

HARRY POTTER

and the Heritage



A.I. ROWLING

LLM-GENERATED

The church smelled of wood polish and lilies. Harry noticed the lilies first — white ones, arranged in a vase by the altar — and looked away.

There were fourteen people in the nave, not counting the vicar. The newly passed regulations permitted thirty at a funeral that April, but Petunia Dursley had not drawn thirty mourners. The pews were marked with blue tape at two-metre intervals, and the mourners sat in their separate squares of space like strangers on a train.

Harry and Ginny had taken a pew near the back. Ginny was in a dark coat, her red hair pulled up. She sat still and close, not touching him, which was its own kind of touch.

Vernon Dursley sat in the front row. He had not turned round when Harry entered the church. He had not moved at all. The back of his neck was red above his collar — it had always been red; Harry remembered that much — and his shoulders, which had once filled a doorway, had drawn inward. His suit was too big. His hair was white and thin. Vernon Dursley at seventy was a man who had been larger, as though something had been subtracted.

Dudley sat beside his father. He'd caught Harry's eye when they came in and nodded once — careful, private, a gesture twenty-three years in the making. His wife, Claire, was on his other side, a cardigan over her dress, twisting a tissue in her hands.

There was a bottle of hand sanitiser on a table by the entrance. A laminated sign asked mourners not to shake hands. Another sign, taped to the hymn board, said singing was not permitted in accordance with government guidance. The hymn board still displayed the numbers.

The vicar was young and spoke carefully. He had not known Petunia, which was obvious, because the woman he described could have been anyone. A devoted wife and mother. A valued member of the community. Taken from us too soon. Would be deeply missed by all who knew her. He said her name correctly, at least.

Harry looked at the lilies.

"Petunia touched many lives," the vicar said, reading from his notes. "She will be remembered for her dedication to her family and her commitment to the values she held dear."

She had been committed. She had done the washing-up properly, and the Hoovering, and the Sunday roast, and the keeping of a nephew in a cupboard under the stairs for ten years. She had done all of it with the same rigid thoroughness.

The organ struck up for the hymn and the words were on the laminated sheet and Harry knew them. He'd mumbled them at primary school assemblies, standing in Dudley's too-big hand-me-downs while Mrs Ellis played the piano at the same plodding tempo she used for every hymn. She'd had a mole on her chin. He hadn't thought about Mrs Ellis in thirty-odd years.

They weren't allowed to sing. The vicar had said so at the start, apologetically. So Harry stood and read the words in silence and half-remembered the tune and held it inside his mouth, and it was the strangest thing — not singing a hymn you knew. Holding the sound in.

Then they sat, and the vicar spoke a final prayer, and it was nearly over.

Harry's eyes kept going to Vernon. The old man hadn't moved. His hands were on his knees, large and mottled, and he stared straight ahead at the coffin. Dark polished oak, heavy brass handles, the kind of coffin that cost what Vernon would have considered appropriate. Petunia would have approved of the handles.

When the service ended, the pallbearers carried the coffin out through the main doors and into the churchyard, and the mourners followed at their prescribed distances. Vernon walked behind the coffin with the stiff, heavy gait of a man whose knees pained him. He didn't look back.

The sky was a uniform white. The trees in the churchyard had the pale green of new leaves that hadn't quite decided to commit. The grave was already dug, a neat rectangle in the wet grass, and the earth beside it was covered with a green cloth. It had rained that morning and the cloth was dark with it.

The vicar said the words. The coffin went down. Vernon stood at the edge of the grave and Harry stood several metres behind him, and between them was Dudley, exactly between them, as he'd been for twenty years.

Then it was done. People began to leave, walking in ones and twos to the car park, keeping apart. No wake. Under normal circumstances there would

have been cucumber sandwiches in the church hall, arranged on plates, crusts cut off, cling film peeled back at the last moment — all of it prepared days in advance, labelled, exactly so.

Vernon passed Harry on the path to the gate. He was close enough that Harry could see the broken veins on his cheeks and the white stubble he'd missed shaving under his jaw. Their eyes met. Vernon's were small and wet and full of something that had nowhere to go.

He turned away and kept walking.

