little bit ahead.

~

Harry hates bananas and peas. Dudley hates nearly everything. Meal time is always an adventure, a chaotic mess of mashed food coating the high chair that one boy sits in, then the other. It feels like her life has been taken over by a cycle of feeding and cleaning, feeding and cleaning, over and over. It's all interrupted only by tear-filled nights spent in a rocking chair and a few quiet moments curled up beside Vernon each evening while he watches the news and she tries to pretend she's not constantly on the verge of screaming in frustration.

She always feeds Dudley first; he cries at just the sight of food and doesn't stop until he's fed. Harry watches from the floor, never wandering very far, only moving to crawl under her chair when Vernon comes downstairs for breakfast in the mornings or walks by him to take his seat at dinner.

"Boy's afraid of his own shadow," Vernon mutters sometimes, giving a conspiratorial smile to his son. "Not like my Dudders."

*Wouldn't you be?* Petunia thinks. She never manages to say the words, but she can't quite look at Vernon when he says things like that, either.

~

Dudley's wonderfully opinionated, even at nineteen months old. Petunia wonders if that's *savage* or *ahead*. She doesn't ask the paediatrician because he keeps telling her that child development isn't a race, giving her that disapproving look that she'd want to slap off his face if she could ever allow herself to *want* such a thing.

When the boys are napping, she considers beginning the search for a new paediatrician, but she's so tired herself that she ends up falling asleep in Vernon's armchair instead. She hasn't had more than three hours of sleep a night in over two months. It feels like *two years*.

~

"Tuna?" Harry whimpers one day from his near-constant place at her feet.

She wrinkles her nose. Still, *Tuna* is better than the week he decided to copy Dudley and call her *Mummy*, so she just says, "Aunt Petunia," in a mildly chastising tone before waiting for him to continue.

He doesn't say anything, just stretches out his arms, waiting to be picked up. But she's already holding Dudley, who'll just scream if she sets him down. "No, go play," she says, turning back to the food she's trying to prepare. Harry's eyes brim with impending tears. "I can't hold both of you at once and make your..." she starts to say, a hint of exasperation seeping into her tone, but then stops when she realises she's trying to justify herself to an eighteen-month-old.

"Just go play," she finishes wearily, shaking her head when he reaches for her again. He starts to actually cry this time, but when she doesn't give in, he toddles away.

~

"Dudley's weight's a bit higher than I'd really like," the paediatrician tells her, frowning at her son's chart. "Above average, anyway."

Petunia really does despise the man. She resolves yet again to change doctors, wondering if she'll actually find the energy to do it this time or if it'll just be another one of those things that's pushed off week after week in favour of a nap between baths and feedings and breaking up squabbles over toys.

"Harry here, though," the doctor continues, "he's right about normal for a boy his age."

Hearing Harry referred to as 'normal' always surprises her because it feels like the doctor should be able to see, somehow, that he's *different*. That there's nothing *normal* about a baby who made her favourite vase shatter into a million pieces last week when he threw a tantrum on the other side of the living room. Every time she looks at him, she wonders how long it will be before he's floating off of swing sets and making flowers dance in his hand.

She offers the doctor a bland smile and hugs her son closer.

~

She's washing dishes one morning while Vernon reads the paper, the two boys playing in the living room, when it happens. Dudley shouts, "Mine!" and Harry starts crying. Dudley's never really been one for sharing.

"Let them be," Vernon insists from behind his paper, and Petunia hesitates halfway between the sink and the door. "It won't hurt the boy to cry. Besides, he needs to toughen up...Dudley's just playing with him."

"You worry too much," he adds, turning the page, not looking up.

She'd agree, except she knows no amount of worrying will ever *be enough*. She turns back to the sink, gritting her teeth as Harry's cries turn into anguished wails.

After a few moments, Petunia's listened to the sound for as long as she can, and she ignores Vernon's grunt of exasperation as she heads for the other room, wiping her dripping hands absent-mindedly on a dish-towel. But she doesn't get there quickly enough. Shattering glass and Dudley's screams send her practically flying into the living room. The sight of blood makes her heart stop.

