

Title: Redemption  
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Summary: Dudley Dursley's life takes an unexpected turn.

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Warnings: none  
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## Redemption

They had finally left, the last to go. Dudley did not think he could have taken much more. It was just too much. He still loved his parents, but now saw them from a different perspective. His getting married and having a child had turned them into... *grandparents!*

If Dudley had been doted on and spoiled by his parents when he was a child, and he remembered as much, it was *nothing* to what his parents were inflicting on his darling little daughter.

Had *his* mother used that irritating baby talk with him? Ghastly!

Had *his* father bought him this many toys? Insane!

It may not have been so bad except for the fact that they had visited *every single weekend* since little Penny had been born. And that was *three years ago!*

Enough already!

It was Penny's birthday today, so Dudley had not said anything. The birthday party had been nothing less than two hours of uninterrupted chaos with six other children, their parents, and... the *clown* -- a "nice surprise" courtesy of his parents. Their small flat looked like a battle zone.

So he had finally made up his mind to talk to his parents next weekend, for they would surely be ringing the doorbell on Saturday morning as always -- with more baby talk and more presents for Penny.

His dear wife, Iris, was napping on the sofa. Well, not exactly. She looked like she had passed out from exhaustion.

The party, on top of his parents' regular weekend visit, had just been *too* much. Iris was the most tolerant person he had ever met, probably one of the reasons she could live with him, but she must have reached her limit. She had actually asked Petunia *not* to help her with the birthday pudding. Mistake!

Dudley walked over to her. Iris was snoring very softly. Her arm was dangling off the edge of the couch. He carefully moved it to her side to be more comfortable. Then he covered her with a throw they usually shared when watching their favorite shows on the telly.

Dudley dearly loved Iris. He considered himself very lucky to have her. She had been there for him when he had finally battled his overweight problem.

It had returned with a vengeance after graduating from Smeltings, which ended his school boxing activity. And going to work for his father at Grunnings, sitting behind a desk all day did not help. He had never been particularly smart and Grunnings had just been too stressful. It had simply not been possible for his father to keep overlooking his failures at work.

This had forced Dudley to make the first real decisions of his life -- to quit Grunnings *and* leave home. Of course, he had ended up returning home almost immediately, but then left again, and returned again, and then both again and again (it had been more times than he could remember) until he finally found something he could do well that he liked -- fixing bicycles. Who would have guessed?

Of course, his parents had not approved of him working and living "beneath his station" as they still so often reminded him. And so for a time, he and his parents had been estranged.

It was then that Dudley realized he had to do something about his weight -- since collapsing bicycles whilst test riding them was not good for business. It had really happened! Though only on a youth bicycle. So, he had gone to *Big Boned Anonymous* -- '*real help for people who can't fit through the door to Weight Watchers*' as the advertisement said.

That is where he met Iris. She was his diet coach. She was so empathetic; he could not help but fall in love with her. Wanting so badly to win her, he had steadfastly lost weight and physically transformed himself. He looked amazing -- like the best 'after' photo in the *before and after* advertisements -- so much so, his old friends did not recognize him when he passed them on the street.

Courtship and marriage followed. When he renewed contact with his parents, they were shocked at everything that had transpired and even suggested that Iris had brainwashed and starved their "little Dudders."

Estrangement resumed.

Then Penny was born and nothing else mattered. The estrangement was over for good. His parents could not get enough of their grandchild. She was the new center of their universe.

It was overwhelming and exhausting for Dudley and worse for Iris. So, he was finally determined to set some serious boundaries for his parents.

Thankfully, Penny seemed unaffected by all the extra attention. She was daddy's little darling too. Cute and precocious, she was a ball of energy and never stopped talking. And... where was she right now?

He had lost track of her. Not good!

She really liked to hide. And she was a climber. She would get up into closets and cabinets that would not seem possible for a three year old. It was amazing.

However, he found her right away when he looked into the kitchen. She was not hiding; but she had been *climbing*. She was standing on top of the tall refrigerator with a mischievous grin.

