

The Mother who Lived

by *drinkingcocoa*

What does the Harry Potter series say about mothering? Lily's self-sacrifice was magic because it was universal: any mother would die to protect her child. But what about the rest of us -- the caretakers who do the daily drudgework of keeping a child alive, and keeping the self alive for the child? Whether it's about Snape protecting an enemy's son, Petunia and her unwanted nephew, or a suicidally depressed single mother, Rowling permeates her series with stories about how it feels to be the Mother Who Lived.

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Chapter 1 of 1

What does the Harry Potter series say about mothering? Lily's self-sacrifice was magic because it was universal: any mother would die to protect her child. But what about the rest of us -- the caretakers who do the daily drudgework of keeping a child alive, and keeping the self alive for the child? Whether it's about Snape protecting an enemy's son, Petunia and her unwanted nephew, or a suicidally depressed single mother, Rowling permeates her series with stories about how it feels to be the Mother Who Lived.

The heart of the Harry Potter series came from the stories of two mothers. J.K. Rowling's grief over the death of her mother translated into Lily Potter's lingering protection of Harry. Rowling's own struggles with depression and poverty as she single-parented her first child informed her many depictions of caregivers in all their ambivalence. She permeates her series with stories about the work of keeping a child alive and keeping the self alive for the child: how it feels to be The Mother Who Lived.

I was childless when I read the first five books, but I read the last two as a mother; my kids are six and two this year, and hers are almost seventeen, seven, and five. It changed things to experience the series as one middle-aged mother of young children reading the words of another, as though it were one of those multi-layered conversations, coded with euphemisms, that parents have over their children's heads at the playground.

Long before Rowling acknowledged that she had been suicidal during the time she wrote *Sorcerer's Stone*, I knew the writing of it had to have saved her life. It takes desperation to write a book when you have a baby. Once I had mine, I came to know that flare-up of rage when a good run of writing is interrupted by a piercing cry. That's when I made the connection between the mandrake joke in *Chamber of Secrets* about the baby-like plants whose cries are nearly fatal [CoS 93] and the author whose writing time was limited by the duration of her daughter's naps in the pushchair.

I saw, too, in *Sorcerer's Stone*, the delicious relief that floods a writer's mind when the baby goes down for the night. The three-headed guard dog is lulled to sleep. All the exciting things happen when everyone else is in bed.

It was when re-reading *Goblet of Fire* while nursing my baby that I heard "the clink of a bottle being put down" through Frank Bryce's ears and realized, as I had somehow never bothered to before, that Rowling didn't mean a potions flask or anything like that she means the kind with silicone nipples and milliliter markings on the side, used to feed babies [GoF 6-9].

"There is a little more in the bottle, My Lord, if you are still hungry."

Oh. Wormtail is feeding Voldemort by holding him cradled in the left arm, gazing into his face, and holding the bottle in his doomed right hand. Heck, there's even an armchair by the fire.

I had gotten, on previous readings, that Voldemort's rage is the rage of a powerless baby. I had gotten the pain, so great that I'm not sure Voldemort even feels it, behind his words to Wormtail: "I revolt you. I see you flinch when you look at me, feel you shudder when you touch me...." I'd been shocked that Voldemort felt so free to belittle Wormtail, to bite the hand that fed him, when he was so frighteningly dependent.

But I hadn't gotten the slapstick behind Rowling's characterization of the caregiver-infant interaction.

Wormtail begs him for a teeny tiny caregiver break. "If you allowed me to leave you for a short while" "as little as two days"....

Well, anyone who's cared for an infant knows the answer to THAT. Ha.

"How am I to survive without you, when I need feeding every few hours? Who is to milk Nagini?"

Ah, my impotent little tyrant, biting me as she nurses. "Mommy! Waaaah! Nurse me! Where do you think you are going? Get your ass back here! *Imperio!* I need love! How dare you change my diaper? *Crucio!* No, don't stop nursing me when I bite! *Avada Kedavra!* Waaaaaaah!" I see. Unforgivables were invented by infants.

When I first read the series, before I had kids, I knew to read the beginning as a fairy tale. A baby is left on a doorstep with a letter. We nod in recognition; important infants, like King Arthur or Oedipus, are fostered out before they learn their destinies.

But in *Deathly Hallows*, Rowling writes Harry as the protagonist of a novel, a person with everyday emotions who thinks that had his mother survived, she and not Mrs. Weasley would have baked him a Snitch-shaped birthday cake and the fairy tale version is punctured full of metallic jagged holes for me.