An hour later, watching a doctor sew four tiny stitches into Dudley's thigh, Petunia still feels like she can't breathe.

"It's not... the first time," she has to admit to her husband that night. "It's happened before. Just nothing so large as a window. No one got hurt." She doesn't know why she never told him about the other times, but it probably has something to do with how quickly he begins insisting that Marge was right...the boy should be sent away.

"He isn't our responsibility!" Vernon shouts. Despite his penchant for yelling when upset, this is the first time Vernon's raised voice has ever been directed *at her*, and she stares at him in shock, her expression a mix of hurt and anger. "Let those freaks protect him!"

*Harry's keeping us safe*, Petunia thinks. *Dumbledore said protection works both ways*. But she doesn't tell Vernon this because magic makes him angry. Because he wouldn't understand even if she tried to explain it. Because he wouldn't believe it even if she *did* manage to make him understand. Because he'd insist on just moving far, far away, and while she privately suspects that leaving Europe entirely...and leaving Harry behind...is all it would take to keep her family safe, she can't quite bring herself to go along with such a thing.

She's read Dumbledore's letter so many times that she can recite it by heart. The words run endlessly through her mind every time she even considers sending Harry away.

...This protection works both ways. Just as his presence will  
mean increased safety for your family, your willingness  
to provide him a home will shield him from danger and  
almost certain death. Your relation to Harry's mother has  
made your home the safest place in the world for him until  
he is of age, and in these dangerous times, such an  
occurrence is a blessing.

I am confident that, considering all of the circumstances,  
you will agree that Harry remaining in your charge will be  
beneficial to all involved.

Dumbledore had been *so* confident that he hadn't included a return address on the letter. There hadn't been a way of calling him back to reclaim the baby. She doesn't really know what she would have chosen to do because the option of saying 'no' had never really existed. To refuse the boy would have been to turn him over to other *Muggles*, ones not 'blessed' with any sort of magical protection.

...will shield him from danger and almost certain death.

"He's family," Petunia says finally, her voice firm, her tone not inviting further argument. "He's staying." Vernon's face reddens with anger, but instead of yelling, he just storms out of the room. The front door slams shut a moment later

*Magic doesn't offer blessings*, she corrects Dumbledore in her mind for the thousandth time since reading that letter seven months ago *Only curses*. Her head sinks into her trembling hands, tears welling up in her eyes. Harry's wails echo down the stairs a moment later, quickly followed by Dudley's, and the idea of actually going upstairs to quiet either of them is so exhausting that she doesn't move. Only the thought that another window might shatter finally brings her to her feet.

~

Sometimes, sitting at home with the boys all day, Petunia thinks about dreams. She thinks about the days she spent lying beside her sister on the grass, when they'd created futures for themselves that would have sounded terribly boring if they hadn't been so *perfect*...two handsome husbands, two beautiful homes just minutes away

from each other, and children, lots of children, who would all love their cousins as much as their mothers loved each other. With her sister, such dreams seemed filled with magic, the kind only family and being nine years old could provide.

Of course, those dreams changed. They were cut in half, torn apart. But even with a Lily-shaped hole in the fantasy, Petunia still wanted the husband, the house, the children.

Vernon isn't the most handsome of men, she'll admit, but he *is* responsible, dependable, even loving at times. The home came eventually, and perhaps it wasn't quite beautiful at first, but Petunia *made* it beautiful, decorated it with nice furnishings and family photographs and love. And children... well, Dudley arrived just two years after their wedding, all chubby cheeks and baby smiles and perfection that made her heart melt every time she looked at him.

From the day she brought Dudley home, she knew she wanted more children. A daughter, maybe, who she'd dress up in pretty dresses and hair bows. Or two girls, with the green eyes she'd inherited from her grandmother and a complete lack of magic or oddness they'd inherit from their father. There are no magical people in Vernon's family; there's nothing special whatsoever about the Dursley line. They're wonderfully, enviably *normal*. It's part of what she's always loved most about Vernon...how very safe he is. No child of his, she's quite sure, would ever be anything except *ordinary*.

