There Goes the Neighbourhood

by Phosphorescent

Summary

The residents of South Petherton are certain that there is something decidedly Odd about Those Potters.

Notes

Standard Disclaimer (Which Is Probably Unnecessary and Almost No One Reads Anyway): I don’t own Harry Potter.

Additional Notes: Despite lurking here for over a year and reading the recommended tutorials, I'm still figuring out AO3; technology and I have always had a love/hate relationship. If you notice any formatting issues in this fic, feel free to give me suggestions as to how to fix them.

Finally, if I have written anything problematic in this or any of my stories, please don't hesitate to let me know (if that is your desire - obviously you don't owe me your education/correction). I will always listen, always thank you, and frequently do my best to fix it.

See the end of the work for more notes.

Lydia Jones still remembers the day that They moved into the old Westcott House.
There was no ominous crack of lightning, no portentous clap of thunder. In fact, it was a shockingly sunny and temperate mid-July afternoon.

Lydia had been outside watering her begonias when Their removal van arrived.

“Honestly, Harry,” a woman with rather bushy brown hair said, climbing out of the driver’s seat. “This thing is a nightmare to drive.”

Harry – a tall man with a shock of untidy black hair – grinned, slamming his door shut.

“Why else d’you think I had you drive it?” he asked.

The woman huffed and scowled at him.

“Aw, c’mon, Hermione,” an even taller man – this one red-haired and freckled – wheedled, clambering out of the vehicle. “It’s a compliment. You know you know more about operating Mug– these sorts of things than anyone else in the family.”

The woman – Hermione – blushed slightly.

“Not for a lack of Dad trying, mind you,” the red-headed male continued.

There was a gurgle of laughter as a freckled woman exited the van.

“Dad’s very determined to get his licence,” the woman said dryly, pulling her mass of coppery hair into a ponytail and securing it with an elastic. “I’d watch out if I were you, Hermione. He’ll be coming after you for lessons any day now.”

Hermione shrugged and said, “Better he gets his first lessons from me than from some poor unsuspecting M– stranger.”

“Oh good,” the woman said, “Dad’ll be thrilled to hear that you’ve volunteered.”

Hermione’s face twitched into an expression that was part smile, part grimace.

“Hey, Ginny?” Harry said slowly. “Where are the kids?”

The freckled woman – Ginny – frowned.

“Good question,” she said, and poked her head inside the van. “Time to get out, everyone. And James, stop pinching your brother!”

“I wasn’t pinching him!” a young boy’s voice insisted from the depths of the van.

“Was too!” another voice insisted.

“Was not!”

“Was too!”

“Was n–”

“I saw you, James,” Ginny sighed.

“Yeah, kiddo,” the red-haired man said, now leaning inside the van as well. “Don’t you remember the First Rule of Mischief-Making?”
“If you’re going to lie, make sure you can get away with it,” a different voice piped up from inside the van.

“Ron!” Hermione hissed, pulling him a bit away from the van.

“Hey, I’m their uncle, not their dad,” Ron said unrepentantly.

“Well, by that logic,” Ginny said, smirking, "I have a lot I ought to teach Rose and–"

“I take it back!” Ron said promptly, tone laced with mild panic. “Kids, obey your parents and never, ever lie because lying is bad.”

“Mummy, I can’t find Dog!” one of the children called.

“Get out of the van and I’ll find him,” Ginny said. “C’mon, out with all of you.”

She withdrew her head and stepped back.

It was as though a bomb had gone off.

A blur of sound and colours later, three children stood in front of the van.

“Is that our new house?” the smaller boy asked, green eyes wide behind his glasses.

“Actually, Al,” the larger boy said. “This is your new house. See, you’ve been such a pain in the arse that Mum and Dad decided to drop you off here on the way to the house where the rest of us will be living.”

The smaller boy – Al – clenched his jaw and said, “You’re lying. Mum and Dad wouldn’t do that.”

His voice came out somewhat more wavering than Lydia suspected he intended it to.

“Ah, but –”

“James, cut it out,” Harry said tiredly. “Al, you know your brother’s just taking the mickey. We’d never do that to any of you, OK? We love you.”

Al shrugged and nodded, but his eyes looked a tad watery all the same.

Ginny scrambled back out of the van, a stuffed animal of some sort clutched in her hand.

“Dog!” the little girl cried joyously, rushing over and embracing the toy.