A doorstep? With a letter?

They found him *the next morning*.

I remember thinking about this when my baby turned fifteen months old, the age Harry was orphaned.

It's chilling to look at an actual child and feel what happened to Harry.

About half of all babies walk before their first birthdays, and active, athletic little Harry was probably one of them. He must have had a few words. He was still in diapers, though, and probably was desperately in need of a change by the time the Dursleys opened their front door, perhaps had developed diaper rash from going so long without one.

When I think of Harry at fifteen months, the thing that aches the worst is not that he's been orphaned, or hurt, or that Dumbledore knowingly sent him to a loveless home. The thing I almost can't think about is that Harry went suddenly from a world in which he existed and was seen into one where nobody laughed at the adorable baby things he did. The cuteness that always elicited cuddles and praise from his parents suddenly didn't work anymore. Nobody smiled at him. That part of him was being starved.

Nobody met his eyes.

When he cried, he was scolded. He learned not to cry.

He was denied toys.

Dudley hurt him, and no one protected him.

He was put to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs. At fifteen months old.

He was not spoken to, except to be bullied.

Nobody ever smiled at him.

When I think of this, I can barely breathe.

Dumbledore gave him this.

Sometimes fans question how Dumbledore could make some of the decisions he did, considering that he believed love to be the greatest power in the world.

But he didn't.

He believed it to be a great power, certainly, but we don't actually hear him say it is the greatest.

Rather, at the end of book 5 he comes right out and tells Harry and us, if we are listening, which perhaps we are not, in sympathy as we are with Harry's pain that he chose blood protection for Harry out of strategy: "But I knew too where Voldemort was weak. And so I made my decision" [OotP 835]. Dumbledore's priority was to keep Harry alive. Not happy, not loved just alive.

The Dursleys "never exactly starved Harry" [SS 123], a painful distinction that only a severely neglected child must consider. Children who grow up in foster homes, even without love, fare better than children in orphanages. An infamous 1961 study of Romanian orphanages found that the infants, adequately fed and sheltered but never held, never smiled at, never loved, had permanently stunted brains. Title 55 of the Pennsylvania Code, the state where I live, mandates, "Infants and toddlers shall be provided stimulation by being held, rocked, talked to, played with and carried." Rowling is highly conscious of what settings can help provide the children's needs. Her charity, supported partly by proceeds from *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* bases policy on these distinctions: "The Children's High Level Group aims to bring an end to the use of large institutions and promote ways that allow children to live with families their own, foster, or national adoptive parents or in small group homes" [BtB 110].

Through the Dursleys' treatment of Harry, the single tissues and used socks they give him as family gifts [SS 43, GoF 410], Rowling ponders just how little it takes to keep a child alive. No matter how they treated him, as long as Harry lived with the Dursleys, Voldemort could not touch him.

I keep worrying about diaper rash.

I wanted my children. But changing diapers, answering incessant calls, putting aside everything for their care there are times I pretend not to hear them even though I love them. How easy it would have been for Petunia, chasing Dudley around the house, to hear Harry crying in need of a diaper change and just make him wait. And this was not the devoted co-parenting of James and Lily, perfectly balanced male and female, both at home around the clock; the arrival of another toddler on her doorstep simply meant that Petunia's solo load of women's work had doubled. How afraid she must have been that Vernon would leave her.

Didn't Dumbledore even leave Petunia any money?

We know the Dursleys are prosperous; we love to hate that about them, that they begrudge Harry his cupboard while Dudley has a second bedroom full of broken toys. When Harry sees his inheritance at Gringotts, he thinks, "The Dursleys couldn't have known about this or they'd have had it from him faster than blinking. How often had they complained how much Harry cost them to keep?" [SS 75].

But I know exactly what they mean.

Perfectly normal Petunia, finally living her life free of witchcraft with her own husband and child opening the door one dreadful judgment morning to the evidence of her own envy, like a punishment from the universe for the crime of having coveted her sister's gifts, having written to Dumbledore she should never, ever have written to Dumbledore finds herself saddled mercilessly with the thankless care of Harry. Would it have killed Dumbledore to thank Petunia once in a while, instead of judging her and sending her Howlers?