The one downside to Dudley being ordinary, or course, is that Harry *isn't*. Harry makes glass explode. Harry is, as the doctor says, *a little ahead*. Harry wakes up screaming every night, but always puts on cute, loveable smiles for passers-by when she takes the boys to the park. Nearly everyone seems to adore him. He may look exactly like that awful James Potter, but his ability to outshine those around him is pure Lily. Every time Petunia sees another child on the playground choose to play with Harry over Dudley, it makes her heart ache with bitter memories.

Still, it's better than the boys playing together. One day those *people* will come to steal Harry back, just like Lily was taken away all those years ago. Petunia can't bear the thought of Dudley being hurt in the way she was; when her son pushes Harry away and wanders off to play by himself, she can't quite bring herself to scold him.

~

Petunia doesn't let herself dream of a big family these days. She can't.

Upon figuring out that magic is born, not taught, Vernon balked at the idea of more children. Children with Evans blood, a chance of magic running in their veins. The fact that Lily had been the magical one, not Petunia, didn't seem to matter.

"One was risky enough," he insisted whenever she dared to broach the subject...something she hasn't bothered to do in quite a while because even though Vernon's response never changes, it makes her heart ache a little more each time. "We got lucky with Dudley. What if the next one ends up being one of those... *freaks*?"

She wonders if he would've refused her children at all, if he'd known the truth two years ago. She doesn't dare ask him, but she's pretty sure she knows the answer anyway. He makes it obvious every time he looks at Harry.

One orphaned, inconsolable, incredibly frustrating little boy is a poor substitute for the daughters she's always wanted, she thinks.

~

At two years old, Harry still never sleeps through the night. He stands in his cot and screams like he's being murdered, always somewhere between one a.m. and three. Even Vernon, sound sleeper that he is, has started to wake up from it. Harry's crying sounds like nails on a chalkboard...loud, piercing and awful...and Petunia's started to worry about what the neighbours must think.

She takes the boys to the park one afternoon, and comes back to find that Vernon's taken apart Harry's cot and is busily reassembling it in the cupboard under the stairs.

"I can't take it any more," Vernon grumbles when she gives him a horrified look. "And besides, he won't wake up Dudley this way."

Petunia still wakes up at two, listening for her nephew's cries. She has to admit that Vernon was right as far as the noise is concerned...she can hear Harry, but barely. The stairs, carpet, walls and doors muffle the sound, and she thinks one day she'll end up actually getting a full night's sleep again. One day.

She starts to get up a dozen times, but lies back down with Vernon's arguments echoing in her mind *He'll stop once he realises no one's coming. If you always run to pick him up, he'll be waking us up every night for the rest of his life. It won't kill him to cry.*

How long can a two-year-old scream like that before he gets tired and gives up?

The clock seems to glare at her from across the room as the red numbers tick off the minutes. An hour passes. The cries stop, then start again a few moments later *It won't kill him to cry.*

*Maybe if he can make it through the night by himself, he'll realise there's nothing to be afraid of* Petunia thinks, but even as she tells herself that, she's also acknowledging that a toddler's mind probably doesn't work that way.

Another half hour goes by. She's tired, so tired, but even though Harry's cries are muffled, they're all she can hear. Sleeping would be impossible, so she doesn't even try. Tears gather in the corners of her eyes, and she angrily blinks them back, forcing herself to stare at the clock and not glare at her husband.

*It won't kill him to cry,* she repeats to herself, silently forming the words over and over. *It won't kill him to cry. It won't kill him to cry.*

Petunia listens to the faint wailing until finally Harry dozes off again around five, just minutes before her alarm goes off. The noise is almost deafening after straining to hear the distant cries all night, and she quickly turns off the blaring alarm before it wakes up either of the boys and starts the whole thing over again.

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There's no guilt in the world like the one caused by a betrayed expression on a child's face. When she retrieves Harry from the cupboard, he clings to her as if he's terrified of being put back in the dark, small space. Petunia's hands tremble a little as she pries his fingers out her hair and sets him down on the floor to play. He stares at her accusingly. His almost instantaneous wails start Dudley crying too, and she nearly screams in exasperation.

"Stop it!" she snaps, and her nephew falls silent, staring at her with wide, tear-filled eyes. "Stop *it* right now!"

