

The Hero They Needed

Chapter 1

In a small flat buried among the maze of streets that was Muggle London, Sirius Black sat on his couch, staring deep into the flickering flames of a dying fire. It was all Hallows Eve, and while Muggle children walked door to door with their parents all across the country in search of sweets, the dark-haired young man brooded silently with only a bottle of gin and his worries to keep him company.

All night, something had felt wrong. A feeling of impending doom hung over him like dark clouds threatening a storm. Sirius had tried for hours to put off his worry, convincing himself it was just paranoia. Now, as the clock neared ten, it became too much. Setting his half-empty glass on the stand, he stood and made his way over to the fireplace. He paused to grab a handful of grey, sparkling powder from a vase on the mantle and threw it on the glowing logs. Instantly, the fire roared back to life, bright green flames licking at the entrance of the chimney.

"The rat's nest," he called out loudly.

Dropping to his knees, Sirius closed his eyes and thrust his head into the flames. When he opened them again, he was looking around a dark, dingy living room.

"Peter!" he shouted. "Peter!"

Sirius waited several seconds for a reply but heard nothing. His heart began hammering in his chest as he pulled his head back and stood. Grabbing another handful of powder, he tossed it in carelessly.

"The rat's nest!" he yelled.

The moment the flames turned green, Sirius stepped into the fireplace, arms held tight across his chest. He started spinning as grate after grate flashed by, giving him a momentary glimpse into another witch or wizard's home. After a mental count of six, he bent his knees and prepared to land. In one smooth motion, he came to a stop, stepped forward into the living room he'd been looking at moments before, and drew his wand.

"Peter, are you here!?" Sirius shouted. "Peter!"

Making his way through the small, two-bedroom home of his childhood friend, he swiftly made his way towards one of the bedrooms, hoping to find Peter passed out on his bed. With a flick of his wand, he threw open the door with enough force that it cracked down the center and stopped in the doorway, his stomach sinking.

The room was empty. No Peter, no sheets, and no personal effects lying about. One of the wardrobe doors hung half open, revealing the inside to be as bare as the bedroom.

"No," Sirius whispered, his heart rejecting what his brain was screaming.

Spinning around, he raced back to the living room and lit his wand, peering keenly around the room. There were no signs of forced entry or a struggle. Another wave of his wand and a mumbled incantation showed the Wards Lily had cast were untouched.

Tightening his grip on his wand, he turned and sprinted towards the front door. A flick of his wand sent it flying off the hinges and into the yard. Running as fast as he could, Sirius reached the end of the driveway and twisted, his body curling in on itself until he vanished with a pop. Back in London, an identical pop sounded at the same time as he stepped out of thin air.

Barely breaking stride, Sirius sprinted to a canvas-covered lump sitting just outside his apartment building. Wrenching it off, he revealed a sleek, black motorbike underneath. He threw his leg over the seat, knocked the helmet off the handlebars, and righted the bike. A single kick made the engine roar to life. Heedless to the looks directed his way, he knocked the bike into gear and twisted the throttle.

Accelerating down the street, he turned at the first available alley, locking up the rear tires with a screech. The alley was just big enough for the bike and sidecar but it was short. Not quite long enough for a normal take-off.

“Fuck it,” Sirius growled.

Gunning the engine, he popped the clutch and shot off down the alley. Knocking the bike into second, he accelerated rapidly towards the solid brick wall. Letting out a roar that matched the sound coming from his bike, Sirius wrenched back on the handlebars and flicked a switch with his thumb. He grunted as the bike lurched into the air and slammed tire first into the wall five feet up. In complete defiance of gravity and physics, the bike drove effortlessly up the wall. Shifting into third, he raced as fast as he could toward the edge of the roof. Flicking another button just as he cleared the roof, the bike continued on and disappeared into the inky black sky.

Letting out a sigh of relief, Sirius pinned the throttle and ran through the gears as he headed North towards the village of Godric’s Hollow.

“I swear to Merlin, Peter, if anything happens to them because of you...,” he growled under his breath.

The trip, even on his magically enchanted bike, seemed to take forever. That high, the air was cold and crisp, necessitating the use of several Warming Charms. Mercifully, the village lights came into view, and he began his descent. Uncaring about the Muggles that might see him, Sirius landed his bike in the middle of the street. Driving on the wrong side of the road and looking left, his heart dropped as James and Lily’s house came into view.

A large section of wall was missing on the second floor and the front door was hanging crookedly, only the top hinge still connected. Bringing the bike to a screeching halt, Sirius leapt from the bike, his wand drawn, and through the wide-open doorway. Scanning around for threats, it took him a moment to notice the body lying crumpled at the bottom of the stairs.

“James!” Sirius yelled.

Racing forward, he slid on his knees and rolled him over. Brown eyes stared back at him blank and lifeless. A lump formed in Sirius' throat, his eyes burning as he stared at his best friend's face. Before he could drown in his grief, the sound of a baby crying had his head snapping up to look up the stairs.

"Harry," Sirius said.

Letting go of James, he took the stairs two at a time, wand held aloft. The air felt thick with magic as he peeked around through the door, ready and anxious for a fight. What he saw both shocked him and broke his heart. Lily lay in front of the crib, her green eyes just as lifeless as her husband's. The wall to the left of the crib was completely missing with bits of drywall and roofing tile littering the floor. Voldemort was nowhere to be seen but, miraculously, Harry was alive.

Sitting in his crib and crying, Harry only had a small cut on his forehead.

"It's okay, Harry, I've got you," Sirius said.

Stepping carefully around Lily, he picked Harry up and held him to his chest. Rubbing his back soothingly, Sirius glanced down mournfully.

"I'll take good care of him," he said tearfully. "I swear to you, James, Lily, I'll protect him with my life."

Wiping his face, Sirius left the room and down the stairs. He knew if he didn't get out of the house soon, he'd break. As he stepped past James' body, grief started to turn to rage. It was time to go rat hunting.

"Come on, Harry," Sirius said, pressing his godson's head to his chest so he didn't look around. "Time to go see Aunt Andy."

Stepping outside, he walked past the open gate just as a massive figure appeared out of nowhere. Drawing his wand, a deadly curse on the tip of his tongue, Sirius paused when he recognized the new arrival.

“Hagrid,” he called, lowering his wand. “What are you doing here?”

“Dumbledore sent me,” Hagrid said, his face unusually serious. “Said he felt the wards fall. I’m glad to see Harry’s alright. Where are James and Lily?”

“Gone,” Sirius said, swallowing thickly.

“Gone?” Hagrid asked, his beetle black eyes swimming with tears.

At Sirius’ nod, he sniffled, tears falling into his thick, bushy beard.

“You know what happened?” he asked, choking back a sob.

“No,” Sirius said, shaking his head. “Lily must’ve done something, though. The nursery’s a wreck and You-Know-Who wouldn’t have left Harry alive if he could help it. I hope she killed the bastard.”

“If anyone could do it, it’d be Lily,” Hagrid sniffled. “Poor Harry. Having to grow up without his parents.”

Sirius nodded but said nothing, the grief shutting him down. In looking for a change of subject, he caught on to something that bothered him.

“You said Dumbledore sent you?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Hagrid said, pulling a handkerchief out of his pocket and blowing his nose loudly.

“Did he say why he didn’t come himself?” Sirius asked, disguising the suspicion in his voice as a curiosity.

“I didn’t ask,” Hagrid admitted. “Just came to me hut and told me something had happened to the Potters. Gave me a Portkey and told me to bring Harry to ‘im.”

“Just Harry?” Sirius asked, his eyes narrowing. “I wonder how he knew he was alive.”

“Some kinda spell I s’pose,” Hagrid shrugged.

“Yeah,” Sirius said, his mind working frantically.

“Well, I better get Harry back to Dumbledore before the Aurors show up,” Hagrid said, stepping closer.

Sirius held Harry tighter and took a step back. Hagrid looked at him curiously.

“I’m his Godfather,” he said, knowing he needed to leave quickly. “I should take care of him.”

As far as the world was concerned, he had been James and Lily’s Secret Keeper. He’d never catch up to Peter if he spent Merlin knew how long being interrogated by Crouch. For a moment, he considered just giving Harry to Hagrid, but his suspicions about Dumbledore held him back. Something was wrong here.

“It’s Dumbledore’s orders,” Hagrid shrugged.

Thinking quickly, Sirius turned like he was going to hand Harry to him. Behind his back, he flicked his wand towards the house, sending one of the chairs tumbling across the kitchen loudly. Hagrid froze with his arms outstretched, his face raised to look over Sirius' head. Sirius clutched Harry tighter, wand held aloft as he backed away from the house, and from Hagrid.

"What was that?" he asked, adding a bit of panic to his voice.

"Dunno," Hagrid muttered, his eyes narrowed as he scanned the house. "Squirrel maybe?"

"Sounded too big for that," Sirius said. "I didn't check the house that well. I just grabbed Harry and got out. You mind taking a look? I don't think I can go back in there."

"I'll check it out," Hagrid said, puffing up his chest.

As he strode towards the house, Sirius backed slowly towards his bike. The moment Hagrid ducked inside, he turned and sprinted. Setting Harry in the sidecar, he waved his wand, transfiguring the seat to conform around him. Using a couple of more charms to protect him from the cold and wind, he hopped on and started the engine. Hagrid came rushing out just as he took off down the street.

"Sorry, Hagrid!" Sirius yelled.

Before the half-Giant could react, Sirius gunned the engine. A few seconds later, he took back off into the night. Glancing over at Harry, he smiled when he saw the boy waving at the passing stars overhead, his hand clenching and opening as if to catch them. Banking gently to the left, he headed for his cousin, Andromeda's house.

"Alright Harry," Sirius yelled over the sound of the wind and engine. "I'll drop you off at Aunt Andi's. You can play with Nymphadora. You remember Dora, don't you?"

Turning away from Harry, he grit his teeth and went even faster.

“Then Uncle Padfoot needs to go see an old friend,” he growled.

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It was almost midnight by the time Sirius pounded on Andi’s front door. Harry, now under a Silencing Charm, had fallen asleep halfway over Bristol.

“Who’s there?” she called. “Do you have any idea what time it is?”

“It’s me,” Sirius called back.

“Sirius?” Andi asked, undoing the locks on the door. “I swear to Merlin, if you’re drunk —”

Andromeda broke off as she opened the door and stared at the baby in his arms with wide eyes. Andi was a tall, beautiful woman with dark, gently curling hair. Her grey eyes and sharp nose spoke strongly of her Black heritage.

“Is that Harry?” Andi asked, pulling her housecoat tightly around her curvy figure.

Sirius nodded, and her face dropped.

“Come and tell me what happened,” she said, stepping to the side.

“I can’t stay,” Sirius said, walking in and heading towards the living room. “I need to find Peter before he leaves the country.”

“Peter?” Andi asked, confused.

“He betrayed us,” Sirius growled, laying Harry gently down on the couch. “He was their Secret Keeper. I went to check on him tonight and he was gone. He sold them to You-Know-Who.”

Straightening up, he turned to leave, only to find himself staring down the business end of Andi’s wand.

“Funny, last you told me, *you* were their Secret Keeper,” she said, narrowing her eyes.

“Oh, come on, Andi!” Sirius yelled. “You can’t think I would do that!”

“No, I don’t,” Andi said, her stern features unmoved. “Which is the only reason I haven’t cursed you yet. Now, explain.”

“I don’t have time for this!” Sirius shouted frustratedly. “Peter-”

“Can wait,” Andi interrupted. “Explain. Now.”

“Andi? Is everything alright?” Ted, her husband, asked as he reached the bottom of the stairs.

Ted was a short, plain-looking man with a head full of straw-colored hair. There wasn’t anything exceptional about the man, but he was nice enough.

“No,” Andi said. “James and Lily are dead, and Sirius here is just about to explain what happened.”

“Ah,” Ted said, looking between the two for a moment. “I’ll just put some tea on, shall I?”

“Thank you, dear,” Andi said, never even glancing away from Sirius.

Once Ted was in the kitchen, and Sirius realized he wouldn't be leaving without explaining, he threw his hands up in frustration.

"Fine," he barked. "Something felt off all night, so I Flooed Peter to check on him. When he didn't answer, I Flooed over and found his place empty. Peter was gone and so were all of his belongings. There was no sign of forced entry and the wards were intact."

"He had his Floo connected?" Andi asked, brow arched.

"Everyone knows if you want to hide you need to get off the Floo," Sirius sighed. "We didn't want to draw any attention to him. No one knew he was the Secret Keeper and out of the three of us, he was the least likely to be chosen."

"Not a bad idea, but risky," Andi said. "It's possible someone followed him, hoping he knew who the Secret Keeper was."

"But why take his clothes?" Sirius asked, shaking his head. "No, Peter left on his own and if You-Know-Who found James and Lily, that means he told them."

"You're probably right," Andi admitted. "What happened next?"

"I Apparated back to my place and grabbed my bike," Sirius continued. "I flew as fast as I could to Godric's Hollow."

"Why not just Apparate there?" she asked suspiciously.

"I couldn't," Sirius replied. "I made Lily obliviate the Apparition coordinates from my mind. I was supposed to be a distraction. I didn't want the Death Eaters to find them from that if I was caught. I only knew the general direction and a few landmarks to look for."

"I'm impressed," Andi said, cocking an eyebrow. "This is quite well thought out for you."

"Not well enough," Sirius growled. "That rat led him straight to them. James and Lily were already dead when I got there. The nursery was missing a wall and Harry was crying in his crib. I don't know what Lily did, but it must've been amazing. You-Know-Who wouldn't have left Harry alive. I think she might've killed him. I could practically taste the magic in the air."

Sighing, Sirius sat in a chair heavily.

"Then, as I was leaving to bring Harry here, Hagrid shows up," he said.

"Hagrid?" Andi asked, eye narrowed.

"Yeah," Sirius said, still unsure what to think himself. "He said Dumbledore sent him to pick up Harry and only Harry. Hagrid mentioned something about the wards alerting him, but it still doesn't make sense. Why send Hagrid when you know You-Know-Who might be there? Why not come himself?"

"Those are very good questions," Andi said, finally lowering her wand.

Ted came back from the kitchen, a tray of tea floating in front of him.

"Do we still have Nymphadora's old crib?" she asked, taking a cup.

"It's in the attic," Ted told her.

"We'll get it down tomorrow, then," Andi said. "I'll transfigure something for the night. Harry can stay with Nymphadora. Sirius, you can take the guest room."

“Thanks, Andi,” Sirius said, levering himself out of his chair. “But I really need to-”

His words were cut off when he was knocked back into his seat, his wand ripped from his pocket and roped snaked around his chest.

“What the hell, Andi!?” Sirius yelled.

“You’re going nowhere,” she told him sternly. “The Aurors will know what’s happened and they’ll be looking for you. If you go after Peter now, you’ll end up in Azkaban.”

“He killed them!” Sirius shouted angrily, struggling in vain to free himself.

“I know,” Andi said softly. “But you need to think about Harry. I have no legal standing with him. What happens to him when Dumbledore comes knocking and his Godfather is sitting in prison?”

Sirius opened and closed his mouth twice before slumping back in his chair.

“Fuck,” he muttered.

“Language,” Andi scolded. “Now, are you going to behave, or do I need to keep you tied up all night?”

“I’ll stay,” Sirius sighed.

“Good,” Andi said, releasing the ropes and tossing him his wand. “Now, first thing tomorrow, you need to go to the Ministry and explain everything that happened. Volunteer to take Veritaserum, that should speed things up.”