That precious letter of Lily's from Harry's first birthday gives so much healing to adult Harry that the reader can almost feel his brain leaping to resume its rapid development, blooming eagerly like Lily's magical flower, like a growing baby. Harry's joy at flying on a broom grafts instantly to the knowledge that his one-year-old self zoomed about on his toy broomstick, "so pleased with himself" [DH 180] with that happy sense of accomplishment native to any healthy baby, "roaring with laughter" like his mother before him when she flew off the playground swings. The self wants true stories; the self wants to grow. It doesn't take much.

There is, for first-time parents, the moment when we first truly realize that we cannot guarantee our own survival. That's what it is to read *Harry Potter* as the mother of an infant, to have the message drumming through my mind, *it's the mother's love*. This is quite literally, prosaically, Mugglishly true. Protect them. Inoculate them. Give them a shot of colostrum, that immunity-laden golden pre-milk from the first day or two, even if you plan never to breastfeed your baby again. Don't do the adult things you long to do, even if you think your brain will rot and you will go mad with frustration; someone else needs you. Newborns look avidly at their mothers, in that first hour after birth, even if they open their eyes only fifteen minutes per day for the next two weeks. Make eye contact. Transfer the love within the gaze. The more the baby sees your gaze and takes in your love, the more you respond to her, the more you build her sense of self.

The series got me through the first year of parenting my younger baby, reminding me of my importance on days when absolutely nothing else yielded any self-esteem for me out of the work of stay-at-home mothering. I gaze at my daughters and take in their gazes in return so they will not starve, remembering Harry in the mirror and the loving hunger of Lily's eyes in the forest searching his face. Pack it in while they are young, while their baby brains reach toward it like a flower making food from the light.

Somehow, Harry got enough before he was orphaned. If Lily and James did that for him by fifteen months, I have done that for my babies, too, haven't I? They know how it feels when people love and see babies, as we are meant to do. They will know something is wrong if that is not there. Please let my love provide this basic protection.

It took Rowling seven books to work up to the awfulness of the moment, written as a strange confrontation between fairy tale and novel, that Voldemort and Harry first came face to face. This gentle sentence fragment from a children's book is as unbearable as anything I've read or heard:

he looked up into the intruder's face with a kind of bright interest, perhaps thinking that it was his father who hid beneath the cloak, making more pretty lights, and his mother would pop up any moment, laughing [DH 344-5]

That toddler's bright interest. The assumption of goodwill.

Voldemort flashes back to the moment toddler Harry realizes the stranger is not his father: "*He did not like it crying, he had never been able to stomach the small ones whining in the orphanage*" [DH 345].

I remember when I first read *Half-Blood Prince*, I couldn't figure out what preadolescent Tom Riddle did to the orphans in the cave or how I could guess. But then Rowling gave us this clue. The two small children had grated upon him by grieving, by feeling pain. Maybe he targeted their ability to grieve, whatever hope they had developed in their brains, and destroyed it to quiet his own unease and make them like him, unable to feel loss.

And then he saw Lily's love for her baby, the thing that makes it possible for humans to love and therefore grieve, and he remembered what he himself, as well as Rowling, thinks of as his "greatest loss" [DH 345]. We are designed from birth to need love. We are not completed yet. We do not automatically grow. It takes human interaction to create that magic, the assurance that someone has wanted us. The baby who was Tom Riddle cried for this. It never came. Would it have been better if he had died? He spent his life in rage against that thought, so overwhelming that he couldn't even feel it until the sight of Lily's love for her son ripped him open and sent him, howling and void, into "pain beyond pain" [GoF 653].

And the part of him that wanted to live most attached to the child for protection, wanting what the child had, so that Harry Potter carried the burden of the unwanted child that was Voldemort, a child that repulsed him, a burden that cost him terribly. The damaged Harry was connected to Voldemort by having to wonder always: who is this stranger who has scarred me for life? Why did you want to hurt me? Did you want me to heal so you could heal, too? I don't want to think about you. You are a monster. You were not supposed to be a part of me.

Dumbledore said, "I put my trust [...] in your mother's blood" [OotP 836]. Living with Petunia, knowing she was Lily's family, would maintain in Harry his ability to grieve and therefore heal. As long as he lived there, he was safe from Voldemort: from the inability to feel loss. When he took Harry's blood, Voldemort admitted wanting what Harry had. As long as he knew the boy lived, Voldemort was at risk of remembering the unendurable sight of Lily loving Harry as any baby needs to be loved; Voldemort thinks killing Harry might be his only hope of stopping that pain for good.