Dudley just cries louder, and Harry's lip trembles with impending screams.

"Stop!" she chokes out, but her voice barely reaches the volume of a whisper. She walks out of the room, leaving them both to cry, and makes it as far as the kitchen before she too dissolves into tears. She'd blame her reaction on only getting two hours of sleep, but doesn't really see the point in lying to herself.

Dudley toddles in a moment later and begins impatiently tugging on her dress. His little face is red from screaming, his nose running and tears still damp on his cheeks, and she ends up with the whole mess smeared across her shoulder when she picks him up to sit him in the high chair. Both boys still need to be fed breakfast, and of course there will be two more meals each and baths and playtime and maybe a trip to the park because if she doesn't get out of this house soon, she's almost certain she'll lose her mind entirely.

As she begins to feed Dudley, Harry wanders into the kitchen, taking his usual place beside her chair, only slightly calmer. Dudley's response to Mummy's sporadic fits of

tears is to grab the spoon away and throw it on the floor, spraying liquefied banana all over everything, including her. A glob of it lands on Harry's head, and he starts wailing again.

"Be quiet!" she snaps again. Harry doesn't even pause to take a breath. "If you would just *stop crying*, I would..." Her words trail off because she doesn't know how to finish that sentence, and it wouldn't do any good anyway. He's two; he doesn't understand. He *can't* understand, and neither can Dudley, and Vernon refuses to even try. *Lily would have understood, maybe*, she thinks, but Lily isn't here. If she were, Harry wouldn't cry every night. He wouldn't be Petunia's to deal with at all. She'd probably never have even met her nephew, let alone been forced to raise him.

She's been angry with Lily almost constantly for thirteen years, but she's never really *hated* her. Not until now. Right now, she despises Lily. She doesn't even like *Vernon* much these days. The very sight of Harry makes her feel tired, and she's never felt as frustrated with herself before as she is in this moment. Frustrated and guilty because of all the people involved in this, Dudley is the least to blame, and yet he sees it all. She'd always promised herself that she'd give her son a life free from such madness, and she resolves to make it up to him somehow.

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Sometimes, when Harry's napping, Petunia imagines what her home would be like without him. Quieter, certainly. More peaceful. She and Vernon wouldn't fight, maybe, because they wouldn't have anything to fight *about*. She wouldn't be overwhelmed with guilt every time she looks at her son. Her life wouldn't be as perfect as she used to dream it'd be, perhaps, but it'd be *close* to perfect, and she thinks she wouldn't mind settling for close at all.

But without Harry, there would also be danger...all of them could end up dead. He has to stay. ~~He~~ *has to*.

Petunia's home may be beautiful, and it may have unlocked doors, and her family may come and go from the house as they please, but that doesn't make it feel like any less of a prison.

*Until he's of age*, Dumbledore had written. Petunia doesn't think she can handle this for quite that long. She'll go mad trying, she's certain of it. And yet she doesn't have any choice *but* to try.

Harry's crying startles her out of her thoughts. She starts to stand, then sits down again with a weary, frustrated sigh. She's too exhausted, and the lack of actual sleep is only part of the problem.

*If you always run to pick him up, he'll be waking us up every night for the rest of his life. It won't kill him to cry.*

Most of her life has been spent trying to avoid this sort of thing.... She never asked for this.

She can't live this way any more. Not for another month, and certainly not for fifteen more years. If something doesn't change, it will destroy everything. Her marriage, her son's happiness.... She refuses to let that happen.

*It won't kill him to cry.*

She never asked for this.

Harry's wails continue to echo through the kitchen door, as loud and unceasing as always.

*It won't kill him to cry.*

She picks up her teacup and takes a sip, resolutely pretending that she doesn't hear a thing.

~

"Told you he'd be fine," Vernon says as they get into bed that night. Harry's asleep. Of course he is. He won't wake up again for at least two or three hours, and by then, Vernon will already be sleeping soundly.

Petunia nods her head against her pillow, not turning to meet her husband's eyes. She's so tired that she drifts off to sleep almost immediately, and that's probably for the best...she'll be awake by two, after all.