“Alright,” Sirius nodded. “Probably for the best. Maybe I can get Crouch to let me go after Peter once I explain everything.”

“I’d say you’re too close to the case, but I’ve seen that man make far worse decisions,” Andi told him.

Walking over the couch, she gently picked up Harry and cradled him to her chest.

“I’ll put Harry to bed,” she said. “Try to get some sleep, Sirius.”

“I doubt it,” Sirius muttered. “Thanks, Andi. For everything.”

“It’s what family’s for,” Andi said, giving him a smile.

Chapter 2

Sirius didn’t sleep at all that night. Whenever he closed his eyes, he saw James and Lily’s, cold and lifeless, staring back at him. He sat for hours on the couch, watching the minutes tick by as he waited for the sun to rise. Guilt and sadness ate him up on the inside, gnawing painfully at his heart.

A part of him was glad to be alone, but another part wished Andromeda had stayed. But, then again, she hadn’t known James and Lily that well. Andi had only met them a couple of times before they’d gone into hiding. Sirius wished he could call Remus, but he was still away talking with the Werewolves and wouldn’t be back for a few more days.

Unless the news reached him sooner, in which case Sirius worried he might try to kill him. He was really regretting keeping his ‘brilliant’ plan to himself. It was stupid now that he thought about it, but the thought of Voldemort getting to James and Lily was so unthinkable he hadn’t even considered it an option. In hindsight, he should have told someone, anyone, they all trusted.

“Did you get *any* sleep?”

Sirius looked up so fast that his neck popped painfully. Andi came walking down the stairs in a worn, pink bathrobe, eyeing him critically. Blinking, he glanced out of the window and was surprised to see the sun rising over the horizon. After hours of watching and waiting, the damn thing had managed to sneak up on him.

“A couple of hours,” Sirius lied.

“I’m sure,” Andi replied, unconvinced. “Well, since you’re up, you might as well come with me to the kitchen. You’re going to need to learn how to cook if you’re going to take care of Harry.”

Groaning and rolling his eyes, Sirius got to his feet and followed her into the kitchen. Grabbing a carton of eggs and a pack of sausages from the refrigerator, as well as a can of beans from the pantry, she showed him how to make a simple breakfast.

“I hope you can at least make toast,” Andi said, handing him a loaf of bread.

“I’m not that bad,” Sirius grumbled, snatching it from her hand. “I’ve been living on my own for years now, you know.”

“You live above an Indian restaurant for a reason,” she said knowingly.

“Well, they do have great takeaway,” Sirius admitted.

Laying out ten pieces of bread on the counter, he toasted one side, then flipped them with a charm to toast the other. While he was doing that, Ted ambled into the kitchen sleepily and headed straight for the coffee maker.

“Morning,” Ted yawned, kissing Andi on the cheek.

“Morning, dear,” Andi smiled. “Are the kids still asleep?”

“Yep,” he replied, smiling softly. “I checked on them before I came down. Nymphadora must’ve woken up in the night and moved her bed closer to the crib. She’s laying with her hand through the bars, and Harry’s got a death grip on her finger.”

“That girl,” Andi said, shaking her head as she moved the last of the eggs onto a platter.

“Should I go wake them?” Sirius asked.

“Oh, you poor man,” Andi said, patting his cheek. “You have so much to learn. If the kids are still asleep, eat, then wake them. Things get chaotic at the table when kids are involved, especially with Nymphadora.”

“Right,” Sirius said, looking over at Ted, who chuckled as they sat at the table.

“Nymphadora didn’t want scrambled eggs yesterday,” he said. “Her accidental magic dumped the whole bowl over Andi’s head. Took her an hour to get it all out of her hair.”

Sirius snorted but couldn’t bring himself to really laugh. It felt like doing so would somehow be disrespectful to James and Lily. Eating mechanically, he got through half his plate, never tasting what he was eating before an owl flew in with the morning paper. Ted dug a Knut out of his pocket to pay for it and took it from the impatient bird. As it flew back out the open window, he opened the paper and immediately choked on what he was eating.

“What is it?” Andi asked.

Coughing to clear his throat, Ted set the paper on the table. On the front page was a picture of James and Lily's house in Godric's Hollow, Ministry workers swarming the scene. The title of the article stood out in big, bold letters.

Boy-Who-Lived Defeats Dark Lord! Sirius Black Wanted for Kidnap and Murder!

"What!" Sirius yelled, jumping to his feet.

"It gets worse," Ted said. "The Ministry has started a nationwide search. They have orders to kill you on sight. And there's a ten thousand Galleon bounty for information leading to your capture."

"Shit!" Sirius said.

He nearly knocked over his chair as he got to his feet and began to pace back and forth in the small kitchen.

"I was their best friend," Sirius growled, running a hand through his long, dark hair. "How could they think I'd murder them and then kidnap my own Godson?"

"Because you told everyone you were the Secret Keeper," Andi pointed out. "What about Harry? Does the paper say anything about him?"

"Let's see," Ted replied, scanning the article. "They know he was alive when Sirius took him. Good Lord, they're saying Harry killed You-Know-Who in a burst of accidental magic."

"Ted," Andi said, giving him a brief glare.

"Right. Sorry, dear," he said. "Um, they believe Sirius is either going to use Harry in a ritual to bring You-Know-Who back to life or raise him to be the next Dark Lord. One that he controls so

he can take over magical Britain. Some believe Harry is already dead, and Sirius has already fled the country.”

“Alright,” Sirius barked angrily. “Okay, here’s what I’ll do. I’ll go to the Ministry and tell them what really happened. They won’t kill me until they know where Harry is, right?”

Ted and Andromeda shared a look that didn’t boost his confidence.

“Sirius, I hate to say this, but I think as soon as they have you, they’ll use Veritaserum to find out where Harry is and then have you Kissed,” Andi told him.

“They would administer the Kiss to someone just like that,” Sirius said, though the words felt like a lie even as he said them.

“They already have,” Andromeda told him, her face solemn. “Ted, tell him about those cases you’re working on.”

Sighing, Ted folded the paper and set it aside.

“My firm is working on two cases where the Ministry arrested two ‘known’ Death Eaters and had them Kissed before they could be questioned,” he said. “Neither of them had the mark, and they went missing days before they suddenly reappeared and committed heinous crimes. The families believe they were put under the Imperious Curse and forced to do those things. With the current climate, it’s been nearly impossible to find a sympathetic ear in the Wizengamot. I’ve been holding off on filing the cases. If I do it now, I have no doubt I’d lose.”

“It was Crouch, wasn’t it?” Sirius asked, his heart racing as he started to pace again. “I knew that fucker was no good.”

“If you go into the Ministry now, it’s almost certain you won’t be coming back out,” Andi told him bluntly as she shared a look with her husband. “We need to think of something else.”

“What if I grant you custody of Harry and make a public statement?” Sirius asked. “I can hide out someplace long enough for the public to hear my side of the story, and Harry will be safe here. They’d have to put me on trial just to clear things up, right?”

“Maybe,” Ted said, stroking his chin.

“It won’t work,” Andi said, shaking her head. “The Ministry lost this war, everyone knows it. It’s only because of whatever happened at the Potters last night that it’s over. They won’t allow anyone but themselves look like the hero now. Kill you, save Harry Potter, and they’re back as everyone’s savior. Not to mention, there are still Death Eaters in the Ministry that would still love to see you dead. You’d never live long enough to see a trial. Ted, I think it might be time for plan B.”

Ted stared at Andi for a long moment, his normally jovial face dropping into a frown as he finally nodded.

“What’s plan_”

Sirius was cut off by a loud knock at the door. Everyone froze, staring at each other until they knocked again.

“Just a moment!” Andi yelled, dropping her voice as she turned back to the men in the kitchen. “Ted, Take Sirius and the kids and hide. I’ll tell you when it’s safe to come out.”

“I have a better idea,” Sirius said.

Dropping down onto all fours, he transformed into a big black dog. Andi and Ted’s shocked looks lasted for only a second.

“That’ll have to work,” Andi said just as the person knocked again. “Ted, go!”

Nodding, Ted quickly and quietly made his way up the stairs. Sirius heard a murmured incantation before the house fell silent.

"Coming," Andi called.

Sirius followed her to the door so he could see who it was. When Andi opened the door, he wasn't too surprised to see Dumbledore standing there in a dark blue set of robes that sparkled in the morning sun.

"Good morning, headmaster," Andi said respectfully. "What brings you here this early?"

"Hello, Andromeda," Albus said, smiling tiredly. "I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm afraid I have grave news. Have you had a chance to read this morning's paper?"

"No, it arrived while I was making breakfast," she said, looking up at him worriedly. "What's happened?"

"Voldemort found and attacked the Potters last night," Albus told her, his face dropping. "James and Lily are dead. Miraculously, Harry survived, but Sirius removed him from the house before I arrived. I'm afraid there's evidence to suggest he was involved in giving away their location. You haven't heard from him, have you?"

"That's terrible," Andi said, her acting perfect. "No, I haven't heard from Sirius in weeks. But I can't imagine him doing anything to hurt James, Lily, or Harry."

"Until last night, I would've said the same," Albus sighed, taking off his glasses to give them a quick clean. "Please, if you hear from him, let me know immediately. It's imperative Harry is found and returned to his family."

Sirius perked up at that. James didn't have any family, and Lily's only living relative was her Muggle sister. Surely he wouldn't put Harry with that magic-hating shrew, he thought. Andromeda caught his movement out of the corner of her eye and spoke up just as Dumbledore started to turn.

"I wasn't aware James had any family left," Andi said.

"Indeed, Harry is now the last remaining Potter," Albus told her. "Fortunately, Lily's sister has agreed to take him in. It's the safest place for him. Sorry to bother you so early, Andromeda. Please let me know if you hear from Sirius."

"Of course, headmaster," Andi replied while Sirius fought back the urge to growl.

She closed the door slowly, giving them just enough time to see Dumbledore Disapparate before the latch clicked into place. Sirius instantly transformed back into his human form.

"What the hell is he thinking!?" he raged. "Petunia hates magic! She wouldn't even come to James and Lily's wedding! And how can he think I'd ever do something to hurt any of them!? That sanctimonious, self-righteous son of a--"

"Sirius!" Andi yelled, slapping his shoulder. "First of all, don't use words you don't understand. Secondly, you told everyone you were the Secret Keeper, remember? Is there anyone that knows the truth? Is it in James or Lily's wills?"

"No," Sirius grumbled. "We didn't want to chance anyone finding out the truth. We didn't even tell Remus because of how much time he spent around the other Werewolves."

"You could've told me," Andromeda told him, crossing his arms.

"I didn't want to put your family at risk," Sirius replied lamely.

“Bellatrix is my sister, and I married a Muggleborn. I’ve always been at risk,” she told him angrily before pausing to take a deep breath. “This isn’t getting us anywhere. Do you trust Dumbledore enough to tell him the truth? Do you think he’ll listen to you?”

“I don’t know,” Sirius said, running his hands through his hair. “I used to, but something changed. He’s been making really odd decisions the last few weeks. It was like he’d given up. He was really focused on James, Lily, and Harry for some reason. James told me some of what was happening, but I didn’t let him tell me everything in case I got captured. Merlin, I’m an idiot.”

“You were in a tough situation,” Andi said, giving him a hug. “If we can’t trust Dumbledore, then we have no choice but to deal with this ourselves.”

“Is this that plan B you were talking about?” Sirius asked.

“Yes,” Andi said. “Let me go get Ted and the kids, and I’ll explain.”

Patting his shoulder, she turned and made her way upstairs. Sighing tiredly, Sirius walked over to the couch and collapsed onto it heavily. He dropped his head into his hands, feeling like the whole world was collapsing around him.

“I can carry him,” Nymphadora said loudly from the top of the stairs.

“You’re not carrying him down the stairs,” Andi said annoyedly.

“You can sit with Harry on the couch, okay?” Ted asked.

“Okay!” Tonks cheered. “Thanks, Daddy.”

Sirius smiled slightly as Nymphadora came racing down the stairs, her hair bright yellow. The energetic four-year-old ran right past him and climbed up onto the other end of the couch. She

was waiting impatiently before Ted and Andi, with Harry in her arms, had even reached the bottom of the stairs.

“Ted, can you call Meredith?” Andi asked, setting Harry next to Nymphadora, who grabbed his hand and started gabbing away.

“Sure,” Ted replied.

Kissing his wife on the cheek, he made his way over to the Floo. While he was grabbing a handful of Floo powder and getting on his knees, Andi sat across from him.

“I think the best option right now, for all of us, is to get out of Britain,” Andi said.

“I can’t ask you to do that,” Sirius said, shaking his head. “I was thinking I could just take Harry and go to Black Island. I don’t want to put your family in the middle of this.”

“We’re already in the middle of this,” Andi told him. “Ted and I have been talking about this for a while. Even with You-Know-Who gone, we still have to worry about the Death Eaters in the Ministry. You know as well as I do that people that powerful aren’t going to see the inside of Azkaban. Besides, without that monster holding Bella’s leash, there’s nothing to stop her from coming here. Add to that the way our government is treating you, we think it’s time to leave. Ted has family in America. We’ve had arrangements set up for months.”

“But how do we get there?” Sirius asked. “We can’t just walk into the Ministry and ask for an International Portkey.”

“We have a Vanishing Cabinet upstairs connected to Ted’s uncle’s house in Nevada,” she replied. “I made plans to leave as soon as Bella married Lestrage. I knew it would only be a matter of time before she came after us. She’s made her opinion of Ted quite clear over the last few years. Ted’s talking to a friend of his right now. She’s a Congresswoman in MACUSA. She’ll make sure you’re given a fair trial there. You know how much the Americans like a good headline.”

"We're leaving?" Nymphadora asked, hugging Harry tightly.

"I'm afraid so, sweetheart," Andi said softly. "It's not safe for us here anymore, especially for Harry."

"He's coming with us, right?" the little girl asked, morphing her eyes to make them look slightly bigger.

"Yes, Harry and Sirius are coming with us," Andi smiled, looking at Sirius as if daring him to argue.

"Yay!" Nymphadora yelled, kissing Harry's head as he tried to squirm out of her grip.

Ted pulled his head out of the fire and sat on the arm of Andi's chair.

"We're all set. Meredith will meet us at the house with a couple of Aurors in a few hours," he told them. "They'll need to question him under Veritaserum, but it will all be public, and I'll be with you the whole time. She's also sending a Healer to take a look at Harry. Bagnold is claiming he survived the Killing Curse last night."

"That's ridiculous," Sirius scoffed. "No one can survive that curse."

"Maybe not," Andi said, drawing the incredulous stares of both men. "I checked on his cut after I laid him down for the night. Whatever caused it is some of the darkest magic I've ever seen."

"But there's no way... I mean, Harry's only a baby, right," Sirius said. "I know he showed magic early, but accidental magic can't stop a Killing Curse, can it?"

"I didn't say he did it on his own," Andi corrected him. "We all know how brilliant Lily was. I'm sure she had something to do with it, but Harry survived some powerful magic last night. Of that, there's no doubt."

"Is it hurting him?" Sirius asked, glancing over at the toddler in concern.

"No," Andi replied quickly. "Besides a cut, he's perfectly healthy. Still, it wouldn't hurt to get a second opinion."

"I hate to interrupt, but we really should get packing," Ted butted in.

"Right," Sirius said, getting to his feet. "Well, looks like I'll have to go with what I'm wearing. They'll be watching my apartment. I just need to figure out what to do with my bike."

"You rode that death trap all the way here? With Harry?" Andi asked angrily.