Dudley found Harry by the lych-gate. Claire was waiting in the car. Vernon had already gone — climbed into a black taxi, alone, before the mourners had finished filing out.

"Thanks for coming," Dudley said. He was taller than Harry, which still seemed wrong somehow. Broader, too, though the bulk of his childhood had settled into something merely solid. His black tie looked new. "I know... you didn't have to."

"She was my aunt," Harry said, because it was the simplest true thing.

Dudley nodded and put his hands in his pockets. "He won't — Dad's not —" He stopped. They both knew what Vernon was and wasn't. "It's hard for him."

Harry said nothing to that. It was hard for Vernon the way everything was hard for Vernon: as a personal offence.

"The kids all right?" Dudley asked.

"They're at school."

"Right, yeah. Course." Dudley looked at the mound of fresh earth, the green cloth now folded back, the grave that would be his mother by evening. "Mine don't really understand. Poppy keeps asking when Nan's coming back."

"How old is she now?"

"Seven. Liam's nine, turning ten soon." Dudley almost smiled, then didn't. "Liam keeps moving his sister's toys about when she annoys him. Claire thinks it's draughts."

Harry looked at him. Dudley looked at the ground.

"I'll ring you," Dudley said. "There's the will and that. Solicitor's sorting it. Apparently she left you something."

"Left me something?"

"Yeah. I don't know what. Mum had it in the will specifically. *Mr H. Potter*. The solicitor showed me." Dudley shrugged, big shoulders going up and down. "I'll let you know when it's sorted."

Ginny was waiting by the car. She had the keys; Harry hadn't wanted to drive. He got into the passenger seat and put his seatbelt on and looked at the church through the windscreen — the grey stone, the pointed windows, the noticeboard that said EVERYONE WELCOME in faded letters.

"All right?" Ginny said.

"Yeah."

Ginny started the car. They drove out of Little Whinging and onto the motorway, the identical houses and clipped hedges falling away behind them. They hadn't gone down Privet Drive. Harry hadn't wanted to.

Ginny turned the radio on, then turned it off again.

"Vernon looked at me once," Harry said, somewhere past Guildford. "In the churchyard. Then turned away."

Ginny drove. The wipers were on intermittent, catching a drizzle that couldn't decide if it was rain.

"Dudley says she left me something. In her will."

Ginny glanced at him. "What?"

"He doesn't know."

They drove the rest of the way home in a silence that wasn't unhappy. Harry just didn't have anything else to say, and Ginny didn't need him to.

Three weeks later, Harry's doorbell rang.

It was a Saturday afternoon in May, warm for once, and Harry had been in the back garden pulling weeds. Not because the weeds needed pulling — Ginny had put a self-maintaining charm on the flower beds years ago — but because it was the kind of task that wanted hands and not thought, and Harry's hands needed something to do. Ginny was finishing a column at the offices of the *Daily Prophet*. The house was quiet in the way it was quiet when three children were at school and it was too large for one person.

The doorbell went and Harry came through the kitchen wiping soil on his jeans. Through the frosted glass of the front door he could see a large shape and knew it was Dudley before he opened it.

"All right?" Dudley said. He was holding a parcel under one arm — brown paper, taped shut, about the size of a shoebox. He was also holding a carrier bag from Marks and Spencer.

"Dudley. Come in."

"I brought biscuits," Dudley said, holding up the carrier bag as though it explained something. "Claire said I should bring something."

"Tea?"

"Yeah, go on."

Harry filled the kettle. Dudley stood in the kitchen looking at things he'd seen before but still found interesting — the dishes washing themselves in the sink, the photograph above the mantelpiece that moved when you weren't looking directly at it. He picked up a mug from the draining board, turned it over, put it back. He was always doing that in Harry's house — picking things up and putting them down, as though he expected the magic to be in the objects rather than the air.

"Nice place," Dudley said, the way he always said it.

"Milk, one sugar?"

"Please."

They sat at the kitchen table and drank tea and ate the biscuits, which were chocolate digestives, and talked about nothing much. Dudley's children. The

lockdown easing enough for him to make the drive. Claire's work. The weather. It was the kind of conversation two people have when they are family but not close, fond but not fluent.