"Daddy, catch me," she chirped when she saw him and prepared to jump.

"What? No! Penny, WAIT!" Dudley shouted from across the kitchen.

He lurched toward her, stumbled, and fell flat on his face with his arms outstretched.

He craned his neck upward. His heart skipped a beat.

Penny had jumped. All he could do was watch helplessly as she fell, as if in slow motion.

Wait a second... It was slow motion.

She landed lightly on her tiptoes just inches from his outstretched hands and giggled, holding her hands over her mouth.

All he could think was, 'Oh... my... God!'

From the doorway behind him he heard Iris gasp, "Oh... my... God!"

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They did not discuss what they had seen until after they had put Penny to bed. With Penny, they acted as if it nothing unusual had happened. Normalcy seemed to be the best approach until they could talk.

At last, they sat facing each other on the couch holding hands.

Dudley's brow was knitted. "Iris, I can explain this. You are probably not going to believe me, but I know what just happened. Penny is *special*. She has a 'gift'. I never told you about my cousin, Harry. He lived with us when I grew up. He had the 'gift' too. My parents tried for more than ten years to stamp it out of him... quite brutally. But they failed -- thankfully for me," he added thoughtfully.

"I treated him monstrously too," admitted Dudley, "but Harry saved my life and, in doing so, ultimately changed my life. It took me several years to realize it, but I finally did. It allowed me to become myself. The 'gift' must run in families. Sorry, I know I'm rambling. Does this make sense so far?"

Iris smiled and nodded.

Was she humoring him?

There was so much more Dudley wanted to tell her, to explain. How, while he and his parents were in hiding and under the protection of Harry's lot, he had come to respect and admire the witches and wizards that had regularly looked in on them. How they had brought food and everything else he and his parents had needed to live comfortably in a safe house. How they were always so nice. After all, who could not like Dedalus Diggle? Dudley had even comforted Dedalus when he broke down after revealing the deaths of several witches and wizards who had helped protect his family.

Dudley knew then he had changed. He later realized this change in attitude had been critical to his parents' safety -- more times than he could remember he had persuaded his frustrated father and mother not to leave the safe house.

He would tell Iris everything, but later.

Dudley swallowed nervously and whispered, "The 'gift' is..."

"...*magic*," breathed Iris.

Dudley paused and stared at her wide eyed.

"Dudley, my sister is a *witch*," she said hesitantly.

Dudley's jaw dropped.

"Well, it's not something you generally talk about," she added quickly.

Dudley's head whirled. He stammered, "Are you... *serious?*"

"Of course. I wouldn't joke after what we've just seen," she said earnestly.

Dudley paused and then continued nervously, "Are you angry? My aunt, my mother's sister, was a witch too. But my mother was so jealous of her that she hated magic."

Iris smiled and touched his cheek. "Just the opposite. I'm *overjoyed* to learn that our daughter, like my sister and your cousin, has the gift of magic and that you understand. You already know about their world and accept it."

She paused, then with a very serious look, said, "Dudley, I want *us* to be a part of our daughter's world. I don't want to shut her out."

Dudley sighed. "You have *nothing* to worry about. I feel exactly the same way. This is going to be an exciting journey for Penny... and for us too."

They both grinned. Then he added thoughtfully, "I hope someday I'll have an opportunity to make up with my cousin. I never did it properly before he left."

"I bet my sister could help you with that," she offered.

Dudley nodded and then slouched heavily back into the cushions. Iris did the same.

"I'm exhausted," Iris sighed.

"Me too," echoed Dudley.

Then he groaned and slowly got up. Turning to face Iris, he took her outstretched arms and leaned back using all of his incredibly reduced bodyweight to pull her up. She hugged him and they made their way to the bedroom arm in arm.

"Dudley, there is just *one* little fly in the ointment, you know," she teased.

"And what's that, my dear?" asked Dudley, feigning concern.

"Well, *two* flies actually... Vernon and Petunia," she giggled.

Dudley chuckled and said, "Fear not, my lovely; for I have a *magical* plan."

They both laughed.

The End