"I didn't have a choice," Sirius said, waving her off.

"Idiot," Andi muttered. "Where did you leave it?"

"I parked it behind the petrol station on the corner and put it under a Disillusionment Charm," he told her.

"At least you hide it well," she sighed. "If Dumbledore had seen that... Alright, Ted, you go get the bike and see if you can shrink it. I don't want Sirius going outside the house. They could be watching it. Sirius and I will start packing."

"Mummy!" Nymphadora yelled. "Harry made a stinky!"

“Correction,” Andi smirked. “I’ll start packing while Sirius changes his Godson.”

“I don’t know how to change a baby!” Sirius said, looking alarmed. “And I don’t have any diapers.”

Andi’s smirk never faltered as she summoned a piece of parchment and transfigured it into a diaper before it even reached her. Catching it, she handed him and patted the top of his head.

“Time to learn,” she told him.

Ted chuckled as he headed towards the door while Andi took Nymphadora by the hand and led her upstairs to pack. Sighing, Sirius pulled off Harry’s pants and wrinkled his nose at the smell.

“Urgh, what did you eat?” he asked.

Sirius turned his head to the side for fresh air, he tried and failed to open the diaper. Giving up, he drew his wand and vanished it.

“Shit,” he cursed.

Using a couple of more spells to clean the mess on Harry and the new one on the couch, Sirius grabbed both of the toddler’s feet gently in one hand and lifted him up. Harry giggled while Sirius grabbed the diaper and slipped it under him. Tilting his head to the side, he turned it back and forth a couple of times.

“I don’t suppose you know which part is the front, do you?” he asked.

Picking the side he thought was right, Sirius set Harry back down and folded the diaper over before realizing he didn’t know how to close it.

“How the bloody hell does this thing work?” he asked no one.

After struggling for a few more moments, he once again resorted to using his wand. Two quick Sticking Charms left the sides attached quite securely. Putting Harry’s pants on was even more of a struggle. The lad seemed to take great joy in yanking one leg free while Sirius tried to cloth the other. After several minutes of struggling, he finally managed to get them on and wiped the sweat from his brow.

“I hope you’re not always this difficult,” Sirius said, lifting Harry up and holding him to his chest. “Now that that’s done, ready to go cause some mischief in America?”

Chapter 3

Sirius stepped into the Vanishing Cabinet, and Andi closed the door behind him. He felt pressure on his entire body, his ears popping, and then the feeling left. Sticking his pinky in his ear, he wiggled it around and worked his jaw as he opened the door and stepped out into his new home. The house was like nothing he’d ever seen before. The front of the house, where the living area was, was made up of bare white walls and minimal furniture. An open floor plan left him with a clear view of the kitchen and the back wall made almost entirely of glass panes from floor to ceiling.

Stepping out of the cabinet, he closed the door behind him and walked closer. Outside the window, all he could see was mile after mile of reddish sand with a few dry bushes and cacti dotting the landscape. In the distance, he could see a large hill with a massive city sprawling out on either side far behind it. It had been just after noon when he’d stepped into the cabinet, but here, the sun was just rising over the horizon.

“Sirius!” Andi yelled. “Stop staring at the scenery and help me start unpacking.”

“Right,” Sirius replied, shaking himself from his reverie. “This place is huge, and it’s a second home?”

“Ted’s uncle owns a software company,” Andi told him, handing him the suitcases she’d brought with her. “Don’t ask. I don’t understand what it is, either. I do know he made a lot of money from it. He’s getting on in age and doesn’t come out here much. I think he spends most of his time out in California now.”

“Does he know about magic?” Sirius asked, watching as she closed the cabinet, then opened it a moment later and started pulling out trunks and boxes.

“No,” Andi replied. “The Americans are very strict about that sort of thing. We just told him there were terrorist attacks in England, and we might need to get out. He offered us this house as soon as we told him.”

“Nice guy,” Sirius commented.

Suddenly, they heard crying coming from the cabinet. The door opened and Nymphadora stumbled out while Harry cried in Ted’s arms.

“I don’t think he liked the trip,” he told them, bouncing Harry and rubbing his back. “It’s all right. It’s all over now.”

“I’ll take him,” Andi said, taking him from Ted. “You two need to get ready to meet Meredith. She’ll be here any minute.”

The words had only just left her mouth when there was a knock at the door.

“Bugger,” Ted muttered. “Sirius, give me your wand. Let me do all the talking unless they ask you a question directly.”

“Why do you need my wand?” he asked, reluctant to part with it.

“it’ll look better if you’ve already surrendered,” Ted said urgently. “Sirius, trust me.”

Huffing in frustration, Sirius handed over his wand and stuffed his hands in his pockets while Andi went to answer the door.

“Andromeda,” came a woman’s voice. “It’s good to see you again. Can we come in?”

“Of course,” Andi said, stepping aside and holding the door open.

A middle-aged woman with dark curly hair greying at the edges stepped into the house. Her dark, intelligent eyes scanned over the room while a small smile hovered on her lips. She wore a Muggle dress suit under an open, dark blue robe, the golden MACUSA insignia embroidered over her right breast. Behind her came two men. One was black, the other white, but they both wore matching suits and sunglasses, wands peeking out of their sleeves.

“You must be Sirius Black,” Meredith smiled, looking him over. “You’ve caused quite the stir. Meredith Bennet, at your service.”

“Pleasure,” Sirius said, smiling shortly.

“Oh, don’t be so nervous,” Meredith chuckled. “If I really thought you were a threat, I’d’ve sent the MIB to pick you up. So long as you’re telling the truth, we just need to take a trip to D.C., you give your testimony before Congress, and then you’re free to go. I’ve already processed the Tonks’ and Harry’s request for asylum. Once you’re cleared, I’ll stamp yours.”

“Has there been a request for extradition?” Ted asked.

“No, I doubt they even know you’re here,” Meredith told him. “Last I heard, the British closed all exits from the country until you’re found. They’ve yet to contact other countries, which is why we need to move quickly. I’ll need your wand, I’m afraid.”

Ted handed it over, and Meredith nodded approvingly.

“The next session starts in less than an hour, I should have them home after lunch,” Meredith said to Andi.

“Thank you, Meredith,” Andi said gratefully. “I don’t know what we would’ve done without your help.”

“Don’t mention it,” Meredith smiled. “It’s the least I can do after everything Ted did for Henry.”

She gave Andi a brief hug and then walked out the door. Ted put his hand on Sirius’ back, guiding him to follow her, the two Aurors wordlessly falling in behind. Sirius squinted from the bright sun as soon as he stepped outside.

“Bloody hell,” he said, shielding his eyes.

“Jones,” Meredith called, holding out her hand.

Reaching for the inside pocket of his jacket, the white Auror pulled out an iron horseshoe and handed it to her.

“This Portkey will take us to the Capital in Washington,” she said, holding it out. “If you’re ready to go, grab hold.”

Ted reached out first, and Sirius took a deep breath before taking hold. The two Aurors moved in on either side of him before gripping his biceps and touching the horseshoe. Before Sirius could question them, Meredith tapped the Portkey with her wand, and they were off.

Tumbling through a wild swirl of colors, the trip lasted much longer than Sirius was used to. Just as he was beginning to wonder if it would ever end, the Portkey slowed, and he started to kick

his feet. They landed under the cover of a bus stop, and the first thing he noticed was the sudden change in temperature. It was much colder in Washington, D.C., and there was a light dusting of snow on the sidewalk. In front of him was the Capital building, looking massive compared to the way he'd imagined looking at pictures in his History of Magic books.

Wrenching his arms free from the Aurors, Sirius gave them a glare and adjusted his leather jacket aggressively. The two men stood back, their faces impassive. He hated the fact their eyes were hidden behind those glasses.

"This way," Meredith said, marching forward without looking back to see if they were following.

Crossing the street, they walked past the Muggles making their way into the building through the front entrance and made their way down the side until they came to a metal door. Meredith tapped a pattern on the door with her wand, and the lock clicked open audibly. Yanking the door open, she strode inside. Ted put his hand on Sirius' back, directing him to go first. When Sirius stepped inside, he found himself in a long, wide hallway with doors on either side. Each door had an American flag outside of it and one or two others he wasn't familiar with. One he particularly liked was a yellow flag with a segmented snake across.

"We just need to make a quick stop at my office," Meredith said.

Walking a little further down the hall, she turned and opened one of the doors.

"Arabella, I'm back, have we heard anything from Britain?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," replied a young, Hispanic woman with a pretty face, her hair tied up in a bun. "Congressman Holmes stopped by a few minutes ago, though. He said everything is ready."

"Perfect," Meredith smiled. "Thank you."

Closing the door, she started back down the hall.

“Who’s this Holmes bloke?” Sirius asked curiously, his paranoia getting the better of him.

“Congressman Edward Holmes from Texas, he’s the speaker for Congress,” Meredith told him. “You’re lucky the Whigs took the majority after the last election. This would’ve been much harder if the Democrats were still in charge.”

“Whigs?” Ted asked. “I thought it was Democrats and Republicans.”

“Only on the Muggle side,” Meredith told him. “In Muggle Congress, the Whigs were split on slavery, and the party fell apart in the 1840s. The Republicans formed in 1854 as the party against slavery. We never had that issue on the magical side. We agreed to end all slavery years before the civil war broke out.”

“Huh,” Ted said. “Wish Binns had taught us that.”

“He probably did, we just slept through it,” Sirius joked.

“You’ll find Ilvermony has much better history lessons,” Meredith said. “Every year, the sixth years come to Congress to participate in a mock session and meet their representatives.”

Opening a door at the end of the hall, they stepped into a massive atrium. Sirius was struck by just how big everything was. Everything just exuded a level of power and wealth, and it was like they weren’t even trying to put it on display.

Taking the stairs, Meredith turned right at the top and led them into a well-appointed waiting room.

“You and Ted can wait here until we call for you,” she told him. “It shouldn’t be too long.”

With a reassuring smile, she turned and walked back out the door, the two Aurors taking up position on either side of the door. Ted took a seat and patted the chair next to him.

“Take a seat, Sirius, and try to relax,” he said. “Everything will be just fine.”

“Easy for you to say,” Sirius said, dropping into the chair. “You’re not getting sent to Azkaban if this goes wrong.”

“You’re not going anywhere,” Ted told him, patting his knee.

“Are you sure we can trust Meredith?” Sirius asked nervously. “I’ve never met a politician I liked.”

“She’s a good woman,” Ted replied. “I expect she’ll use this to make some political move, but she genuinely wants to help.”

“How do you know her, anyway?” he pressed. “What was that she said earlier about helping someone?”

“Henry,” Ted said with a sigh. “Her son. He came to Britain a few years ago to study under a Potions Master. One night, he came across a wizard assaulting a Muggle woman. They got into a duel, and Henry ended up killing the man. Broke his neck when he knocked him against a steel staircase. That man ended up being Jonah Selwyn.”

“Bloody hell,” Sirius said. “I bet they threw a fit over that.”

“Oh, they did,” Ted nodded. “Not only was he American, but Henry’s father is a Muggle, not just a Muggleborn, which would’ve been bad enough. Meredith being a Congresswoman made them even more irate. I was the only one who would take the case. No one else wanted to anger the darker faction, especially with the rising disappearances at the time. Nearly cost me

my job at the firm. The trial lasted a week, and the Selywn's used every trick in the book, but Henry walked free, as he should have. All the evidence was on his side."

"And this is Meredith's way of paying you back for that?" Sirius asked.

"I suppose you could look at it that way," Ted admitted.

"Thanks, Ted," Sirius said sincerely. "I really appreciate you doing all of this for me."

"Don't mention it," Ted smiled.

Smiling back, Sirius picked up a Quidditch magazine to read about American Quidditch teams while trying to keep control of his nerves. They waited for half an hour before there was a knock at the door, and a big, heavily bearded Auror stuck his head in.

"They're ready for Mr. Black," he said.

Sirius took a deep breath and stood, straightening his jacket. Ted was right behind him, hand on his shoulder as they walked towards the chamber. Sirius was very cognizant of the two Aurors following close behind.

"Just answer any questions they ask as best you can," Ted told him.

Nodding, Sirius walked into the Congressional chamber. It was easily ten times the size of the courtrooms the Wizengamot used for meetings, and every seat was filled. When he reached the front, a young man stood and motioned him to a seat in the center of the room at a long wooden table.

“Sirius Black,” A tall wizard with a beard to rival Dumbledore’s spoke from a raised podium. “I’m House Speaker Edward Holmes. You’re here to declare your innocence and ask for asylum in the United States, correct?”

Sirius looked to Ted, who nodded.

“Yes, sir,” he said, holding his head high.

“And you have agreed to be questioned under Veritaserum of your own free will?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” Sirius replied.

“Very well, the members have submitted their questions,” Holmes said, ruffling a stack of papers. “Aurors, if you would administer the potion.”

A side door opened, and an Auror came out with a wooden box in his hands. Walking over to the table, he set the box down and opened the lid. Inside was a single, tiny vial of Veritaserum. Taking it out, the Auror walked around to stand next to Sirius.

“Please tilt your head back and stick out your tongue,” he said.

Sirius did, allowing the Auror to place three drops of the powerful truth potion on his tongue. A haze came over his mind, and he felt like a large part of himself was trapped underwater. The Auror pried open his left eye and looked at it closely, then stood back and cast a charm Sirius didn’t recognize before turning to Holmes and nodding.

“He’s under,” he said.

“You are Sirius Black from London, England, correct?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” Sirius replied without even the thought of hesitating.

“Who was the Secret Keeper for James and Lily Potter?” he continued.

“Peter Pettigrew,” Sirius answered, his emotions suppressed by the potion.

“Why does the British Ministry believe you to be their Secret Keeper?” Holmes pressed.

“That’s what we told everyone,” Sirius replied. “Everyone knew I was the most likely person to be their Secret Keeper, so we used that. The plan was for me to keep the Death Eaters busy looking for me while the real Secret Keeper, Peter, was completely safe at home. We didn’t know that he was the traitor.”

“Are you now, or have you ever been, aligned with the wizard known as Lord Voldemort?” Holmes asked.

“No,” Sirius stated firmly.

“Why did you come to America instead of going to your own government for help?”

“The Aurors put out a kill on sight order for me,” Sirius replied. “There’s still enough Death Eaters hidden in the government that I didn’t trust them not to kill me, even if I turned myself in. I was also worried about my Godson. Dumbledore has been acting oddly lately, and I don’t trust that he or the Ministry has his best interests at heart.”

“I’d like to enter into evidence the birth certificate of Harry James Potter,” Meredith said, holding up the document. “It clearly declares Sirius Orion Black as his Godfather. According to British law and our own, Mr. Black is his legal guardian.”

“Without objection,” Holmes nodded, summoning the parchment to him. “Does anyone have any new questions they’d like to add? No? Then please give Mr. Black the antidote.”

A vial was suddenly shoved in Sirius’ mouth, and his head forcibly tilted back. He choked on the bitter potion briefly before he swallowed, and his mind quickly cleared. Reaching for a glass of water, he downed half of it to get the taste out of his mouth.

“That was quick,” Sirius said, smiling crookedly. “Did I pass?”

A few members of Congress chuckled, and Holmes cracked a smile.

“I think your answers speak for themselves, but we still need to put it to a vote,” he told him. “Now, this is not a court. We are merely to determine whether Mr. Black should be granted asylum or not. All those in favor of granting asylum, please raise your wands and say yay.”

Sirius gazed around the room, trying to count the number of lit wands with what felt like a lead ball sitting in the pit of his stomach.

