

How We Grew Up

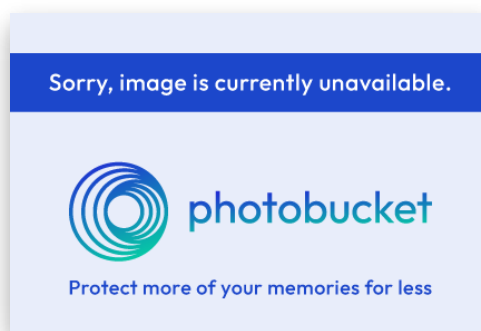
by ofankoma

'I knew my brother... He learned secrecy at our mother's knee.'

Secrets and Lies

Chapter 1 of 1

'I knew my brother... He learned secrecy at our mother's knee.'



Seven years he had wondered.

No, he corrected himself, *almost eight*.

Would he even recognise the man again?

He took a seat, a battered aluminum thing whose fourth leg had been bent back into place a few too many times. Gazing around the derelict room and out the window to the sea below, he waited.

Twenty minutes later, he had his answer.

Recognisable?

Yes.

Barely.

The guard dragged an older man than he had ever known to the empty chair, shoved him into place, and cast restraints around his wrists and ankles.

'Is that necessary?' the young man asked, eyeing the prisoner's gaunt frame and exhausted apathy. This wasn't a man with any fight left in him.

Not anymore.

The guard merely shrugged in reply and walked to the door.

'I should've come earlier.'

The hollow man stared silently at the waves thrashing outside.

'They finally gave me permission to visit, since I'm of age.'

He waited for the prisoner to say something —*anything*.

He didn't.

'But you knew that...', he muttered softly. He took in the deep-set wrinkles and grime-caked fingernails and tried not to shudder. 'You never forgot our birthdays. Mother reads us your letters. That is, Mother—'

He stilled himself.

Exhaled slowly.

Closed his eyes.

'Mum *read* us your letters.'

He didn't need to explain, certain his father had received the four pages he'd scribbled out and sent over a month ago.

The night of his mother's funeral.

'I've got it all under control, though.'

He began the speech he'd rehearsed.

'Ab'll be taken care of. He wanted to stay with Ariana, but he only has one year left. He'll sit his exams and find himself work. Besides, she's my responsibility. She's coming with when we—'

He faltered, interrupting himself with something else he wanted —*needed*— to say, dropping his voice low so the guard couldn't overhear.

'I met someone, Father. A new... friend. He'll protect people like Ari from Muggles who don't understand. We need a revolution, like you always said, for the greater good. We've figured out a way to make everyone listen, but—'

He reached for his father's hand, hoping to reassure him.

Not expecting the explosion that followed.

The violent shaking of his head.

Jerking against his restraints.

Crashing to the stone.

Choking on his saliva as he whimpered, then screamed profanities and nonsense.

'Help!'

The son knelt at his side, cradling his head. 'What's happening?'

'The usual,' the guard stated, righting the chair with the man tied in it.

'Since when?'

'He lasted a year before he cracked.'

'Impossible!' he protested. 'He wrote—'

'Son—'

'NO! I *read*—'

'SON!'

He looked up.

'There are no letters in Azkaban.'

He stopped breathing.

And saw his father with new eyes.

Saw his unfocussed pupils.

The tremors wracking his hands.

'Father?'

He didn't reach for him again.

'I didn't know,' he whispered. 'Mum never...'

The guard retreated.

'I swear,' he promised quietly. 'I'll take care of them. For you.'

A/N: Thank you to kittylefish, a thoughtful word wrangler and a generous soul. The title and summary come from Aberforth's words to Harry: 'I knew my brother, Potter. He learned secrecy at our mother's knee. Secrets and lies, that's how we grew up, and Albus... he was a natural.'

Prompt: Inability to let go of a grudge costs one family dearly.