

All Those Empty Spaces

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Petunia Dursley will be forty years old tomorrow, but age doesn't matter anymore, and everything she's ever wanted and worked for has been taken away from her.

There are empty spaces in her life now, and maybe they've always been there. Maybe it's just that the empty spaces were easy to ignore until they started filling up with memories, clamouring for her attention now that she has nothing else to preoccupy her from her thoughts. Or maybe the spaces were never empty to begin with.... She's not sure how to tell at this point, and not sure it matters much either way.

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The house is small, smaller than the one that they left behind, and she never realised how much she enjoyed her days alone until Vernon had to stop working and Dudley couldn't go back to school. Now the hours seem to drag by and the years play through her mind, the sounds oddly muffled or muted, but the pictures clear; Lily pushes her on the swing sometimes, and other days, Petunia stands beside Vernon at her parents' funeral and wonders if it had really been a car crash or if Lily's war hadn't spilled over into the normal world.

Occasionally, she thinks of Harry, but then hurries her musings on to other things. He's no longer *the boy*, though; there are too many who have been given the title of *the boy* over the years, she's decided, and the quiet gives way to remembering them all, and it's hard to keep them straight if she doesn't call them by their names.

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Lily and her husband fought in a war; neither of them survived. Their son is fighting, *has been* fighting, and Petunia wonders if she'll ever learn of his fate. She supposes that he's still alive, or someone from his Order would have come by already. '*Or maybe they're all dead!*' she thinks with a fleeting sense of panic, *and no one will ever come.*

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Vernon misses the telly...the wizards never thought about what they'd actually *do*, trapped in this tiny, empty house...and Dudley misses his friends. Petunia misses *everything*, or at least that's how it feels sometimes, right down to the stray cat she shooed off her doorstep with increasing irritation morning after morning and the spiders that would occasionally creep out of the cupboard under the stairs.

She misses her clothes, for they only have what they brought with them that first night...the wizards gave them robes to wear, but they haven't even looked at them. They're still in a bag, tucked into a *new* hall cupboard (one that probably has just as many spiders lurking in its shadows as the first one did, but it doesn't hold the memory of a child with a scar on his forehead, and Petunia uses this new cupboard for storage even though the old one remained empty for years after Harry had his own bedroom).

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If the days are long, the nights are endless, but perhaps lying awake is better than sleeping.

Petunia used to have nightmares about the murderer from the news breaking into her home and hurting her family. She thinks back to when that same man was just a boy, when he'd sat at her parents' kitchen table and laughed too loud, talked too much, and teased her in a mean-spirited sort of way that she'd never really forgiven him for. Years later, the fact that the news of his escape had reached her world had told her all she needed to know about just how dangerous that boy...*Sirius*, she amends now because she has to use his name or his face will get lost among the others...had grown up to be, and she was terrified.

She still remembers the last time she talked to him...when he stood in her garden, just beside the runner beans, and despite his obvious dislike for her, tried his best to convince her to attend Lily's wedding the following morning. "Your sister wants you there," Sirius had said, his voice a harsh whisper "She's been crying over your letter ever since it arrived. How can you just *not go*? She's your *sister*... she loves you." He got mad when Petunia said she didn't care, that she didn't love Lily no matter how Lily felt about her, and his eyes burned with anger, almost glowing in the darkness. But it was three a.m., and Petunia's primary concern at that moment was that her new neighbours would see her talking with a strange man in her garden in the middle of the night.

Sometimes Petunia wishes she'd cared a bit less about her new neighbours. Sometimes she wishes she'd swallowed her pride and gone to Lily's wedding, watched her marry the man she'd die with only a few years later. Other days Petunia thinks that the distance between her and her sister is the only thing that kept her guilt and regret from overtaking her every time she looked into Harry's eyes.

Lately, her nightmares are more sinister. The dark men multiply with each second, creeping through the shadows and waiting around every corner, and they no longer bother with Harry because they can't touch him, not in her dreams. In her dreams, it's *her* they're after, and they all look like Sirius Black...long, dark hair and torn robes and crazed laughs that match the maniacal expressions in their eyes...even though Sirius turned out to be innocent in the end.

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She wonders if she'll ever get to leave this house, if they'll be able to go back to Privet Drive even if Harry and his friends ~~do~~ win the war. She wonders if anyone misses her, has even noticed that she's gone, or if the wizards have made it so that no one remembers the Dursley family ever existed. She knows that they can do such things....

She muses, *'Perhaps it's for the best if they've done exactly that.'* She can't see herself ever going back to their house, picking up her life as though nothing had ever happened. There would be too many questions, too many rumours, too much gossip, and there has been enough talk about her nephew over the past few years to cast a bad light on her family anyway. *'Our reputation,'* she thinks, *'will probably never recover from this.'*

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'I shouldn't think about Harry,' she tells herself again, but she does...everything seems to lead back to him in her mind...and for the first time, Petunia understands why the wizards and witches all seem to talk about him as if he were some sort of god. It's not because they think that he *can* save them, but because he's their only chance and it's either support him or admit defeat.