“All those opposed?” Holmes asked.

Wands were again raised, but he was relieved to note it looked like far less this time. Despite that, he couldn’t stop his growing anxiety. Under the table, his leg bounced furiously. After an interminable minute, a young witch handed the tallied votes to Holmes.

“The clerk records the votes 182 yays to 34 nays,” he announced.

Sirius let out a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding while Ted clapped him on the shoulder.

“Mr. Black,” Holmes said, smiling when Sirius looked up and raising his gavel. “Welcome to America.”

Bang.

~

As Sirius landed back in the Nevada desert, he was immediately overwhelmed by the sweltering heat.

“Blood hell,” he said, taking off his jacket and squinting his eyes as the sun glinted off the windows of his new home. “This heat’s going to take some getting used to.”

“This is nothing,” Ted smirked. “In the summer, it gets up to 49 during the day.”

“Well, at least I’ll get a tan,” Sirius muttered. “Just remind me to flip over before I get well done. Oh, that reminds me, I need to try and get in touch with Remus.”

“It might be best if you wait for news to make it across the pond,” Ted reminded him patiently. “Tomorrow would probably be better. For now, let’s go give Andi the good news and help her unpack.”

Sighing, Sirius nodded and led the way to the front door. Swinging it open, he stopped and blinked as he watched a black and blue blur shoot from one side of the house to the other with a loud giggle.

“Harry Potter, you get back here, young man!” Andi shouted, racing after him.

She disappeared into another room, only for Harry to reappear a moment later, heading in the opposite direction. Nymphadora sat against the wall, laughing herself to tears as her harried-looking mother sprinted after him.

“Look out for the vase!”

Crash!

“Ah, home sweet home,” Ted chuckled.

Chapter 4

Sirius, Harry, and the Tonks quickly settled into their new lives in America. Within days, Remus had shown up on their doorstep after receiving a letter from Sirius. The reunion had been tearful, with apologies on both sides. With nothing left for him in England, Remus moved to America. He found a small house just a few miles away and, after discovering that American wizards weren't as prejudiced against Werewolves, found work on the magical side of the local post office.

Meanwhile, Sirius took an offer to join the MIB, often referred to as the Men in Black, though it really stood for the Magical Investigations Bureau. Ted set about learning American law as fast as he could. Within months, he'd passed the bar and started a law firm. While he'd intended to only take work as a criminal defense attorney, the small town they now lived in forced him to branch out into almost every aspect of the law, from personal injury to legal contracts. Andi, on the other hand, stayed at home watching the kids.

Harry and Nymphadora were attached at the hip. If she wasn't carrying him around the house, he was toddling after her as fast as his legs could carry him. He'd even taken to climbing out of his crib at night and sneaking into Nymphadora's bed, where the four-year-old cuddled him like a teddy bear.

While the family settled into their new lives, the British Ministry was notified, in front of the ICW, that Sirius Black and Harry Potter had been located and granted asylum in America. Of course, there had been quite the argument, followed by pointless threats from both sides. In the end, international law was clear on the matter, and there was nothing Britain could do to get them back.

For Sirius and Andi, the most surprising part was how quickly Dumbledore gave up the fight. He made a token effort at best and seemed content to let them stay in America. They talked about sending him a letter or arranging a meeting to hopefully find out why Voldemort was so set on getting to Harry, but in the end, they decided against it. If he hadn't told them before, he was unlikely to do so now. That, and the old man had a way of getting you to say more than you intended. In all likelihood, Dumbledore would gain far more from the exchange than they would.

Less than a year after their move, it was time for Nymphadora to go to school. While Ilvermorny was America's most prominent school, it was far from the only one. Unlike Britain, where magical children were either homeschooled or sent to Muggle schools, America had a dedicated magical school in every state. By law, from the ages of five to fourteen – when they could enroll at Ilvermorny – magical children were required to attend.

While America was less prejudiced against other magicals, they were much more stringent about hiding from Muggles. Magical children were taught from a young age how the Muggle world operated, how to blend in, and what laws they needed to know. Sending them to a school for magicals also let them make friends their age without worrying about them letting the secret of magic slip.

On a hot August morning, Tonks waited to be picked up for school while little Harry clutched her hand in a death grip.

"You know he's going to be heartbroken when he can't go with her," Ted whispered.

Andi sighed, "I know, but he'll just have to get used to it. In three years, he'll be able to go with her."

"Maybe you should take him out somewhere fun," Sirius suggested, tugging unhappily at the collar of his suit. "You know, take his mind off Dora."

"We'll see how he behaves first," Andi said sternly. "I'll not reward him if he throws a tantrum."

“Fair enough,” Sirius nodded.

A loud bang from their left drew their attention to the dirt road leading to the house. A big yellow school bus sped down the road at an unnatural speed before slamming on the brakes in front of them. They all had to cover their faces from the sand and dust kicked up by the tires.

“Americans really use yellow school buses?” Sirius asked with a cough.

“I was surprised too,” Ted told him. “I thought they were only in the movies.”

The door to the bus folded open with a creak, and a large woman in her fifties with wild, dark hair tinged with grey looked at them.

“Nymphadora Tonks?” she asked loudly.

“That’s me!” Nymphadora grinned.

“Well, hop on,” the driver told her.

Stepping forward, Andi hugged her daughter.

“Have a good day, dear. And make sure to be on your best behavior,” she said, taking Harry by the hand. “Come on, Harry. It’s time for Dora to go to school.”

Harry sniffled, his bottom lip quivering as Nymphadora kissed him on the cheek and boarded the bus. With only a few other kids aboard, they sat in a group, getting to know each other.

“I’ll drop her off just after two,” the driver yelled.

Closing the door with a creak, the bus took off with a bang, kicking up another cloud of dust and sand as it rocketed down the road. Andi covered Harry while Sirius and Ted turned their backs, using their wands to clear the air.

“Bloody hell, that’s worse than the Knight Bus,” Sirius grumbled.

“Language!” Andi hissed.

He rolled his eyes while Harry started to cry. Sighing, he checked his watch and saw he only had a few minutes to get to work.

“Don’t worry, Harry,” Sirius said to his Godson. “She’ll be home before you know it. Sorry, Andi, I have to get to work.”

“Me too,” Ted said.

Kissing his wife on the cheek, he and Sirius Disappeared, leaving her alone with a crying toddler. Sighing, she picked Harry up and carried him back to the house.

On Harry’s fifth birthday, the family held a party outside to celebrate. After the food had been eaten and the cake devoured, he got to open his presents. From Ted and Andi, he got a few magical board games. Remus had gotten him a few new books, including one about himself that had him and Nymphadora giggling like mad.

“Harry Potter and the Troll Bridge?” Nymphadora laughed. “Harry, you’re the worst superhero ever.”

“Hey!” Harry yelled. “You couldn’t fight a Troll, either.”

“Yeah, but they don’t write books about me,” Nymphadora teased, sticking out her tongue.

“Remus, where did you get that?” Ted asked with a frown.

“I found it at the bookshop,” Remus replied. “They’re not too popular over here, but the owner said they’re a best-seller in Britain.”

“Is that even legal?” Andi asked, brow furrowed.

“No, it isn’t,” Ted said, folding his arms over his chest. “I couldn’t do anything about the name alone, but the fact that they describe him exactly, even his scar, is infringement.”

“Are you going to sue them?” Nymphadora asked excitedly.

“I could,” Ted answered when the others looked at him curiously. “I’d have to go back to Britain for a bit, but I have a better idea. Why don’t I write them a letter and see if we can make a deal? Harry could get a share of the profits to save for the future, and we could make them add a disclaimer.”

“That could work,” Andi smiled. “And if they don’t agree, we can sue the pants off them. I love it when you get all Slytherpuff on me.”

Leaning in, she wrapped her arms around Ted and kissed him on the lips.

“EW!” Harry, Nymphadora, and Sirius exclaimed.

“Oh, grow up, you three,” Andi said amongst the laughter.

Once they settled, Harry opened his last present, which was from Sirius.

“Yes!” he cheered, pulling the broom from the long, thin box. “Thank you, Sirius! Thank you!”

“You’re welcome, kiddo,” Sirius said, hugging his ecstatic Godson.

“You just be careful on that,” Andi said sternly. “If you get hurt, I won’t hesitate to take it away.”

“I will. I promise,” Harry said, staring at the broom in his hands. “Can I fly it now?”

Before anyone could respond, Nymphadora pulled Harry close and whispered in his ear.

“Oh, right,” he said. “I forgot.”

“What are you two up to?” Andi asked suspiciously.

“Nothing,” Nymphadora replied quickly. “We just got a present for Sirius we wanted to give him. I’ll go get it.”

As Andi opened her mouth to reply, Nymphadora dashed inside. Sirius patted Harry on the back and smiled.

“You know you’re not supposed to get other people presents on your birthday, right?” he asked.

“We wanted to,” Harry said with an innocent smile.

Sirius beamed, and Andi folded her arms over her chest. A moment later, Nymphadora came back outside, a large, poorly wrapped box in her hands.

“Here you go, Uncle Sirius,” she said, handing it to him.

“Aw, you shouldn’t have,” Sirius said, pulling the bow loose and tearing the wrapping paper.

He never noticed the kids snickering silently as he pulled the lid off of the box.

“AH!”

Sirius let out a high-pitched scream and fell backward off the picnic table bench as a rattlesnake poked up its head to look at him with a hiss. Coiling up in a ball, it rattled its tail threateningly. Harry and Nymphadora howled with laughter as Sirius scrambled back to his feet. Before anyone could get over their shock to yell at the kids, Harry turned to the snake and hissed. The snake stopped rattling and hissing and slithered out of the box and over to the boy.

“Harry, don’t touch that! It’s dangerous!” Sirius yelled, drawing his wand.

“She won’t hurt me,” Harry said, letting the snake climb up his arm where it draped itself calmly over his shoulders. “See?”

Giggling, Tonks stroked the top of the snake's head.

“Harry?” Andi asked shakily. “Can you... talk to it?”

“Uh-huh,” he grinned.

“Awesome, isn’t it?” Nymphadora asked.

“How?” Andi asked, frowning her brow. “Sirius, did James ever mention anyone in his family being a Parselmouth?”

“No, never,” Sirius said, staring at Harry dumbfoundedly.

Harry hissed to the rattlesnake again and set it on the ground. Giving a glance at the adults, it slithered off into the brush, disappearing quickly.

“Can I go flying now?” Harry asked.

“Sure,” Sirius said, jumping in before Andi could respond angrily. “Dora, why don’t you go grab your broom and go with him?”

“Okay!” Nymphadora smiled, dashing back inside.

“Sirius,” Andi hissed threateningly.

“We need to talk about this, and I don’t want the kids around,” he whispered back. “Besides, I kind of deserved that for turning his hair blue.”

“That was you?” Andi asked incredulously. “Dora thought he was a Metamorphmagus!”

“They started it with the water balloons,” Sirius muttered.

Andi smacked him upside the head before rolling her eyes while Ted chuckled behind her. Nymphadora returned with her broom in hand. Without a word, Harry mounted his, and they took off into the air. Sirius smiled, seeing his Godson take to the air so naturally.

“Do you think we should tell anyone?” Andi asked with one eye on the kids.

“No,” Sirius replied. “They might not care here, but Britain will vilify him. We’ll have to tell them to keep a secret.”

“But where did it come from?” Andi asked. “Parseltongue isn’t something that just pops up like that. It’s hereditary.”

“Do you think it has anything to do with You-Know-Who?” Ted asked, continuing when they looked at him sharply. “Well, he was known to have the skill, and no one really knows what happened that night. Maybe he gave it to Harry, somehow.”

“I don’t even know if that’s possible,” Andi said, sighing.

“Even if he didn’t, it doesn’t mean anything,” Sirius said firmly. “He’s still Harry. That’s all that matters.”

At the age of eight, Harry went flying after school. He’d wanted Tonks to go with him, but she was stuck inside until she finished her homework. Pushing his training broom to its limits, he reached the nearby canyons after half an hour and grinned as he zipped between the narrow, jagged walls. Fortunately, there weren’t many Muggles out there. It was the wrong time of year.

As he zipped along with the Colorado River rushing beneath him, he caught movement at the top of the canyon. Slowing down, he watched as a large bird hopped forward and plummeted towards the ground. With the sun ahead, he couldn’t tell what bird it was, but he assumed falling wasn’t part of its plan when it jumped. Shooting forward, Harry dove down, catching up to the squawking creature and catching it in his hands. With a closer look, he noticed that while it was pretty big, it was still young.

“It doesn’t look like you’re ready to fly yet, big guy,” Harry smiled, slowing to a stop.

Chirping softly, the bird latched its talons onto the handle of his broom. Looking up, Harry spotted the edge of a nest hanging over the top of the canyon. Flying up carefully, he hovered

next to it and blinked at the size. The nest was massive, easily five feet wide. Inside, two other chicks chirped when they spotted him. The chick holding onto his broom responded in kind, chirping loudly. As the other two waddled over, a massive shadow passed quickly over Harry.

When he looked up, he caught sight of a blur of white feathers, much brighter than the grey of the chicks. As he looked around for the source of the shadow, something large and heavy landed in the nest. By now, Harry had an idea of what he was going to find and turned his head slowly. The massive Thunderbird flared her six wings wide and looked at Harry curiously, her sharp, yellow eyes traveling from him to the chick standing on his broom handle.

“Whoa,” Harry breathed. “Uh, I was just bringing him back. He fell out of the nest.”

The mother tilted her head as she stared at him, electricity crackling from the horn-like feathers on the top of her head. Swallowing nervously, Harry picked up the chick and quickly but gently placed it back in the nest without his eyes ever leaving the mother.

“I’ll – uh – I’ll go now,” Harry said.

Chirping happily, the chick chattered with its siblings while the mother watched Harry slowly descend back into the canyon. Once he was safely out of sight, he grinned and laughed quietly.

“That was amazing,” he said to himself, his heart hammering in his chest. “I can’t wait to tell Dora. She’s going to be so jealous.”

Just then, Harry heard a loud chirp above him. He looked up just in time to see the chick spread its wings and jump out of the nest. Eyes wide, he watched as it plummeted toward the Colorado River.

“Not again,” Harry said, rolling over and diving after it.

This time, he let the bird get as low as possible, hoping it would start flying on its own, before catching it in his hands. Squawking angrily, the little thunderbird clacked its beak in annoyance as it gripped his broom.

“Don’t worry, I’m sure you’ll get the hang of it soon,” Harry said.

Glancing up at the nest, he took a nervous breath when he saw the mother and the chicks watching him closely. Slowly, he flew back up and gently placed the chick back in the nest. This time, it was barely back in before it jumped out again.

“Oh, come on,” Harry huffed.

Rolling over, he dove down and caught the bird again. As he reached the nest once more, the mother cawed loudly and took to the air. Harry worried for a moment that she was angry at him but relaxed when she flew up. Circling above him, she looked directly at him and cawed again. Cautiously, he flew up to meet her. As soon as he got close, the Thunderbird flew higher, and Harry followed, the chick chirping happily from his broom.

Suddenly, the mother screeched a frightening sound that echoed through the canyon below him. As she flew in circles, the air cooled, the wind started to blow, and Harry could smell rain in the air. In moments, the sparse, puffy white clouds overhead started to grow, gradually turning grey as they blotted out the sun. Lightning lit up the sky a moment before the rain started to fall. Harry watched in awe as the storm grew to cover the entire valley.

The wind picked up, and he had to actively work against it to stay in one place. The chick crooned happily and spread its wings wide. Letting go of the broom, he took to the air, pushed upwards by rising air currents.