"How's your dad?" Harry asked, because he felt he should.

Dudley wrapped both hands around his mug. "Same. Sits in his chair. Watches the telly. Doesn't go out." He paused. "He says it should've been him."

Harry didn't know what to say to that.

"He means it, as well," Dudley said. "Not in a — he's not being noble about it. He just thinks she should've survived instead. Like it was a choice someone got wrong."

"That's not how viruses work."

"I know." Dudley turned his mug a quarter-turn on the table. "The hospital said there was nothing more they could do. I thought about — I mean, maybe you could've —" He stopped. "But Dad said no. And Mum wouldn't have wanted..."

He trailed off. Harry stared at him.

"Dudley —"

"Forget it. It was stupid." Dudley looked at the parcel on the table between them. "So. The will."

"Right."

"It's mostly Dad. House, savings, everything. But she'd added a separate bit — codicil, the solicitor called it. Done a few years back." Dudley pushed the parcel across the table. "This is for you."

Harry looked at it. Brown paper, ordinary, the tape starting to peel at one corner. A white label in Petunia's handwriting: *Mr H. Potter*. Not "*Harry*". "*Mr H. Potter*". The way she'd have addressed a parcel to a stranger.

"That's her writing," Harry said.

"Yeah."

"No note? No letter with it?"

"Nothing. Just that, left to you." Dudley rubbed the back of his neck, a gesture so like Vernon that it did something odd to Harry's chest. "Dad didn't want me to bring it. Said to bin it. I said I'd bring it."

"Thanks."

Dudley looked at him, then at the parcel, then at his tea. "D'you want me to go? So you can open it on your own?"

"You don't have to go."

"I think maybe I should." Dudley stood and drained his mug and set it by the sink. "I don't know what it is. She never told me. But she wanted you to have it, so." He shrugged. "There it is."

Harry walked him to the door. On the step, Dudley put his hands in his pockets and looked down the street and seemed to decide something.

"She talked about your mum sometimes," he said. "My mum, I mean. Talked about yours. About Lily."

Harry stared at him.

"Not often. Just sometimes, if she'd had a sherry. Late at night. She'd say a name or start a sentence and then pretend she hadn't." Dudley scuffed his shoe on the step. "I don't know if that helps."

"I don't know either," Harry said.

Dudley nodded and walked to his car and drove away, and Harry stood on the step until the car turned the corner, and then he went inside.

The parcel was on the kitchen table where Dudley had pushed it. Harry sat down across from it and looked at it for a while. *Mr H. Potter*. Her handwriting was small and precise, every letter the same height. She'd written his name carefully, as though it were an address on an envelope and not her nephew.

He pulled the tape and the brown paper fell open.

Inside was a blanket.

Small. Baby-sized. A square no bigger than a large tea towel, faded to a colour that had lost its name — once blue, maybe, or once violet, now a pale, uncertain grey with the ghost of its original shade still caught in the deeper folds. The edges were bound with satin ribbon that had gone soft and dull with age. The wool — if it was wool — was thin as tissue in places, worn clean through at one corner.

Harry picked it up. It weighed almost nothing. He could have closed his fist around it.

He brought it closer and something happened that he couldn't explain and wouldn't have tried to. A sensation below memory, below thought. Warmth. Pressure. The feeling of being held, though no one was holding him. It lasted less than a second and left him sitting very still at the kitchen table with a baby's blanket in his hands and his heart going too fast.

He turned it over. No label. No tag. Just the blanket, thin and very old.

He brought it to his face without thinking — the way you bring anything old and important to your face, as though smell could recover what time had taken. He didn't know what he expected. His mother. Godric's Hollow. Something.

It smelled of must and the inside of a drawer and underneath that the lemon-and-chemical smell of Petunia's house — cleaning products soaked into the fibres after decades of proximity. Decades in a cupboard or a wardrobe, probably washed at least once, probably folded and refolded and put back. Whatever it had once carried was gone.

He put the blanket down on the table. Picked it up again. Put it in his lap.

He went to the sitting room. He took a pinch of Floo powder from the pot on the mantelpiece and threw it into the grate and the flames turned green and he knelt down and said, "Hagrid's hut, Hogwarts."