I didn't get, on first reading, that when Voldemort was disembodied and frightened in the forest, he felt just like any other child would: he just wanted to go home. So in one of Rowling's ghoulishly funny twists, Voldemort re-enacts Hagrid delivering Harry to the Dursleys'. He has Wormtail carry him to the Riddle home. That's all he's got. No wonder he resents Dumbledore for keeping him out of Hogwarts. I guess that tells us where he expected to live once he moved out of Malfoy Manor.

Why was Dumbledore's priority not to secure love or happiness for Harry, but only to keep him alive?

Rowling tells us the answer in the dedication of Goblet of Fire, when she thanks Susan Sladden, the friend who "helped Harry out of the cupboard" by watching her baby during the writing of Sorcerer's Stone. The soul fragment in the scar, the child under the stairs, the destitute mother's dream of becoming a writer are all the same: the life force, taking refuge until a safer time in a place where it is not nurtured, but neither is it killed.

Rowling includes an image of this essential life force in Book 7, and to identify it, we have to look for clues in her family's names. She and her sister are Joanne and Dianne, called Jo and Di; her mother's maiden name was Anne Volant. What a beautiful name, the French word for *flying*. When I read that, I suddenly understood something important about Snape's memory of Lily as a child, laughing as she flew off a swing.

The author's father is named Peter James Rowling. His secondary namesake, James Potter, is so nebulously depicted that he seems barely to exist in the author's Pensieve. But her father's first name no matter how I think about it, I cannot imagine it was an accident that J.K. Rowling, for whom names hold endless importance and fascination, used it for the most contemptible character she had it in her to create. Her loathing of Peter Pettigrew is extreme. She makes it clear that he is not good for anything except chopping off his own wormy appendages.

In the documentary *J.K. Rowling: A Year in the Life*, Rowling says in one distressing interview that her mother, though a good cook, was restricted by her father's Vernon Dursley-like "mistrust" of "foreign food" to foods that were "permissible." In contrast, Anne Volant Rowling seemed much less suppressed in her work as a lab technician for John Nettleship, the chemistry teacher who was one of Rowling's inspirations for Professor Snape. It was her first job after twelve years of being a stay-at-home mother, and she reputedly loved it. She comes alive in Nettleship's memory of her: "She was absolutely brilliant, a sparkling character, totally reliable, very interested in words and stories and things like that. Although her job was on the technical side, she was also very imaginative" [McGinty 2003].

What a revelation it must have been to the child Jo to see her mother vital, working, and happy. In many of her depictions of Snape, Rowling seems to be staring with fascinated, angry curiosity at the teacher who says such cutting things to children: why do you have to be so ugly? Why must you hurt people so cruelly? But in a series full of brilliant images of flying children Harry's motorcycle dream, the Ford Anglia, brooms and hippogriffs and thestrals, the small girl in St. Mungo's sprouting wings like an angel [OotP 486] she gives Snape this beautiful aspect of Nettleship as well, the ability to treasure the part of the mother that soars.

Did the child inherit the ability to fly? Come back to the moment of the brilliant, destitute, debilitated single mother, trying to rescue her dream of writing from its spidery

cupboard. Can she do it, with all the weight of depression and failure on one side and only her belief in her gifts, and some love, and a few other wisps of strength on the other?

She needs those memories. She needs to connect her life force with the moment that her mother was happy and herself, working, even if for someone Rowling did not like. She has to remember that her mother had this to feel the certainty that she'd have walked with Rowling through all the chapters of the series, delivering them to completion and releasing them, and would have been proud. There is no Snape in the walk through the forest: Snape was the mother's story, not the child's, the part of the mother that was not defined by having a husband or children or by the way she died.

How appropriate, then, that Snape is the character who has the most mysterious dark knowledge, about things best kept out of reach of children. He knows how Dark Magic can be countered with phoenix tears, someone grieving for you. Remorse can re-integrate split souls. Self-sacrifice with intent to protect can deflect *Avada Kedavra*. *Sectumsempra* can be healed by incantations that are almost song. What were those words? Did they speak of sorrow for damaged innocence, selfless grief and knowledgeable sympathy for something devastating that has happened to another?

When I speak with other peacetime children of war survivors, everyone seems to recognize this phenomenon: our parents don't tell us everything they endured, partly because it's too traumatic to discuss, and they are determined to raise us in innocence of such evil. Yet at moments of stress, they can be furious with us for not knowing what they went through. Still, it's better for them not to tell us the details until they're calmer, because there's a way in which we can only understand their experiences if they show us by hurting us. Do they want to make us into people who can understand them and keep them company by slashing wounds into our brains? No. But sometimes, they may have to fight the urge, and sometimes they lose that fight.