“Yeah!” Harry cheered, laughing.

The chick chirped, flapping its wings furiously to fly around his head. Hearing more chirps, Harry looked over his shoulder and smiled when he saw the other two flying up to join them. When

they did, the mother cawed loudly and began flying north. The chicks followed, and Harry trailed after them. His clothes were drenched, and he was buffeted by the wind, but the smile on his face never faltered.

As a group, they soared through the air until the sun started to near the horizon. Flapping her powerful wings, the mother shot into the air, heedless of the lightning striking its body. Spreading her wings wide, backlit by the continuous lightning striking around her, she cawed loudly, and the storm ceased. Harry laughed in amazement as she flew back down, the clouds already dispersing as the wind calmed. Turning, he followed them back to the nest.

“That was awesome!” Harry laughed, coming to a stop.

Reaching out, he petted the chick that had been so determined to fly, his cheeks hurting from smiling so much.

“I need to head back home before I get in trouble,” Harry said to the mother, not sure if she could understand him or not. “I’ll see if I can come back tomorrow. I have a friend that would love to meet you. Bye.”

Waving, he started back home. The chick chirped and tried to follow him, but the mother stopped him gently with her wing. Grinning, Harry flew home as fast as he could, anxious to tell Dora everything.

“Let me get this straight,” Andi said, staring at the young Thunderbird sitting on Harry's shoulder. “You made friends with a whole nest of Thunderbirds, never told us, and now this one wants to stay with you.”

Nymphadora giggled as Harry and the Thunderbird looked at each other, turned back to Andi, and nodded in unison.

“Oh, for Merlin’s sake,” she cried, throwing her hands into the air. “Can’t you ever do anything normal?”

Harry shrugged, looking up at her through his eyelashes in an expression Nymphadora had taught him to use when he really wanted something.

“Harry, I don’t even know if it’s legal to keep one,” Andi sighed.

“Well, actually,” Ted said, stepping forward. “Thunderbirds are a protected species. I had a client that lost his barn for eight months when one decided to make a nest on the roof. Technically, it would be illegal to make it leave.”

“You’re the luckiest kid in the world, Harry,” Sirius said, shaking his head with a laugh.

“Where are we going to keep it?” Andi asked helplessly. “And what happens when he goes to Ilvermorny in a few years?”

“Oh, I’m sure they’ll be happy to house it on the grounds,” Ted assured her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. “You know how flashy Americans like to be. They’ll probably make it the school mascot. And I doubt we need to worry about it staying here. This is where they live. I’m sure Harry’s friend can take care of himself.”

“We need to name him,” Nymphadora said suddenly.

“I think it’s a her, actually,” Harry said, earning a loud croon from his companion.

“Aw, Harry has a girlfriend,” Nymphadora sang.

“I do not!” Harry yelled.

“No fighting,” Ted warned.

“Sorry,” Nymphadora and Harry said in unison.

“What about Sparky?” she asked.

“Nah,” Harry said. “What about Volt?”

The Thunderbird clacked her beak in disapproval.

“Voltron?” he offered.

“That sounds like a Transformer,” Nymphadora scoffed. “Ooh, what about Pikachu?”

The Thunderbird cocked her head to the side curiously.

“I’m not naming her after a Pokémon,” Harry said firmly.

“What about Levina?” Ted asked. “It’s Latin for lightning bolt.”

“Levina,” Harry repeated, looking at the bird on his shoulder.

The newly named Levina threw her head back and cawed happily, bolts of electricity arcing from the horn-like feathers on her head.

Fourteen-year-old Harry hated Jacob, he decided. When he’d agreed to let Tonks invite her friends from Ilvermorny to his birthday party, he hadn’t expected her to reveal the tall, spiky-

haired, good-looking douchebag was her new boyfriend. Harry wasn't sure why he hated him, but he did.

They'd gone to Lake Mead, where he had to stop himself, several times, from pushing the dick into the water.

Only a couple of Harry's friends from school had been able to come, Marissa and Johnny. The rest were on vacation with their families. But, even if they'd been able to come, it wouldn't have made much difference. He only had two others in his class, and they weren't that close. Johnny Barktree was a tall, Native American boy. He tended to stay quiet unless he had something important to say.

Marissa was a shy little blonde that Harry had befriended when one of his classmates, Chris, had tried to bully her. He'd gotten in trouble for punching him in the nose, but it had been worth it. Aunt Andi had been mad, but Sirius thought he'd done the right thing. Unfortunately, the school had a no-tolerance policy for fighting. When Harry had pointed out that they were supposed to have a no-tolerance policy for bullying, and he'd actually done the school a favor, his principal had given him a three-day suspension.

"Hey, Harry!" Sirius shouted from the grill, wearing a 'Kiss the Chef' apron. "Foods ready!"

Sighing, Harry got to his feet and brushed the sand off of his shorts. As he got closer, he got another look at Dora in her blue bikini. She looked bustier than she usually did, and her hair was long and blonde, an unusual look for her. Aunt Andi thought she was growing up, but Harry didn't think so. He thought she was doing it to impress that asshole, Jacob. Putting a smile on his face so no one asked him what was wrong, he joined his friends and family.

As they ate and talked, more and more of Dora's friends started to show up. Harry cheered up a bit when he got to see so many pretty girls running around in bikinis. A rather short, busty brunette nearly popped out of her top twice, just getting into her seat. Unfortunately, Harry had only just turned fourteen, and all of Dora's friends were eighteen or older, so they didn't spare him a second glance besides wishing him a happy birthday.

After lunch, Harry opened his presents. Dora and a few others, including that shit-stain Jacob, stayed to watch while the rest went swimming. He got some new defensive magic books from Remus, Aunt Andi, and Uncle Ted got him a wizard's shaving kit, Dora got him candy and pranking supplies, and Sirius got him a new broom. Harry gaped at the brand new Lockheed Velocity. Officially, it was the fastest broom in the world, taking the title from the Firebolt just six weeks after its release. The Lockheed wasn't as nimble as the Firebolt, that was for sure, but it wasn't meant to be a Quidditch broom. It was designed to go like hell. Zero to sixty in just over two seconds with a top speed of one hundred and eighty miles an hour, it could leave the Firebolt in its dust.

"Holy shit," Harry said, earning him laughter and a scolding from Aunt Andi.

"Why don't you go take it for a spin?" Sirius asked.

"Yeah," Harry said, getting to his feet. "You want to come with me, Dora?"

He looked at her hopefully, but he could tell by the look on her face she didn't want to.

"You go ahead, Harry," she smiled. "I didn't bring my broom."

"Alright," Harry said.

Turning away before his emotions could show, he mounted his broom and rocketed into the sky. Trying to fly his thoughts away, he didn't even notice when Levina joined him. Impressively, his feathered friend managed to keep up with his new broom, but only just. By now, she'd grown to her full size, dwarfing Harry with her fifty-foot wingspan. As they shot across the surface of the lake, leaving splashing ripples in their wake, Harry spotted some new arrivals.

He paused above the beach, a little confused when he saw Dora get out of a Jeep and walk towards the beach. It wasn't until he looked closer that he realized it wasn't Dora but a girl that looked like her. They even had the same color bikini. Levina cawed and flew over to Sirius, looking for food, while Harry stealthily edged closer to the beach. The girl walked over to where

Dora and Jacob were lounging on towels near the water. Smirking at Dora, she gave Jacob a flirtatious smile before walking a short distance away, her hips swaying exaggeratedly, and Harry wasn't the only one to be caught looking.

Looking over her shoulder, the girl smirked nastily.

"You know he's only dating you because I turned him down, don't you?" she asked Dora. "Nice hair, by the way."

Dora fumed as the girl walked away, her hair turning red and shrinking into her scalp until it was the short, pixy style she usually preferred. Jumping to her feet, she glared at the panicked-looking Jacob.

"I knew it!" she hissed furiously. "You said you never asked her out."

"Dora, it's not what you--"

"Don't you dare tell me it's not what I think," Dora growled. "And don't call me Dora, ever. The only people who can call me that are my family and Harry."

Her wand was out faster than Harry could blink, and with a flick, she banished Jacob out into the water, where he landed on his stomach with a loud splash. Storming off, Dora climbed on a boulder and sat with her arms around her legs, forehead resting on her knees.

Floating over, Harry landed behind her, set his broom down, and sat down beside her.

"You want to talk about it?" he asked.

Sniffing, Dora shook her head and scooted closer, resting her head on his shoulder. Harry sighed exaggeratedly.

“Thank Merlin. You know I’m shit at that,” he said.

Dora snorted and smacked his bare chest. As she slid her hand back, she hooked his arm and hugged it to her chest. Harry did his best to ignore the way her breasts felt against his bicep.

His best was woefully inadequate. He just prayed they didn’t have to get up anytime soon.

“I can’t believe I let him fool me like that,” Dora sighed miserably. “I swore I’d never change like that for anyone, and what do I do? The first time a good-looking guy asks me out, I turn myself into a blonde bimbo for him to drool over.”

“I don’t think it was the blonde hair he was drooling over,” Harry told her, earning a snort. “Forget about Jacob. He’s a dickhead, anyways.”

“You barely talked to him,” Tonks chuckled.

“I didn’t need to,” Harry said. “I’m an expert at spotting dickheads.”

There was a beat of silence as what he said registered with both of them, and they broke out laughing.

“Please don’t tell Sirius I said that. He’ll never let me live it down,” Harry laughed.

“Your secrets safe with me,” Dora said, grinning teasingly as she patted his arm.

He knew she would tease him about this for years to come, but it was worth it to see her smiling again. Sighing, she looked back over the beach. When he saw her frown sadly, he followed her eye line and bit back a growl when he saw Jacob making out with the blonde

skank. Looking over at the picnic area, he saw Sirius, Ted, and Andromeda talking, completely oblivious to what was happening.

“You want to get out of here?” Harry asked suddenly.

“I’d love to,” Dora sighed. “But there’s no way Mum and Dad would let me leave your birthday party early. It’s fine. I can deal with it.”

Looking over at Levina, who was drinking from the lake, he whistled quietly. The Thunderbird lifted her head and looked over at him curiously. Looking her in the eyes, he glanced up at the sky meaningfully. Nodding her head, Levina took to the sky with a flap of her wings and climbed in an upward spiral.

“Harry, what are you doing?” Dora asked.

He just smiled as thunder rumbled overhead. A moment later, the skies opened up in a downpour. The girls lounging on the beach screamed, the guys cursed, and everyone scrambled to get out of the sudden storm.

“Harry...,” Dora whispered, turning back to him in shock.

Shaking her head, she smiled and kissed him on the cheek softly.

“Thank you,” she said.

“It was a boring party anyways,” Harry said.

Getting to their feet, Harry grabbed his broom, and they ran to the parking lot and climbed into Ted’s old station wagon. Ted and Andi packed everything up magically to get out before the roads flooded, while Sirius stayed behind to make sure everyone got out alright.

It was a quiet ride home, with Ted filling the silence with tales from his latest cases. After a twenty-minute drive, they arrived home, where Sirius was waiting for them.

“Sorry we had to cut your party so short, Harry,” he said, helping them unpack the car.

“It’s fine,” Harry smiled. “It’s not like you can control the weather.”

Patting him on the back, Sirius led the way back into the house. Once everything was inside, Dora begged off to her room, claiming she was tired.

“Boys, why don’t you go throw the towels in the wash while Harry and I put the food away,” Andi said.

Nodding, Sirius and Ted made for the washroom. Harry grabbed the cooler and set it on the table just as Levina landed in her nest on the hilltop in the backyard.

“That was a really nice thing you did,” Andi said, pulling him into a surprising hug.

“Er, what?” Harry asked.

“Don’t play dumb,” she scolded him. “I saw everything. As much as I try to protect you and Dora, sometimes, teenagers need to make their own mistakes. I just hope Dora learns from this and finds a boy that wants to be with her and not what she can become.”

“I’m sure she will,” Harry said, the words tasting like sawdust in his mouth.

Smiling knowingly, Andi ran her hand through his hair in a motherly fashion and caressed his cheek.

“So am I,” she said. “But until she does, you just keep looking out for her like you did today. Sometimes, a girl doesn’t need you to solve her problems; she just needs you to be there for her to get over them herself.”

Harry didn’t know what the hell she meant by that, but he nodded anyways. Once they’d finished putting the food away, he went to his room, put his presents away, and laid down on his bed. Slowly, a smile stretched his lips. In just a month, he’d be going to Ilvermorny with Tonks.

Chapter 5

“Harry! Nymphadora! Time to go!” Andi shouted.

“Coming!” Dora yelled back.

Across the hall from her room, the door opened, and Harry walked out, pulling his trunk behind him. Stopping next to the couch, he sat down with a sigh.

“I still don’t get why we have to take the train,” he said. “Why can’t we just Apparate or Floo?”

“It’s part of the experience,” Remus replied, smiling softly. “Your father, Sirius, and I became friends before we even set foot in Hogwarts.”

“I’d rather get a few more hours of sleep,” Harry grumbled before yawning widely.

“Nymphadora!” Andi shouted.

“Alright, alright,” Dora said, pulling her door open. “I’m ready.”

“Finally,” Andi sighed irritably. “Let’s get going. You know how fast the train fills up.”

Levering himself off of the couch, Harry followed Dora to the Floo.

“Union Station,” she called.

Throwing down the powder, Dora vanished in a swirling blaze of emerald flames. Andi went after her, and then it was Harry’s turn.

“I hate the Floo,” he grumbled.

Chuckling, Remus patted his shoulder and gave him a nudge forward. Taking a handful of Floo Powder, Harry stepped into the fireplace and called out his destination. Even though he tucked in his arms and legs, he still managed to bang his elbow on something. As the pain reverberated down his funny bone, he cursed loudly.

Harry had no way of knowing it, but Ben Coughlin of Arizona, who was preparing to leave for work, looked at his Floo oddly when he heard a loud cry of, “Mother fucker!”

After an uncomfortably long journey, Harry stumbled out of the Floo at Union Station in Washington, D.C., and fell face-first onto the floor. His trunk skidded a few feet further, only coming to a stop when it hit a pair of black, polished dress shoes. Harry slowly raised his head, staring blearily at the tall, black man with a bald head, sunglasses, and dressed in a black suit and tie. Suddenly, he sneezed, soot falling from his hair.

“Morning, Frank,” Harry said as Remus stepped out of the Floo and helped him to his feet.

“Morning, Harry, Remus,” the tall black man replied, his stern expression unmoved as he nodded.

Looking around for Dora and Andi, Harry spotted them a couple of feet away. Andi tried to hide her smile behind her hand, but Dora had no issue grinning widely at him. Waving her wand, she conjured a white, square card that read,

9.0

“I took off a point for missing Frank,” Dora said, shrugging as she continued to grin.

Harry rolled his eyes and gathered his trunk.

“Is Sirius around?” Remus asked, looking around.

Frank jerked his chin over Remus’ shoulder. Turning around, they found Sirius shamelessly flirting with a young witch selling refreshments.

“Oh, for Merlin’s sake,” Andi huffed.

Marching over to Sirius, she apologized to the young woman before grabbing him by the ear and dragging him over.

“Ow! Andi!” Sirius yelped. “Bloody hell.”

Harry snorted as people stopped to stare at the MIB agent being dragged around by his ear on the magical side of the train station. Shaking his head, he glanced at Frank, who ignored the commotion and gazed around the platform. It still amazed him that Sirius and Frank had stayed partners for over a decade. They were complete opposites in every way. Where Sirius was, well, Sirius, Frank was a consummate professional.

