

Finding the Right Words

by JackieJLH

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Notes: This bit of ficlet is dedicated to talloaks, who gave me 'Dudley Dursley' as the character to ramble about in a meme on my LJ and ultimately inspired me to write this. Much love and many thanks to Christev for her advice, encouragement, and assistance with the ending and title!! :D

It took dragging information out of his mum—worrying and reluctant though she was—and four painstakingly-written letters that took him months to figure out how to even *deliver*, but here he is. He's not really sure how many stories underground *here* is, but he's here all the same, feeling like everyone is staring at him.

The thing is, no one's really staring. Well, no one except a man sitting at a desk, eying him suspiciously. Or maybe it's his clothes that are drawing the attention. Yeah, that's probably it. But he's wearing the badge the creepy telephone box gave him, pinned right to the front of his shirt like he'd been instructed—*Dudley Dursley, Impromptu Family Reunion*—and there's nothing around saying Muggles aren't allowed, so he decides he has as much right to be here as anyone else.

Squaring his shoulders and doing his best to ignore the people appearing and disappearing through fireplaces around him, he heads for the man at the desk.

"Um, I'm looking for Harry Potter," he begins uncertainly, and the man gets to his feet and lets out a long-suffering sigh, as if Dudley's got everything wrong already.

Sometimes, even after everything that's happened, and even after spending a year seeing no one *but* magical people but for his Mum and Dad, Dudley really cannot stand wizards. Some of them, anyway.

The man holds out a gold wand, moving it toward him, and Dudley resists the urge to flinch away as the man runs it down his front and up his back, nearly touching but not quite.

"Need your wand," the man tells him in a gruff voice, and Dudley shrugs helplessly.

"I don't have one," he says, and the man's eyes narrow a bit. "I'm a Muggle, is the thing," Dudley elaborates, but that doesn't seem to help, and so, hoping that the wizards here are as much in awe with Harry as the wizards Dudley knew used to seem, he tries instead, "My cousin works here. Harry Potter. He'd probably want you to let me by."

"Nobody gets by without registering their wand," the wizard says curtly, not looking impressed in the least.

Well, so much for that idea.

"I can't register something I don't have!" Dudley argues in exasperation.

He looks around, trying to see if there's another entrance somewhere. Even just a different guard, maybe one that will be a bit easier to deal with. Or smaller and more likely to back down. Something.

And then he sees a familiar face. Not one he particularly *ever wanted* to see again, but still, someone who he knows. And who, more importantly, knows him. And is heading this way.

Not ever one to hesitate once deciding what he wants to do, Dudley walks away from the security desk and right up to a man he hasn't seen in six years.

"Hello," he says awkwardly once he gets there and realizes he doesn't actually remember the man's name, but it hardly seems to matter once the man actually looks at him—confused for a second, then with sudden recognition, and then with a sort of excitement.

The next few minutes pass by in a flurry of questions that Dudley fumbles through answering ("*Through the telephone box,*" and, "*Guess so. Nothing stopped me, anyway,*" and, "*A few years,*" and, "*No, he doesn't know I'm coming...*") and being led past the security desk ("*It's all right, Eric, he's with me. He's a Muggle, you know! Well, no, I'm not sure how he found his way down here, but it's exciting that he could, isn't it? I've always wondered what a Muggle would see down here, or if it'd all be hidden. Yes, yes, I'll keep an eye on him, nothing to worry about at all...*") by a very excited Arthur—that's the man's name, as it turns out—and finally they end up in a lift.

"You'll want Level Two," Arthur tells him, reaching past him to press the button, and Dudley nods and mutters, "Thanks."

The lift rattles and shakes as it moves up, stopping at this level and that, and finally the tinny voice overhead announces, "Level two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement, including the Improper Use of Magic Office, Auror Headquarters, and Wizengamot Administration Services."

"This is it!" Arthur announces, stepping out of the lift. Dudley's not sure if he's coming with him or was just already headed this way, but he's not going to complain. He's nervous enough as it is.

"Follow me, now," Arthur says as he strides down a hallway between some cubicles, and with a steadying breath and a nod, Dudley hurries after him. He's still not really sure what he's going to say—he's hoping for something better than 'I don't think you're a waste of space,' this time, and he's been thinking about this moment for months, but he's never been all that great with words. Still, he's put this off for too many years as it is, and he's come too far to back down now.

Arthur points him toward the second-to-last cubicle in the row, then proceeds to hover curiously in the background while pretending to read a notice hanging on the wall. Hesitantly, and with a few false starts, Dudley finally manages a knock on the glass portion of the cubicle wall, and when his cousin looks up and his eyes widen in surprise, all of the sentences he's been piecing together for months seem to slip away from him.

"Hey, Harry," he says instead—and surprisingly, those words turn out to exactly the right ones.