Similarly, other parents and I have noted times when our children try our patience and it takes all our concentration to withstand the desire to shout at them about abuses we endured at their age, to take the focus away from their momentary discomfort and make it about ourselves, slash our unhealed wounds into their brains. I don't want to pass some things on to my children. They were said to me. They were said to my parents before me. I almost always succeed in not passing them on.

Dark Magic is magic that destroys so corrosively that the damage can intensify through generations. It can be stopped the hard way, at enormous personal cost, through self-control, as we see from abstinent Dumbledore and Snape. It can be stopped through grieving, through acknowledgment from others, through remorse, through doing the same for others. I picture Snape on the cold wet bathroom floor singing Draco's wounds back together, and as a parent, I think I can make out the words.

I am sorry I did this, so long ago. I am sorry I brought it into the world for others to use without knowing how it would hurt you. I am sorry you were so hurt by this. You didn't deserve this. I didn't, either. I will make sure he is sorry, too, that he did this. I stopped doing this a long time ago, but I'm still tracking down all the damage I caused, and you got caught, and you don't deserve it. Take my remorse. Let it re-integrate your wounds. I will sing to you until it stops. I was supposed to protect you. I will always protect you. Thank goodness it is not too late.

Molly Weasley couldn't heal *Sectumsempra*, wounds because she had never caused any. Dumbledore couldn't get the memory from Slughorn because he wasn't the one Slughorn hurt by withholding it. Snape had to be the one to deliver the final message to Harry because Snape had misdelivered a message to Voldemort eighteen years before. The one who understands Dark Magic is the one who can heal it. When we have hurt people, it may be possible to heal them, even if the pain of remorse might kill us. They may not forgive us, but they will know the effort was brave.

The Potterverse is overrun with ways to be a caregiver, with cautionary tales about what will happen if a caregiver messes up, about how caregivers don't have the right to, simply can't, lay down their burdens even for a moment. We see in the intensity of Winky's experience how it feels to be haunted by a fatal lapse, no matter how innocent. She drinks to numb the anguish not only of having no second chance to help, but no way to stop caring.

Suicidal depression such as Rowling endured during her first child's infancy is a terrifying illness. How angrily she must have forbidden herself to die. The anger of the burdened caregiver blazes searingly through the series: in Petunia's grimness, the rages of Vernon, the resentment of Dumbledore, the loathing on Snape's face, Wormtail's disgust, the catastrophic surrenders of Mrs. Crouch and Percival Dumbledore and Meropie Gaunt and the similar near-abdication of Remus Lupin. *For you, I must stay alive.*

So much of her series is about people who cannot do as they please because they must take care of someone else. Snape is not one of these people. There is nobody to care whether Snape lives or dies. As brilliant a spy as he is, as hard as he works to make himself indispensable to Dumbledore, he can be replaced. To his annoyance, everybody but Harry is dispensable in the fight against Voldemort, including, as Dumbledore comfortably points out at the entrance to the cave, Dumbledore himself [HBP 570].

Why not let Snape die, as he wishes upon Lily's death?

Dumbledore thinks he ought to make himself useful, instead. Dumbledore, never free of his own anguish, knows that's worth something.

In difficult times, it's easier to get the self moving by remembering, sternly, that others depend upon us. What Narcissa Malfoy did for Snape with the Unbreakable Vow was, like Lily's spell, life-and-death magic. As that pitiless year begins for Snape, counting down to the unthinkable, his author shows him this single mercy. Let there be someone for whom Snape is indispensable, someone who needs and believes in him. Let Snape have that lifeline, to ease his way, for once.

The magic occurs in the human contact. It doesn't have to be positive to be support. When the Dursleys realize someone knows enough about them to address letters to the cupboard under the stairs, they are scared into moving Harry to, as the letters note, "The Smallest Bedroom." Harry rips into Lupin for planning to abandon his family. With the ruthless practicality I've developed as a mother, I say, bring on whatever helps us be better parents. It saves time to have less to atone for later.

I'm not a diehard Lupin fan like some people are, but I love Lupin in Book 7. I love how alive he is and how his conflicts show his engagement with life. Before Tonks, this character might well have assumed that dreams of marriage and children were not for him. The moment he let her into his heart, everything changed for him whether he wanted it or not, as was already happening to Tonks with her Patronus. I imagine the man who had enough involuntary transformation might have felt this was asking too much of him, but that's the merciless way love treats us all which may explain why Rowling, as she said in interview, put Tonks, the agent of love and change, in Hufflepuff House.