He also had an eidetic memory, which came in handy not only for cases but also when it came time to tell them of Sirius' latest antics. Frank wasn't much of a people person. He tended to find social gatherings awkward and didn't seem to understand humor at all. Despite that, everyone in the family liked him. He was a good guy and a fantastic agent.

"Your Godson's about to leave for his first year of Ilvermorny, and you're over there hitting on a girl young enough to be your daughter?" Andi hissed, finally letting go of Sirius' ear.

"She's not that young," he grumbled, rubbing his reddened ear. "Besides, I knew you were here. It's hard to miss when Harry comes flying out of the Floo."

"Aw, thanks, Sirius," Harry grinned.

Before his Godfather could react, Harry hugged him, covering his crisp, black suit in grey soot.

"Oh, come on!" Sirius complained while Dora and Remus laughed. "You little brat."

Hugging Harry back briefly, he pushed him away and whipped out his wand to clean himself off before doing the same for Harry. Just as he was finishing, a stream of students and parents started coming out of the Floo.

"You'll want to get on the train before it gets crowded," Sirius said. "Have fun at school, and don't do anything I wouldn't do."

"You just want to go back to hitting on that witch," Harry smirked.

"You want me to ask if she has a younger sister?" Sirius asked with a grin.

"I don't mind if she's older like you do there, DiCaprio," Harry teased.

“Oi!” Sirius yelled as Dora and Remus burst out laughing.

“Alright, off you go, you two,” Andi said, shaking her head. “We’ll see you at Christmas, and don’t forget to write.”

Hugging their family, they waved to Frank and boarded the train. Sirius had described the Hogwarts Express in detail over the years, and Harry was glad the Ilvermorny Express was different. Most of the cars were open, feeling more like a lounge than a train car. Only the back couple of cars had private compartments, which were usually taken by upper-year students.

As the car began to fill up, Harry noticed there weren’t any other first years joining them, and a few of the other students were looking at him oddly.

“Hey, kid!” called a seventh year with long, dark hair, a handsome face, and a golden badge pinned on his robes that read, ‘Head Boy.’ “First years are supposed to sit in the last open car.”

“He’s with me, Corbin,” Dora told him.

“Sorry, Tonks,” Corbin shrugged. “It’s school policy.”

Before Harry could tell him where he could put that particular policy, Dora stopped him by placing her hand on his arm.

“Fine, I’ll go sit with them, then,” she said, standing up and looking at her friends. “You coming?”

Dora’s two closest friends, Amanda Weeks, a pretty redhead with the most amount of freckles Harry had ever seen on one person, and Jennifer Vasquez, a thin, athletic girl with bronze-colored skin, looked at each other.

“We can stay for a bit,” Jennifer offered.

Amanda sighed, “Fine.”

Dora grinned as her friends got to their feet. Nodding, the Head Boy turned away and walked off.

“This is stupid,” Harry said, following Dora down the train. “I’m going to spend the next seven years in classes with these kids. Why do I have to spend an eight-hour train ride with them?”

“It’s so you can get to know them before you get sorted,” Amanda told him.

“Harry’s not much of a people person,” Dora smirked over her shoulder.

“I’m fine with people,” Harry corrected. “It’s idiots and assholes I have a problem with.”

The girls laughed as they made their way through the cars and made it to the back of the train. Taking seats amongst the other first years, Harry listened quietly as Dora talked to her friends about their Summers and complained about Jacob and Irene, the blonde he’d left her for at his part.

“Yeah, well, everyone knows why she wants to be *Head Girl*,” Amanda said scornfully.

“Excuse me?” asked a shy-looking first year with long dark hair, glasses, and a book held to her chest asked.

“Er, yes,” Amanda said, blushing lightly.

“Are you older students?” the girl asked.

“Yeah, do you need something?” Dora asked.

“I was just wondering if you could tell me about Ilvermorny,” the girl asked softly. “I’m a Muggleborn, and I have no idea what to expect.”

“Don’t worry,” Jennifer told her with a kind smile. “I’m a Muggleborn, too. What’s your name?”

“Michelle Breckenridge,” the girl said.

“Well, if you have any questions, I’m sure we could answer them,” Dora said, reaching across Harry and patting the space next to him. “Grab a seat.”

“I’m not even sure what questions to ask,” Michelle said.

As she went to take a seat, Harry shifted over, letting her sit between him and Dora. While they started talking about Ilvermorny, the car filled up, and other first years leaned over to listen in. By the time the train started moving, Dora and her friends found themselves answering questions from almost everyone. A few had older siblings who had told them about the school, but most were going in blind.

Only a few minutes into the eight-hour journey, Dora suddenly stiffened and glared. Looking up, Harry frowned as he watched Jacob and Irene enter their compartment. Looking at Dora, Irene smirked and gave her a patronizing little wave with her manicured fingers. Jacob stared dead ahead, pretending Dora didn’t exist as he allowed Irene to lead him further down the train into the car with private compartments. With a scowl, Dora folded her arms over her chest and flopped back in her seat angrily. The first years looked at her oddly, not knowing why she was angry.

After a moment, Harry stood up suddenly.

"I need to use the bathroom," he announced.

Dora waved to let him know she'd heard, and Jennifer and Amanda tried to cheer her up. Walking to the back of the car, Harry stepped outside and then into the next, just in time to see Jacob and Irene open the next compartment. Rushing past the private compartments, he ducked into a small space between the last compartment and the bathroom.

"The driver wants everyone out of this car!" Irene yelled, going from one compartment to the next.

"Why?" someone asked.

"I don't know, that's just what I was told," Irene said irritably.

For the first time, Harry noticed the silver Prefects badge on her robes. Grumbling, the other students filed out of the car, a few fixing their clothes and hair as they did. Harry stayed out of the way while they passed him and sighed impatiently like he was waiting for someone to come out of the bathroom. When the last person filed out, he glanced around the corner to see Irene pulling Jacob into the car with a smirk and closing the door. A moment later, she pulled the shade down over the window in the door.

Harry waited for everyone to find a compartment to join or move to another car before he stepped out into the hall. Opening the door between cars, he slipped outside and closed it behind him. He walked up to the door and pressed his ear to it, but the sound of rushing wind around him drowned out any sounds the couple might have made. Trying the handle, he found the door locked and cursed.

Looking around as he thought, Harry noticed a lever connected to the coupler and smirked. Checking behind him to make sure no one was watching, he laid down on his stomach and gripped the lever. After a few tugs that did nothing, he wrenched with all his might, and it came free. The coupler opened up, and the car carrying Jacob and Irene started to fall away. Grinning

to himself, Harry watched at the hose between the two cars pulled taugt and then separated in the middle with a hiss.

Wiping his hands off on his jeans, he slipped back into the car and closed the shade. Without a backward glance, he made his way back to the first-year car.

Hours later, they pulled into the magical side of Salem Station. Essentially, there were two sides to Salem. One side was where the no-maj's lived, and the magicals visited on occasion, but there was a whole other town that was magically concealed from anyone without magic. There was a single cobblestone road that led from the magical side of the station, through the small, magical town of Salem, and up to the winding road up to the top of Mount Greylock. In the distance, they could see a ring of clouds obscuring the top of the mountain, where they knew Ilvermornny to be.

Harry and Dora stepped off the train and made for the carriages as the conductor stepped out of the engine car. The driver was a Pukwudgie. They were related to Goblins but with grey skin, longer, floppy ears, and were slightly taller. Despite their grumpy demeanor and professed dislike of humans, many Pukwudgies had worked at Ilvermornny for centuries.

As they were waiting for a carriage, they heard the conductor start shouting loudly in a language that neither of them had ever heard before. It was loud, rattling and guttural.

"I wonder what that's about," Dora said.

"No idea," Harry replied.

"Why are you smiling?" Dora asked.

Harry ignored her and climbed into the carriage.

“Harry!” Dora yelled, climbing in after him. “I know you did something. I swear, if you get kicked out before we even get there, I’ll help Mum murder you.”

“When you said he was even worse than you, I thought you were joking,” Amanda chuckled.

“You have no idea,” Dora sighed, shaking her head. “Just tell me what you did so I know what to deny later.”

“Well, on my way to use the bathroom, I saw Irene kicking everyone out of the last car for a bit of privacy,” Harry smirked. “I just decided to help them out a bit.”

The girls looked at him curiously before Amanda glanced at the train and gasped.

“You didn’t!” she said incredulously.

“Do what?” Dora asked.

“Look at the train,” Amanda said. “Doesn’t it look different to you?”

“I guess,” Dora shrugged. “I mean, it does look a bit shorter.”

Her speech stuttered as she realized what he’d done and turned to gap at him.

“Harry?” she asked slowly. “Where are Jacob and Irene?”

Harry shrugged, “Depends on how fast the train moves. I’d guess somewhere between Philly and New York.”

Jennifer and Amanda burst out laughing while Dora shook her head.

“You’re such an idiot,” she said right before hugging him. “I’m over him. You don’t need to do that for me.”

“It wasn’t about him,” Harry said. “Irene shouldn’t have tried to rub it in your face.”

“Aw, that’s so sweet,” Jennifer smiled.

Shaking her head, Dora hooked her arm through his and rested her head on his shoulder as they rode through the village and up Mount Greylock. The entire ride, the girls and Harry speculated on how Jacob and Irene were going to get to Ilvermorny.

After more than twenty minutes, they passed through the ring of clouds to reveal a large, sprawling complex. Ilvermorny wasn’t as tall as Hogwarts or Beauxbatons, with the highest point being the four-story tall clock tower located in the center. Instead, two and three-story buildings covered the entire top of the mountain, hidden amongst a ring of clouds and evergreen trees. Stepping out of the carriage, Harry looked over everything with a grin.

He was finally going to learn magic.

“First years to me!” A tall, middle-aged witch with brown, greying hair called as she rang a bell. “First years!”

“That’s Professor Harper. Go on, we’ll see you inside,” Tonks said, giving him a hug.

Hugging her back, Harry split from the girls and walked over to the woman. She looked at him and gave him a brief smile and a nod as he joined the other first years waiting next to her.

“What house do you think you’ll be in?” one boy asked.

As the others began to speculate, Harry ignored them and looked up when he heard a distant rumble of thunder. A smile stretched across his face when he saw Levina appear from the clouds and fly around the mountain.

“I take it she’s yours, Mr. Potter?”

Harry turned to find an elderly witch standing behind him with a kind smile. She leaned on her staff, white hair tied back in a bun, her kind green eyes sparkling brightly.

“Yes, ma’am,” Harry replied.

“Wonderful!” the woman smiled. “It’s been many decades since we’ve had a Thunderbird on the grounds. I’ll ask Professor Grove to build her a perch. Is there anything in particular she would like?”

“Something tall,” Harry told her. “Levina likes to be able to see what’s happening around her.”

“Then tall it shall be,” The woman smiled before turning to the crowd of first years. “Now, if everyone is here, we can start! For those of you who don’t know, my name is Esmerelda Turner. I’m the Headmistress of Ilvermorny. First of all, I’d like to welcome all of you to our school. We look forward to getting to know each and every one of you. If you’ll follow me, we’ll get you sorted.”

The other first years cheered as they followed the old woman to the front entrance of the school. Stepping inside, Harry found himself in a large circular room. The floor was made of stone, and in the center sat an intricate, colored carving of the Gordian Knot. Along the far wall were four wooden carvings. From left to right, they were a Horned Serpent, a panther-like cat called a Wumpus, a Pukwudgie, and finally, a Thunderbird. They were separated in the middle by a large set of double doors that Harry knew led to the Great Hall.

Above Harry, there was a wooden balcony that circled the room. Older students leaned on the railing, watching the sorting. Catching his eyes, Dora waved and smiled, mouthing the words 'Good luck.' Above that was a glass ceiling showing the star beginning to twinkle as the sun fell below the horizon.

With the sound of flapping wings, Levina appeared and perched lightly on the glass ceiling. The students all gasped at the sight of the great bird as she watched Harry curiously. Smiling, Harry waited as the students were called alphabetically.

"Harry Potter," Professor Harper called.

Stepping forward, Harry felt none of the nervousness that his classmates had shown. He knew exactly where he wanted to go, and that's exactly where he was going to go.

Stopping on the Gordian Knot, he waited for the carved statues to react. Unsurprisingly, the Thunderbird flapped its wings and cried happily, a call that Levina echoed above him. Smiling, Harry was just about to step away when the Horned Serpent hissed, then the Wumpus roared, and finally, the Pukwudgie lifted its bow and let out a war cry. The students around and above him started whispering furiously while Harry turned and looked at Professor Harper with a raised brow.

"Quiet," she called, raising a hand for silence. "While it is unusual for more than one statue to choose a single student, it does happen. About once a generation, we find a student that resonates with all four. In cases like this, we allow the student to choose which house they want to join."

Everyone turned to look expectantly at Harry. Glancing up at Dora, he winked before turning to look at Levina.

"Thunderbird," he announced.

Dora cheered and pumped her fist while Levina spread her wings and cried out in victory, lightning flashing in the clouds above her, followed by the rumble of thunder.

“Thunderbird it is,” Professor Harper smiled. “You may go through to the Great Hall.”

Nodding, Harry stepped off the Gordian Knot and walked through the double doors ahead of him. The Great Hall was dominated by four long tables where some students were already sitting. Above the tables sat house banners in the same order as the statues in the sorting room.

“Young man,” someone called from his right.

Looking over, Harry noticed an old man standing between two tables loaded with wand boxes. Excitedly, he strode over, causing the man to chuckle.

“Eager, are we?” he asked. “I’m Miguel Quintana, wandmaker. You’re Harry Potter, correct? Now, let’s see which wand-”

“That one,” Harry interrupted, pointing to a black box, newer than most, sitting in the fourth stack on the left table.

“You can feel it?” Miguel asked eagerly.

Harry nodded, his fingers practically tingling with static electricity as he looked at it.

“Marvelous! I made that wand myself a few years ago,” Miguel said, moving boxes around carefully. “A beautiful Thunderbird landed right in front of my shop with two young ones with her. Scared the life out of me at first. I’ve never had anything like that happen before. Normally, procuring wand materials is either dangerous or costly. Instead, this one comes to me.”

Chuckling, the man shook his head and held the box as if it contained a great treasure. Carefully, he removed the lid to reveal a dark wand, the wood resembling a strand of cable with smaller branches fused and twisted together.

“First, she drops a branch of Snakewood, then plucks one of her own feathers and drops them in front of me before taking off,” Miguel said, shaking his head in wonder. “I discovered later that this wood came from the Snakewood tree here at Ilvermorny. Legend has it that the tree itself grew from the place they buried Slytherin’s wand.”

“Slytherin?” Harry asked, finally taking his eyes off the wand.

“So the legend goes,” Miguel said, waving his hand dismissively. “I never put much stock in those tales myself. Still, it could be true. Salazar Slytherin was a complex man, capable of great good, and great evil. Legend says that when Isolt Gaunt – Ilvermorny’s founder, along with her husband – took the wand from England, she left behind the worst of Slytherin and brought only the good in him. The Snakewood tree that grows from his wand has great medicinal properties. More than a tree of that type should.”

“But enough of that,” Miguel said, waving his hand as if to shoo away the thought. “This wand has never worked for me, personally, but I can feel the power it contains. Go on, give it a try.”

Licking his lips, Harry reached out and took the wand. The moment he held it in his hand, a bolt of lightning hit the Clock Tower outside the window. He could feel with wand in his hand pulsing with power as students screamed and thunder rumbled. Giving it a wave, bright gold sparks leapt from the tip, warm and tingling as they landed on his skin.