The very *idea* of admitting defeat aches somewhere inside Petunia's chest, throbbing in time with her heart. She'll be strong; she has to be, if only for Dudley and Vernon. They need her. She knows more of this world than either of them ever will. She was the one who knew how to extinguish the ever-burning magical candles because Lily had told her about them once, and she's the one who reads the letters from Hestia Jones that come with the food every week, translates them from wizard to Muggle, into words that her family will understand, explaining all of the bits that make no sense to them. She never realised how much she knew of *that world* until it became their only link to *any* world outside of the tiny safehouse.

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The first *boy*, she remembers with a shudder, was Severus. *Sev*, Lily had called him, but Petunia had always thought that Severus fit him better somehow. He'd been an awful, wretched little thing, not at all the sort that Lily had ever been friends with before and nothing like the boys she became friends with in her last years of school. At first, Petunia had teased her sister, made kissing noises at her every time she even mentioned Severus's name, but it wasn't long before she'd learned to hate him because he shared something with Lily that Petunia never could, and that wasn't fair. They were sisters, they'd always done everything together, and it wasn't *fair*.

'Life isn't fair,' something in her mind hisses, mocking her, and she turns her eyes back to the window and thinks about how no one can see the house from the outside. She wonders if anyone out there would even know if they were attacked. Would the charms and spells that the wizards cast protect them, or simply drown out the screams before they ever reached the street?

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Severus had spoken of Dementors once, and Petunia isn't sure she ever really believed him, not until the day that Dudley was attacked. Now his words echo in her mind, and for once, the sound is crystal clear. "They look like death and smell even worse," he'd said with the sort of excitement that only a nine-year-old boy can feel over something so dreadful. "I've heard that they can suck your soul right out of your body," he had continued, and then, softly, added, "D'you think it *hurts*, Lil?"

Once upon a time, Lily told her, "Severus has... joined the other side," her eyes hardening with the words, and only months later she'd brought new friends home with her at Christmas.

Petunia wonders if Snape will ever learn just what it feels like to have his soul taken by a Dementor. A part of her, a part that she doesn't like to admit even exists, hopes that he will.

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Dementors are only one of the things to be concerned with now, Hestia Jones wrote, and lately, Petunia has learned to believe in a million things that she's never believed before...vampires and werewolves, giants and dragons, un-death and graveyard resurrections.

Snape has been made the headmaster at Hogwarts, the witch had said in yet another long and rambling letter, and Petunia thinks that maybe Hestia is waiting somewhere too, bored and lonely.

He killed Dumbledore. He's nearly as evil as You-Know-Who.

Petunia finds it hard to reconcile this information with the memory of the little boy whose face lit up whenever Lily smiled.

In her dreams, Petunia's Death Eaters never look like Severus. But that's only one of many things that don't make sense to her anymore, and she tries not to dwell on that particular thing any more than she does the rest of them.

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Hestia's letters give her hope that somewhere out there, Harry and his friends are surviving. Somewhere, hidden away, they're still fighting a secret war. Somewhere, in another life, millions of people are going about their day completely oblivious to the danger they'll be in if the wrong side...a side they don't even know exists...should win.

Not for the first time and certainly not for the last, Petunia wishes that she didn't know about any of it either. Life would be much simpler, much happier that way.

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"Happy Birthday," she whispers to herself as the clock's hand ticks past twelve, and Vernon twitches in his sleep and then settles again, his deep snores echoing through the silence. He won't remember...he never does, and neither does Dudley, and even though they probably have better reasons to forget this year than they've ever had before, it hurts just a bit more than usual.

Lily never forgot her birthday, not once, not even after Petunia had stopped speaking to her. Petunia had returned the last few gifts unopened, but with each year, came another owl tapping at her bedroom window, a package dangling from its leg for all the world to see.

Her first birthday after Lily died, Petunia would have given anything to hear an owl outside her window, even if she'll never admit it to Vernon or even to herself.

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Just like every morning, she showers and dresses and makes a breakfast identical to the one the day before. She crosses out the date on the calendar, a morning ritual so that she won't lose track of the passing time. It's otherwise unmarked, nothing to signify that this day is any different than the last.

'After breakfast, I'll write another letter,' she thinks, and maybe she'll mention to Hestia that it's her birthday because Hestia reminds her of Lily in some ways, and Petunia has never been as lonely as she is right now.

Petunia Dursley is forty years old today, and in one moment she feels eleven but then later she's ancient, aged beyond her years by the weight of everything she's lived. Everything she's ever wanted and worked for has been taken away from her, but she'll keep wanting and keep working because it's the only thing left for her to do. She'll keep remembering because somebody has to, and maybe one day she'll stop pretending the memories don't exist. *'One day,'* she reminds herself with a pang of worry, *'the memories may be all I have left,'* and she stares absently out the window, lost in her thoughts.

Author's Notes: I wrote this story directly after DH was released, and despite being fairly happy with it, I've always felt like there was more of a story to tell about the Dursleys' time in hiding, and more specifically, Petunia's life during that year. So two years later, I continued the story. [Filling in the Spaces](#), the companion piece to this fic, is now posted to TPP. I hope you enjoy it!