“Keep a close eye on him, OK, Lily?” Harry said, bending down close to her level. “We don’t want him to run away because he’s scared of the new neighbourhood.”

Lily nodded resolutely and tightened her stranglehold on the stuffed animal.

Lydia had become so absorbed in watching the new neighbours that she started upon noticing that someone was watching her back.

It was the man called Harry, his green eyes sharp behind wire rims.

“Hullo,” he said cheerfully, walking forward and offering her a hand to shake.

After quickly wiping her hand on her trousers, Lydia took his hand and shook it. He had a good handshake: firm and confident.
“I’m Harry Potter,” the man said hesitantly, hand absent-mindedly flattening fringe above a lightning-bolt shaped scar. (What made a scar that shape, anyway?)

“Lydia Jones,” Lydia said. “I live here at Number Ten.”

Harry smiled in a rather relieved fashion and said, “Then I suppose we’re neighbours. Back there is my wife, Ginny, and our three little hooligans, James, Albus, and Lily – we’ll be living in Number Twelve. Oh, and the other two adults are my best friends Ron and Hermione, who’ve been kind enough to help us move our stuff.”

“Welcome to the neighbourhood,” Lydia said. “Do you folks need any help?”

“I think we’re sorted for now,” Harry said. “Thank you, though.”

The little girl – Lily – wandered forwards towards them.

“Hi,” she said quietly, green eyes wide in her pale face. “I’m Lily and this is Dog.”

She held up a grimy stuffed animal that appeared to be in the shape of a rabbit.

“Nice to meet you, Lily, Dog,” Lydia said politely.

Harry shook his head over Lily and mouthed ‘Don’t ask.’

Lydia nodded understandingly; she had grandchildren, after all.

“I’m Mrs Jones,” she continued. “I live at Number Ten, sweetie.”

Lily dropped her head bashfully and clutched at her stuffed rabbit.

“She’s a little shy amongst strangers,” Harry said, drawing Lily in close with an arm.

“What’s that?” the older boy – James – asked loudly, dashing over and pointing at Lydia’s hosepipe.

“That’s a hosepipe, James,” Harry said with a smile. Turning to Lydia, he added, “You can tell that most of his chores have been indoor ones.”

“What’s it do?” James asked in fascination, picking it up from the lawn and fiddling with the nozzle.

“Well, it –”

Pssssssssssssssssssssssss.

A stream of water came out of the hose and soaked Lydia, whom he’d been pointing it at.

Harry immediately snatched the hose out of James’ hands and turned it off.

“I am so sorry, Lydia,” he said, though his tone was more amused than embarrassed. “James, what have we said about not touching things that don’t belong to us?”

“Don’t do it,” James muttered sullenly.

“Right,” Harry said. “Now I believe you have something to say to Mrs Jones here?”

“Sorry,” James sing-songed, before adding in a more interested tone, “I didn’t know it would do that.”
“It’s alright,” Lydia said with a smile that was only slightly strained. “No harm done.”

She shivered as a breeze hit her.

“I think I’m going to change into something dry, though,” she added. “It was nice to meet you, Harry.”

“Likewise,” Harry called after her.

But as she walked into her house, Lydia felt a wrench of foreboding in her gut.

Soon she would learn that this had merely been a Sign of Things To Come.

There was nothing wrong with the Potters, exactly. They were perfectly nice people. (Well, with the possible exception of their eldest son, James, who was an absolute hellion.) But there was no denying that they were a tad – odd. If it weren’t for their accents, Lydia would have sworn that they were foreign, unfamiliar as they were with normal money. They also seemed baffled by perfectly ordinary things such as her hoover and lights, and were utterly fascinated by her telly, computer, and mobile. And strange things seemed to follow them like nobody’s business.

Like that time cloaked (?) reporters camped out in their front garden. Or that time there was a rash of some sort of strange wildlife that had never been seen in the area until the Potters moved in. Or that time that Lydia could have sworn she’d seen a picture on one of the Potter boys’ collecting cards wink at her.

And that wasn’t getting into all the sounds coming from that house. Bangs and cracks and shouting at all hours! And the fireworks. And the toads.

Good God, the toads.

Ever since The Great Toad Incident of 2008, Lydia couldn’t even think the word without shuddering.

Yes, there was definitely something very Odd about those Potters.

End Notes

So why did Harry and Ginny decide to move to a Muggle area? Why didn’t they ever magically soundproof their house? (Or if they did, why isn’t it working?) You decide.

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