“A perfect match,” Miguel smiled.

Smiling, his eyes still on the wand in his hand, Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out all the Galleons he had before slapping them on the table.

“Mr. Potter, that’s really not necessary,” Miguel protested.

Harry ignored him and walked away, grinning as he joined Dora at the Thunderbird table.

“Leave it to you to unintentionally destroy the Clock Tower just by getting your wand,” Dora smirked.

Harry looked up and out the window. Thankfully, the Clock Tower was still standing, though a little blackened on one side. Shrugging, he turned back and held out his wand so Dora could get a good look.

“Levina’s mom’s feather is in the core,” he told her. “The wood, apparently, is from the Snakewood tree on the grounds.”

“That’s a bit odd,” Amanda said, leaning forward for a closer look. “Snakes and birds don’t usually get along.”

“I can’t wait to finally learn magic,” Michelle said, sighing happily as she looked at her own wand. “I’ve been fascinated by Charms since I heard about it. What about you, Harry? What do you want to learn?”

“Everything.”

Chapter 6

“This is so boring,” Harry groaned.

Slamming his book closed, he sat back in his chair, arms folded over his chest, and stared out across the library.

“What is?” Tonks asked distractedly, her quill scratching away as she wrote her essay for Charms.

Most professors eased their students into the new year, but the Charms instructor, Professor Wilkinson, was always eager to get started.

“I know it can be a little boring in the beginning,” Amanda said, smiling at him from across the table. “But you need to learn the basics first. You’ll get to the fun stuff soon. Besides, think of all the trouble you can get into by levitating things.”

Sighing, Harry flicked his wand lazily, causing the book next to her to float into the air. Amanda and Jennifer stared at him with open mouths as it drifted smoothly back down without a sound.

“Where the hell did you learn to do that?” Jennifer asked incredulously. “It’s the second day of school!”

“Harry used to steal any wand he could get his hands on,” Tonks replied without looking up from her parchment. “He’s been able to levitate things since he was six.”

“But-” Amanda stammered, a lock of red hair falling in front of her eyes. “But he did it silently.”

“I got caught when I used incantation, so I stopped,” Harry shrugged, before climbing to his feet. “I’m going to go find something better to read.”

~

Sitting at the top of the Clock Tower, Harry studied the copy of *Chadwick’s Charms, Year Seven* he had open on the wooden floor and looked back up at the old Comet two-sixty a few feet away. Over the last two days, after discovering a much more interesting book on Charms in the library, Harry had taken one of the non-functioning brooms from the school shed, stripped all the Charms off of it, and carefully applied his own.

“I think it’s ready,” he said, getting to his feet and picking up the broom.

Clicking her beak, Levina looked over at him curiously.

“It’ll be fine,” Harry assured her. “Not only will it work, I bet it’ll be faster than my Lockheed.”

Mounting the broom, he grinned widely as it hovered perfectly in place. Looking out at the dark, star-filled sky, he gripped the handle tightly.

“Watch this,” Harry said.

As he leaned forward slightly, the broom took off like it was shot out of a canon. Harry had no hope of holding on. The broom was ripped out from under him, and he had just enough time to see it become a speck in the distance before gravity took hold, and he landed hard on his back. Groaning, he slowly climbed to his feet while Levina stared at the point where the broom had disappeared, tilted her head to the side, and blinked.

“Well, I was right,” Harry said, getting the closest thing to an incredulous look a Thunderbird could give. “What? I was! There’s no way my Lockheed could move that fast!”

Blinking slowly, Levina cawed softly and shrugged her shoulders.

“Alright, so maybe I should’ve limited the acceleration a bit,” Harry admitted. “At least I don’t have to worry about getting in trouble. There’s no way they find that broom.”

~

Sirius and Frank touched down softly in the middle of a cornfield in Iowa. MIB agents had the entire area sealed off with yellow tape.

“This better be good to get me out of bed at two in the bloody morning,” Sirius grumbled.

He and Frank wound their way through the rows of corn for a couple of minutes before Sirius nearly stumbled into a fifteen-foot wide, eight-foot-deep crater gouged out of the soil.

“What the fuck happened here?” Sirius asked, looking at the impressively large hole.

“Not sure, yet,” one of the female agents responded while looking over a clipboard. “The No-maj military picked up an unidentified flying object traveling at Mach seven about fifteen minutes ago. They lost track of it two minutes after picking it up but couldn’t tell where it had gone. Our sensors picked up a large release of magic about the same time the local police got reports of a meteor impact in this field. Local Aurors knew nothing until we got here.”

“Anything in the hole?” Sirius asked, gazing over the edge.

“We haven’t checked yet,” the woman responded. “We just finished checking for curses. It’s clean. Whatever caused this used up all of its magic when it hit.”

“I’m not surprised,” Sirius nodded, then turned to Frank, holding out his fist. “Paper, rock, scissors?”

Frank stared at him for a long moment, receiving only a grin in response. With a sigh, he held up his hand.

“One, two, three!” Sirius counted.

The smile on his face fell when Frank countered his scissors with rock. Grumbling, Sirius took off his suit jacket and slid down into the hole.

“Careful,” the woman called. “Whatever’s down there might still be hot.”

Patting the dirt off of his pants as best he could, Sirius waved his acknowledgment and lit his wand. After a couple of minutes of searching, he saw nothing that looked out of place. Just as he was about to try a Detection Charm, he caught a glint of gold out of the corner of his eyes. Gently wiping the dirt out of the way, he carefully picked up the broken and burned shard of wood.

Property of Ilvermorny

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Sirius sighed.

~

Harry followed Professor Wilkinson, the Charms professor and his Head of House, to the Headmistress’ office, trying to think of all the reasons he could be in trouble. That thought process came to a screeching halt when he walked in to find Professor Turner sitting at her desk with Sirius and Aunt Andi sitting across from her.

“Thank you for coming, Harry,” Professor Turner said, smiling softly. “Please, have a seat.”

“Is everything alright?” Harry asked, looking at Sirius worriedly.

“You tell us,” Andi said, staring at him hard. “Sirius got called into work late last night because, somehow, a broom belonging to this school found its way to a cornfield in Iowa without a rider.”

“Wait, what, exactly, happened?” Professor Wilkinson asked as he and Harry took seats.

Reaching into his pocket, Sirius pulled out part of a burned and broken broom shaft in a plastic bag marked with red evidence tape and set it on the desk. Harry internally cursed when he saw the words *Property of Ilvermorny* still legible.

“Last night, the No-maj military picked up an object traveling at Mach seven across their airspace,” he said. “A few minutes later, we detected a magical explosion a few hundred miles away in the same direction of travel. When we got to the sight, we found a bloody great crater and bits of shattered broom laying all over some poor bloke’s cornfield.”

“Mach seven!?” Professor Wilkinson asked incredulously. “How?”

“That’s what we were wondering,” Sirius said, turning to his Godson. “Is there anything you’d like to tell us, Harry?”

Harry immediately knew he was cornered. Sirius wouldn’t ask a question like that unless he already knew the answer. He didn’t know a great deal about all the tools the MIB had to track magic, but he knew they could. Likely, they had already tracked the Charms on the broom to the magical signature of his wand. Or, if they hadn’t, they could and were just waiting to see if he’d lie first.

“Fine, it was me,” Harry admitted.

“How on Earth did you make a broom go that fast?” Professor Wilkinson asked.

“And why?” Andi added with a glare. “What were you thinking!?”

“I was bored,” Harry shrugged. “I was looking through the library for something more interesting to read than my school books when I found a section on Charms used to make brooms, so I decided to give it a try.”

“You caused all of this because you were bored?” Andi asked incredulously.

“Well, I really wanted to see if I could break the speed of sound on a broom, but it took off too fast,” Harry told her. “It was an accident. I fell off when I tried to fly it, and it just kept going.”

“It’s a good thing you did,” Sirius said, shaking his head. “We think that, at that speed, the broom caught fire mid-flight and went into a dive when the Charms failed. It put an eight-foot-deep hole in some guy’s cornfield. Gave the No-maj’s a fright, too.”

“Sorry,” Harry said. “I’ll pay for the damages and the broom. It was one of the ones they don’t use anyway. The Charms were falling apart on it.”

“That doesn’t mean you can just take it!” Andi yelled, throwing her hand up in the air. “What am I going to do with you?”

“How does the MIB plan on dealing with this?” Professor Turner asked, leaning on her desk with her fingers steepled.

“So long as it doesn’t happen again, they’re willing to consider it an experiment gone wrong,” Sirius said, trying his best and failing to look disapproving. “If it happens again, they may decide on a harsher punishment.”

Harry had to repress a snort. He knew that was a lie. Short of killing someone, Sirius wouldn’t let him get in any real trouble.

“Very well,” Professor Turner said, turning to Harry. “I believe a week’s worth of detention with Professor Wilkinson is in order. If you’re going to be using magic like this, it’s best if you learn how to do so safely.”

“Absolutely,” Professor Wilkinson nodded. “Despite the dangers you put yourself and others in, Mach seven is extremely impressive. I think that might be the fastest anyone has ever made anything move with magic.”

“I give up,” Andi muttered in defeat.

“Ah, I see what happened,” Professor Wilkinson said, looking over the notes Harry had made about his broom. “You didn’t have any acceleration control. You said you got the idea from Chadwick’s Charm?”

“Yeah,” Harry replied.

“That’s really not the best book for you to use for this sort of enchanting,” Professor Wilkinson told him. “Chadwick’s really only gives you the basics on how brooms work. It doesn’t go into detail. For that, you really want Advanced Charms volume eighteen. As the name suggests, this sort of thing is pretty advanced. Are you sure you want to get into something like this?”

Harry shrugged, “I just thought it would be something cool to do. I don’t plan on making racing brooms for a living or anything. Besides, it doesn’t look that hard. You just need to layer the Control Charms over the Propulsion and Braking Charms for them to work, right?”

“Well, yes, but it can be a bit more complicated than that in certain instances,” Professor Wilkinson said, blinking in surprise.

“I’ll need to add some sort of Shielding Charm, too,” Harry said. “I didn’t last time because I just wanted to see if I could get the broom to work. But if I’m going to break the speed of sound, I’ll need something to protect me from the wind. Probably the heat, too.”

“Let’s slow down and just work on getting the broom to fly controllably first,” Professor Wilkinson told him with a nervous glance. “Why are you so set on breaking the speed of sound?”

“I just want to see if I can do it,” Harry said.

“I get that, but why?” he asked again.

“My Aunt says I like to push limits,” Harry shrugged with a smirk.

“You like testing yourself?” Professor Wilkinson asked, arching an eyebrow when he got a nod in response. “Tell me, Harry, have you ever thought about picking up dueling?”

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea, Professor,” Harry admitted with a smile. “I’ve never really been one to follow the rules.”

Professor Wilkinson grinned, “Dueling isn’t about following the rules. It’s about finding creative ways to break them.”

Harry stared at his Charms professor contemplatively for a long moment before shrugging.

“I’ll give it a shot.”

~

“Aren’t you going to do your homework?” Michelle asked Harry softly.

They were sitting on a comfortable couch in the Thunderbird common room. While Michelle worked on her Transfigurations essay that was due at the end of the week, he was putting the finishing touches on his latest broom. Over the last two months, he’d gone through four different versions, each working better than the last. Professor Wilkinson got a little annoyed with him in the beginning when Harry refused his offer of advice, but that changed when he realized he liked the challenge of figuring out the problem himself. Now, he only stepped in if something looked a bit too dangerous.

Of course, the professor’s idea of dangerous and Harry’s were two entirely different things.

“I finished it,” Harry told her.

“You’re not going to give Professor Harper another short essay, are you?” Michelle asked.

“I made it as long as it needs to be,” Harry said. “Come on, even you have to admit there’s no reason to know when, where, and who invented a certain spell. It’s a waste of time. And anyways, it’s not like those grades matter much.”

“Only if you want to get a job doing something other than cleaning toilets,” she told him snarkily.

Sitting back, Harry turned to Michelle and smiled. It had taken her a while to relax around him enough to start joking, but he enjoyed how out of character her biting comments could be when she was annoyed.

“Really? Then why do they assign classes based on LAMP scores instead of our class grades?” Harry asked. “And why do employers only look at SALEM scores?”

Michelle furrowed her brow, glaring at him as she tried to think of a response.

“Look, you want to ace all your tests, then by all means, go ahead,” he told her with a smile. “But while you’re learning all those useless facts about who, when, and where, I’ll focus on learning something new.”

“I hate it when you make sense like that,” Michelle sighed.

“Yeah, he’s annoying when he does that,” Dora said tiredly as she fell onto the couch next to Harry. “How’s the broom coming?”

“Good,” Harry grinned. “Next test flight is tomorrow.”

“Just don’t kill yourself,” she told him. “Or start a war by accidentally launching your broom at China or something.”

Harry rolled his eyes as Michelle giggled next to him.

“Do you have a date for the next Salem visit?” Dora asked suddenly.

“No,” he replied. “You?”

“Ben asked me to go with him,” she said.

Harry ignored the gnawing feeling in his stomach and looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

“Ben Shaffer?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Dora said, a touch defensively. “What’s wrong with Ben?”

“Nothing, I guess,” Harry shrugged. “I just think you can do better. He’s not the brightest crayon in the box.”

“Yeah, well, the last time I went for better, it didn’t work out too well,” Dora reminded him. “This time, I’m going for attractively average.”

“If you say so,” Harry shrugged.

Silently, he wondered if Dora would get too suspicious if Ben came down with a sudden case of explosive diarrhea on Saturday.

~

“Seriously?” Harry asked, thoroughly unimpressed with the MFAA supervisors the government had sent over to keep an eye on him.

“It couldn’t be helped,” Professor Wilkinson told him.

Sighing, Harry made his way into the Great Hall with his broom on his shoulder. A black man with greying hair, a mustache, and a clipboard in his hands looked up and made his way over to him.

“Mr. Potter,” he said. “I’m Marcus Denninger. We need to go over a few things before your flight. You’ll need to stay at an altitude below twelve thousand feet at all times. Any and all attempts to break the sound barrier must be made at least one mile from land. We have safety swimmers on brooms stationed at intervals going for two miles off the coast. There’s also a red flag indicating where you need to stop and turn back. Intentionally violating any of these requirements will result in a minimum fine of five hundred Galleons and a maximum of up to five thousand. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

“What’s with the box?” Harry asked.

The woman standing behind the man who’d been speaking looked up and smiled.

“Radar,” she replied. “It’s just so we can keep track of where you are and how fast you’re going.”

“Does anyone know the fastest anyone’s ever gone on a broom before?” Harry asked.

“Three hundred and twenty-seven miles an hour,” the woman replied. “It was set by a British Wizard named Paul Whitworth in 1968.”

Harry snorted, "That'll be easy to beat."

Without waiting for a response, Harry marched outside. Everyone, from staff to students, was already on the front lawn waiting. He wasn't too sure what they were hoping to see. He'd be too far away and going too fast for anyone to watch.

Spotting two more MFAA workers waiting with brooms, Harry sighed. He was about to ask what they were hoping to do when their brooms couldn't hope to keep up with his, but he stopped when he spotted Sirius, Andi, and Ted waiting with Dora.

"Hey, what are you guys doing here?" Harry asked, accepting a hug from Andi.

"You didn't think we'd come to see you make history?" Ted asked with a grin as he patted him on the back.

"Are you sure you want to do this, Harry?" Andi asked nervously.