It took a moment. Then Hagrid's enormous, bearded face appeared in the fire, creased with instant worry.

"Harry! Everythin' all right? The kids —"

"Everyone's fine, Hagrid. I just had a question."

Hagrid's face relaxed. "Oh. Right, then. Fire away."

Harry held up the blanket so Hagrid could see it through the flames.

"The night you brought me to Privet Drive. You know — after my parents died. Was I wrapped in a blanket?"

Hagrid went very still. His beetle-black eyes fixed on the blanket in Harry's hands. Even through the green shimmer of the Floo, Harry could see the change in his face.

"Where'd yeh get that?" Hagrid said quietly.

"My aunt left it to me. Petunia. She died last month."

"I heard. Professor McGonagall said." Hagrid's eyes hadn't moved from the blanket. "Harry. That's — yeah. That's the one."

"You're sure?"

"I wrapped yeh up in it meself." Hagrid's voice had gone thick. "Pulled yeh out of the rubble. Yer mum's house was half gone, the whole top floor, and you were sittin' there in yer cot, cryin'. That blanket was in the cot with yeh. I wrapped yeh up and carried yeh out."

Harry looked down at the blanket in his hands.

"It was from the house," he said. "From Godric's Hollow."

"From yer cot. Yer mum's house." Hagrid was crying now — openly, freely, the way Hagrid cried, without shame or apology. "I gave yeh ter Dumbledore on the doorstep and he laid yeh down with the letter tucked in. And I — I flew off. On Sirius's bike." He wiped his eyes with one enormous hand. "She kept it? Yer aunt kept it all this time?"

"Yes."

"Blimey," Hagrid said. He blew his nose on something that sounded like a tablecloth. "Blimey, Harry."

They looked at each other through the fire. Hagrid was crying. Harry was not.

"Thanks, Hagrid," Harry said.

"Harry — are yeh all —"

"I'm fine. Thanks."

He pulled back from the fireplace and the flames went orange again and the room was ordinary and quiet and he was kneeling on the hearth rug with a baby's blanket in his hands.

His mother's blanket. From his cot, in the house where she died. Wrapped around him by Hagrid, carried through the night on a flying motorbike, laid on a doorstep in Little Whinging. And Petunia had taken him inside, and at some point — that morning, or the next day, or the day after — she had taken the blanket off him and put it somewhere. A drawer, a shelf, a box at the back of a wardrobe. And she had left it there for years.

She hadn't mentioned it. She hadn't given it back. She hadn't thrown it away.

Harry sat at the kitchen table and folded the blanket carefully, though he didn't know what he was being careful of. He set it on the table. Then on the windowsill. Then back on the table. He put the kettle on and made tea and forgot about it and the kettle clicked off and the tea went unmade.

He was still sitting there when Ginny came home. He heard the front door, her keys on the hook, her footsteps in the hall, and he didn't get up.

She came into the kitchen and saw him, and the brown paper, and the blanket, and whatever was on his face. She pulled out a chair and sat beside him. After a moment she picked the blanket up, gently, and held it in both hands.

"It's tiny," she said.

"I know."

"What is it?"

"The blanket I was wrapped in. When Hagrid brought me to Privet Drive. From my mum's house. Godric's Hollow."

Ginny held it in her lap, running her thumb along the satin edge the way she sometimes did with the children's baby things — the box of first shoes and hospital bracelets in the wardrobe upstairs.

"She kept it," Harry said. He could hear how flat his voice was and couldn't change it. "For all these years. She never told anyone."

"No."

"I don't understand."

Ginny put the blanket down on the table between them. She put her hand on the back of his neck, warm and firm, and left it there.

"Have you eaten?" she said, after a while.

"No."

"I'll do something."

She got up and opened the fridge and began taking things out, and Harry sat at the table and listened to the ordinary sounds of dinner being made in his kitchen, and outside it was still light because the May evenings were long and slow, and the blanket lay on the table where Petunia had addressed it to *Mr H. Potter*, and it weighed almost nothing at all.

He didn't put it away for days. It moved around the house — the kitchen table, the dresser in the hallway, the arm of the sofa, the counter beside the kettle — migrating from surface to surface the way a half-read book does. Harry moved it without deciding to, picking it up when he passed and setting it down somewhere else, and if Ginny noticed she didn't say so.