I love that Lupin calls her Dora, evoking both "gift" and "gold," the end stage of alchemy. Of course the woman who brings riches and immortality into his life will bear a child. Of course Lupin panics at the prospect. It is not only about persecution and illness; if the child is a werewolf, Lupin will have passed on his monstrous compulsion to attack others and replicate the damage when his mind is not his own. So why, then, did Lupin not take measures to prevent pregnancy? If he is anything like people I know, it was because despite everything, he wanted a child. He knows he cannot blame Tonks for this turbulence. It is he who is feeling all of these things at once.

Every secret thought I've ever had that parenting is unreasonably hard and love insanely painful is validated when Lupin offers to provide protection to Harry, Ron, and Hermione, saying they don't even have to tell him what they're doing. "You know what I am and what I can do," he said [DH 211]. Did you all get what he's suggesting on first reading? I didn't; it was too awful to sink in. He would rather throw himself away to live as a monster than become a father? There are times when I understand how that would seem easier.

I wanted my children, but for years after it was too late, I had recurring fantasies about choosing to be childless and running off for adventure. I love Lupin for opening up the series to these feelings. Yes, imagine for a moment if the adults in this story weren't shackled so grimly to their burdens. What if Petunia had told Dumbledore to shove it and left Harry on Mrs. Figg's doorstep? What if Dumbledore had said, "Thanks, Aberforth! You're a better caregiver than I'd be, anyway!" and run off with Grindelwald? Making space for Lupin's fantasy gives us the room to see the choice in their decisions and ours to put the child first. It gives dignity to the choice.

And sometimes help for that choice comes from a place we didn't expect. Harry's confrontation of Lupin shows the moment that adult caregivers realize the child can talk back and help us. There is the surprise of realizing this person started, at some point, to see and understand us, even partially because that's how we raised them, and now we won't always have to make the decisions alone. Because of Harry, Lupin defied his fears and took the leap and had the kid with Tonks and was transformed by a happiness he had thought could not be his. I love Lupin in Book 7. Is this Rowling's experience of parenthood in middle age? It's mine.

The most terrible, humbling shock comes when the children are thankful.

After all the ways in which Dumbledore has failed Harry, ignoring him and lying to him and letting Sirius die, Harry tells him that Scrimgeour accused him of being "Dumbledore's man" and he agreed that he was. Dumbledore is stricken by this; he has tears in his eyes, and Fawkes delivers a "low, soft cry" [HBP 357]. Forgiveness love, even from the child whom one has parented so imperfectly yes, that feels like phoenix song.

Snape stays alive until the moment he, too, can meet the child's eyes and be forgiven. He atones for his part in taking Harry's mother away from him, showing that he gave everything he had for this atonement, knowing the success and survival of the child proves it was enough.

The first time I read the scene in *Deathly Hallows* with Snape weeping, taking half a torn photograph and a page of Lily's letter, I thought he was risking a moment, at the lowest point in his life since Lily's death, to fortify himself for the year to come. Or perhaps he was reminding himself of his purpose. Or, through the cruel reminders that this love had never been meant for him, of what he had done that required atonement. Perhaps he just needed a friend. Every possibility I thought of was desperately uncomfortable.

But then, as with so many things about Snape, other readings suggested themselves.

Since when has the master spy left such a mess? Even in a tearing hurry, he could have cast a hasty spell to erase his tracks. The mess is rather ostentatious, isn't it. It tells a story. It leaves a trail.

Maybe he was sending a coded message.

Who could have broken into Grimmauld Place, Mr. Potter? Surely, even your limited mind can work this one out?

What do you notice missing?

What's missing from this picture, Potter? What have you never thought to ask about?

Harry has gotten back his father over the years through stories from Sirius and Lupin, through Quidditch, through his Patronus, through his cloak. What did Lily leave him?

Potter, I have something of yours. I have something to give you. I'll keep it with me until we meet. Here is how your mother looked when she gazed at someone she loved.

Go back to Book 1 again, to the gift with the unsigned note, Harry's paternal inheritance [SS 202]. Here in Book 7 is the other half of Harry's inheritance. Imagine with me the message that came with Lily's love:

Your mother left this in my possession before she died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well.

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