On a Tuesday evening he carried it upstairs and sat on the edge of the bed and held it.

The cupboard under the stairs. The camp bed, the bare bulb, the dark. Dudley's feet thundering overhead. The slot in the door where food came through — always enough, never generous. Her voice, every morning: *Up! Get up! Now!*

He'd been very small.

Small enough for this blanket. Small enough to be carried in one arm by Hagrid, who was twice the size of a normal man, through the ruins of a house and across the night sky. Small enough to be left on a doorstep with a letter by Albus Dumbledore, like a bottle of milk.

The summer he turned eleven and the letters started coming. Petunia's face — white, rigid, terrified. He hadn't known it was terror at the time. He'd been eleven. He knew it now. She had been afraid of magic. Of Lily's world. The world that had chosen Lily and rejected Petunia. The world that killed her sister.

Vernon had known about magic all along. Known it was real. He'd just thought he could refuse it — stamp it down, pretend it out of existence through sheer force of will. He'd treated the virus the same way.

She'd kept him alive. He forgot that, sometimes. Not that he was alive, but that she'd had a choice. The blood wards worked because she chose to take him in. She'd chosen, and she'd hated it, and she'd done it anyway.

Why?

He turned the blanket over in his hands. The satin binding caught the lamplight. There was a small hole near one corner where the wool had worn through to nothing. He put his finger through it.

His mother had touched this blanket. Had wrapped him in it, or laid it over him in his cot, in the house at Godric's Hollow on the last night of her life. And then Hagrid had wrapped him again, in the ruins, and flown him across England on a motorbike, and Dumbledore had laid him on a doorstep, and Petunia had opened the front door to put out the milk bottles and found him there and screamed.

And she'd kept the blanket. Not displayed. Not mentioned. Not given back. Not thrown away. Just kept, somewhere in that house — that clean, polished, aggressively normal house from which every trace of magic had been scoured.

He could list the reasons. Guilt. Grief. Habit. The inability to throw away a dead woman's baby blanket. Some residual sense of duty. Or something she would never have named, not even to herself, because naming it would have meant admitting that Lily's world had mattered, and admitting that would have undone everything Petunia had built her life around.

He couldn't know. She was dead, and she'd never said, and the blanket couldn't tell him, and that was the whole of it.

Harry opened the drawer of his bedside table. His reading glasses were in there, and a watch with a cracked face he kept meaning to repair, and a Chocolate Frog card of Dumbledore that Lily had put in his Christmas stocking as a joke.

He put the blanket in the drawer. It folded small. It fit easily beside the glasses and the watch and the card. He looked at it for a moment, the faded wool against the dark wood of the drawer, and closed it.

Then he went downstairs.

Ginny was at the kitchen table with a cup of tea and the *Prophet* spread out in front of her. She looked up when he came in.

"Ron Floored," she said. "Wants to know if you're free Sunday for — his words — 'a proper fly about, none of this sitting around moping.'"

"I haven't been moping."

Ginny looked at him.

"Maybe," he said.

He sat down across from her. The kettle was still warm so he poured himself a cup from the pot. It was too strong, slightly stewed, the way it got when it sat too long. He drank it anyway.

"She was terrible to me," he said. "Petunia. She really was. They both were."

"I know."

"And she kept it. The whole time. She kept it."

Ginny didn't answer. She reached across the table and put her hand over his, briefly, and then went back to her paper.

Harry drank his tea. Outside, the garden was a square of blue shadow. A bird crossed the treeline — not an owl, not a post owl, just a bird going home. The sky was the colour of the hour before dark, when everything turns the same shade of grey.

He washed his mug and put it on the rack. He turned off the kitchen light.

"Coming up?" Ginny said, folding the paper.

"In a minute."

He went back upstairs. He didn't turn on the lamp. He sat on the edge of the bed in the dark and opened the drawer and put his hand on the blanket.

It was soft under his fingers. Warm, though it had no reason to be warm. He sat there for a while, in the dark, with his hand in the drawer, and the house was quiet around him.

Then he closed the drawer, and that was enough.