"I don't really care about the record. I just want to see if I can do it," Harry shrugged. "Don't worry, Aunt Andi, I'll be fine."

"Harry has a talisman that will protect him if anything goes wrong," Professor Wilkinson assured her. "As soon as the enchantments stop him safely, he'll be Portkeyed directly to the Medical Wing, where Nurse Powers is waiting if needed."

"I'm not going to crash," Harry said firmly, rolling his eyes.

"Just be careful," Dora said, hugging him tightly.

As she stepped away, Sirius took her place, hugging him tightly and patting him on the back.

“International waters are two miles from shore, right?” Harry asked softly.

“Yeah,” Sirius said, then paused and pulled back with suspicious look. “Why?”

“Just curious,” Harry grinned. “See you guys soon.”

Stepping on the footrest, Harry ascended into the air, loud cheers drowning out his Godfather’s shouts. As the MFAA workers joined him, he mounted the broom properly and flew towards the bay. A relieving warmth washed over him as the Charms on the broom kicked in, shielding him from the cold November air.

More MFAA workers were waiting for him out over the water. There was a line of more than twenty going out into the distance, all with yellow flags dangling from the backs of their brooms. At the end, two miles away, he could just make out the large red banner signaling the end. As Harry flew to the starting position, grinning in anticipation, Levina circled overhead.

Gripping the shaft of his broom, Harry leaned forward and took off like a shot.

~

“He’s started,” The woman with the radar announced with a smile. “Mach zero point three... five... seven... mach zero point eight... zero point nine... He’s done it! Mach one!”

As the crowd roared and cheered, a rumble like thunder could be heard in the distance.

~

Harry grunted, his muscles straining as he accelerated so fast the Charms designed to dampen the G-forces couldn’t keep up. He was just glad they worked at all. Even a No-maj plane would be torn apart by the forces his magic was dealing with.

As he sliced through the air, he could see clouds of condensed air bouncing off the edges of the shield protecting him from the wind. Unfortunately, he had no idea how fast he was going, so he just kept pushing.

In seconds, he reached the red flag that marked the end of his MFAA-approved route. Harry grinned as he blew right past it, the shockwave of his passage ripping the fabric from whatever magic held it in place.

~

“He’s still going,” the woman called, still smiling slightly. “Mach one point one at three miles... mach one point two at four miles...”

“Dammit, Harry,” Sirius sighed.

“That boy is grounded until he’s thirty,” Andi muttered.

“I told you,” Dora said, holding out her hand expectantly. “Pay up.”

With a muttered curse, Ted pulled out a couple of Galleons and placed them in his daughter’s hand.

“Are you kidding me?” Andi yelled, hands on her hips as she glared at both of them. “Can you two be serious?”

Just as Sirius opened his mouth with a smirk, she turned on him with her wand in hand.

“Don’t,” she said with deadly calm.

~

Harry pushed his broom as fast as it could go. As it neared its top speed, it suddenly started to buck and lose forward momentum. Deciding he'd done all he could, he slowed down.

"Well, time to head back and get yelled at," he said to himself.

Looking down at the water to judge his speed, he waited until he was moving slowly enough that it was safe to turn and headed back to the distant shore. Grinning to himself, he figured if he was already in trouble, what would a bit more hurt? Gripping his broom, he took off once more.

The shore approached with startling speed. Pulling up a few thousand feet, Harry flew straight for Mount Greylock. If his classmates were going to sit out in the cold, they might as well get a show. Passing directly over the front lawn, he slowed back down and circled around to land. His classmates stood and swarmed around him as he landed.

"Dude! You shook every window in the castle!" someone yelled.

"That was sick!"

"You're crazy!" Johnny grinned, clapping him on the back.

Before Harry could respond to his old friend, Dora jumped into his arms and wrapped her legs around his waist.

"You did it!" she yelled.

Harry laughed and spun her around excitedly.

“Do you have any idea how dangerous that was!?” Denninger yelled, glaring with his arms folded over his chest.

“Yeah, yeah,” Harry said, setting Tonks down and waving him off as he looked at the woman with the radar. “How fast did I go?”

“Mach one point seven,” the woman told him.

“And you went *twelve miles* past your designated stopping point,” Denninger growled. “Do you have any idea how many laws you just broke?”

“Well, technically, when I did that, I was in international airspace,” Harry told him.

Denninger sputtered, his mouth working silently for several moments.

“He does have a point,” the woman said.

“Yeah, well, that doesn’t cover what he did on the way back,” Denninger argued. “You were strictly told not to attempt to break the sound barrier over land, which you did.”

“Just send me the bill,” Harry told him dismissively.

Turning away from the flabbergasted man, he pulled Dora over to their family to celebrate.

“Did you have to say that?” Andi asked frustratedly. “He’s going to fine you as much as he can now. Just because you make money from those books doesn’t mean you should waste it.”

"I'm not going to," Harry grinned. "I got a letter from Lockheed last night. They offered to pay me fifty thousand Galleons for access to any and all research I conduct on brooms. I sent Uncle Ted a copy this morning. It's probably still on the way."

"Fifty thousand!?" Dora gasped.

"How much of it did you read?" Ted asked.

"I skimmed it," Harry said.

"So, that's a no," Ted smiled. "Most likely, they're only offering that much if you give them the rights to keep the full profits from anything they develop using your research. If you ask for a cut of the royalties, you'll get less to start with but a lot more in the long run if they use it. I'll look it over when it gets delivered."

Harry shrugged, "I don't really care about the money. Just make whatever deal you think is best. I trust you."

Chapter 7

"Harry!" Sirius shouted across the platform, waving his hands wildly above his head.

Harry set his and Dora's trunks on a cart and looked up with a sigh.

"Does he have to do that every year?" Dora asked. "It's like he thinks we forget what he looks like or something."

"He thinks he's a lot funnier than he is," Harry smirked.

Grabbing the handle of the cart, he pushed it over to where Sirius, Andi, and Ted were waiting for them near the line of fireplaces.

“How was your first year at Ilvermorny?” Sirius asked before grabbing Harry in a headlock and ruffling his hair.

“It was free of you,” Harry grumbled, pulling himself free.

“Any new girlfriends?” he asked with a grin.

“Maybe,” Harry said with a smirk.

“He started dating Amanda when we got back from Christmas break,” Dora huffed.

“Amanda?” Andi asked, her brow furrowed. “You mean that redhead that came over last Summer?”

Dora nodded, and Sirius whistled.

“An older woman?” he asked, wiggling his eyebrows. “I’m impressed.”

Dora snorted, “I’m not. Every time we tried to study, those two would sneak off to make out somewhere. They got us kicked out of the library a few times.”

“Totally worth it,” Harry grinned.

“This isn’t going to cause problems between the two of you, is it?” Andi asked warily.

“Why would it?” Harry asked.

“Well, what if you break up with Amanda, and she wants to come over to visit Dora?” Andi asked.

“They already broke up,” Dora pouted. “And they get along just fine. I can’t stand my exes, and they still hang out like nothing’s changed. It’s really annoying.”

Sirius laughed, and Ted chuckled while Andi pulled her daughter in for a hug. When Harry looked at the other men in confusion, they just shook their heads. Slings his arm around his shoulders, Sirius led him towards the fireplace.

“I’ll explain when we get home,” he whispered before pausing and raising his voice to a normal level. “Actually, wait. Ted, do you mind going first just in case Harry decides to do another face plant?”

“Ha ha, very funny,” Harry said.

Shrugging off his arm, he grabbed a handful of Floo Powder and stepped into the fireplace.

“Forty-seven fifty-six Gulch Drive!” Harry yelled.

This time, he was careful to tuck in his arms and legs and shut his mouth as he spun through the Floo Network. His confidence grew as the trip continued without issue. Just as he was about to reach his stop, Harry took a step to walk smoothly out.

His stop came a full second after he thought it would. The pain that shot up his spine reminded him of the time he thought there was a curb, and there wasn’t. Groaning, he stepped into the living room, cursing loudly and often, only stopping when Sirius stepped out smoothly behind him and started laughing loudly.

“You really need to get better at that,” Sirius chuckled.

“I’m standing, aren’t I?” Harry asked angrily.

Sirius laughed again as the others stepped out of the Floo. Still rubbing his back and grumbling, Harry grabbed Dora's trunk and started carrying it to her room. Once everything was put away, they sat down in the kitchen, where Andi had cooked dinner.

"How do you think you did on your tests?" Andi asked, passing along the tray of homemade tacos.

"Good." "Fine," Harry and Dora responded.

"Professor Banks said my project was one of the best," Dora explained further. "She said if I keep it up, I'll do fine on my LAMPs next year."

"What does that stand for again?" Sirius asked.

"Levels in Aptitude of Magical Performance," she recited.

"It's the same as our OWLs," Andi told him before turning to Harry. "And how do you think you did this year?"

"Pretty good," Harry shrugged. "Professor Wilkinson gave me extra credit for my broom project at the start of the year. He also told me I should try my dueling out at the tournament in New York next month."

"Why didn't you tell us about this sooner?" Sirius asked.

"Because I just found out," Harry said, pulling a colorful pamphlet from his pocket and handing it to him. "I'll be competing in the under-sixteen bracket. It's a two-day, single-elimination tournament. Do you think you can get time off to take me?"

"I'll ask first thing tomorrow," Sirius told him with a grin.

“Under-sixteen?” Andi asked, yanking the pamphlet out of Sirius’ hand. “Doesn’t that mean you’ll be competing against second years, as well?”

“Well, yeah,” Harry shrugged.

“Do you think I could compete in the under-eighteen bracket?” Dora asked suddenly.

“Why?” Andi asked sharply, eyes narrowed. “You’ve never shown an interest in dueling before.”

Reaching under the table, Harry gave Dora’s knee a supportive squeeze. He’d asked her to join his training with Professor Wilkinson so he had someone else to practice with. She couldn’t always go with him, but she usually went twice a week. He had no idea she was interested in dueling herself, but he knew Andi wouldn’t like the idea, that was for sure.

“I just want to see how I measure up,” Dora said, trying to act nonchalant. “And, if Harry’s going to be there anyway, why not give it a try?”

“Because it’s dangerous,” Andi said flatly.

“But I’ve been training with Harry, and Professor Wilkinson said I was really good for my age,” Dora said, looking at her parents pleadingly. “I just want to see how I’d do. And it’s not that dangerous if you’re going to let Harry go. Please?”

Harry had to bite his lip to stop a chuckle when she swelled up her bottom lip and enlarged the size of her eyes slightly. Ted and Andi shared a long look that carried an entire conversation before Andi sighed in defeat.

“Fine,” she said shortly.

“Yes!” Dora cheered excitedly.

As she threw her hands in the air, her knuckles caught the edge of her plate and dumped it into Harry's lap.

~

After dinner, the family moved out to the newly installed pool to sit and relax. The Wireless played in the background while Harry tried not to get caught checking out Dora in her red swimsuit.

"I wish we had dueling tournaments like that back in England," Sirius said to Ted as they lounged in white chairs with Butterbeers in their hands. "That would've been so much fun."

"I wonder why they don't," Ted mused.

"Lack of interest, probably," Sirius grumbled. "You know the Ministry only pays for something like that if someone can make a profit. No one but parents would go to see kids duel. The national tournament gets all the attention."

"True," Ted nodded.

The sound of a bird chirping sounded from the house, signaling a Floo call and causing Sirius to sigh.

"I'll get it," he said. "It's probably for me anyways." he said, setting down his Butterbeer and climbing out of his lounge.

He disappeared inside the house for less than a minute before coming back out, looking slightly troubled. With a flick of his wand, he changed the Wireless to a different station.

"...what we know so far," the female host said. "It's just been confirmed by senior MACUSA officials that a member of the Magical Intelligence Bureau has just been caught violating Russian airspace and was subsequently captured. From what we know based on President Rurik Kiselev's press release, this isn't the first time MACUSA has done so. Many of you will

remember that, just a few months ago, Harry Potter became the first person to build a broom capable of breaking the speed of sound.

“How does this connect to the Magical Intelligence Agency? Well, Harry Potter sold the rights to that design to Lockheed, who went on to design the X-87 Javelin. This prototype, which is a refined design of Mr. Potter’s original supersonic broom, is what the Russians say the MIA agent was riding when he was apprehended. They claim that for months, MIA agents have been flying across Russia to gather intelligence. Because of the X-87’s incredible top speed of over Mach 2, the Russians had been unable to stop, or intercept the riders.

“Today, they claim to have laid a trap. They found a pattern to the flights and laid out a trap for anyone entering their airspace. A trap, they say, the agent flew into early this afternoon. We’ve yet to hear a response from the White House on this, but we expect one soon. This situation is evolving rapidly. With me in the studio is John Harken, historian, author, and former advisor to President Marks. John, I think the biggest concern for everyone listening is the possibility of war. Do you see that happening?”

“I’d say it’s not likely, but certainly a concern we should share,” a man with a deep voice replied. “This is a severe diplomatic issue, to be sure, but I don’t see it coming to war if MACUSA handles it properly. Fortunately, we’re not in the Cold War anymore. The big concern right now, is going to be over sanctions against the US from Russia and its allies. You can expect prices to go up sharply over the next few days.”

“Bollocks,” Sirius said, switching the Wireless back to a music station. “Leave it to those idiots in the MIA to screw everything up. Magical Intelligence Agency, my arse, more like Morons Inspecting Assholes.”

Andi swatted his arm with her magazine.

“Harry?” Dora asked softly.

Despite her tone, everyone looked over at him.

“I’m going for a fly,” he said, avoiding their eyes as he headed to the house.

“Harry!” Andi called.

He ignored her and marched into his room, where he punched the bed and cursed. Hitting his mattress until he ran out of breath, he slid down to sit on the floor with his back against his dresser.

Harry couldn't believe something he'd made was used for something so stupid. Thinking of the gold he'd gleefully added to his vault now left a sour taste in his mouth. Even worse, with the deal Ted had worked out with Lockheed, he'd be collecting royalties for the next two decades. He'd felt proud at the time, maybe even a little bit arrogant, but now, he felt like a fool. He wished he could cancel the deal, but even if that was possible, it would take back what had already happened.

They'd all fled to America to escape a war that had destroyed his family, and now he'd inadvertently nearly started another one.

Shaking off those thoughts, Harry stood and made his way over to his trunk. Throwing open the lid carelessly, he dug through the enlarged interior until he found his brooms and paused. One was the Lockheed that Sirius had given him for his birthday, and the other was the very broom that had caused all of this.

He grabbed the crude, homemade broom he'd been so proud of and pulled it out, thinking back to how it all started. The charms really weren't as complex as most people thought they were. Going fast was easy. You just had to have a certain disregard for your own safety. Until he'd come along, every speed record had been set on modified Quidditch brooms. Brooms that still had safety features to protect players and the general customer from breaking their neck during a turn. Magic didn't have the same limits that the human body did, as Harry learned the hard way on Ilvermorny's Clock Tower.

Getting the brooms to go as fast as he wanted wasn't that hard. He just neglected to put in the charms that would normally limit it. What was much harder, and took most of his time, was figuring out a way to stay on the damn thing. Once he figured that out, all he needed was basic

charms to limit the acceleration and turning. It was only the strength of his Propulsion Charm, which he'd pulled back on after his first failure, that kept him from going even faster.

Clutching the broom tightly, Harry left his room and headed for the front door to avoid his family. He'd just stepped off the front porch when he mounted it and took off into the air like a shot. With a loud cry, Levina joined him, flapping her powerful wings as she tried to keep up with him.

As they got further from the house, the skies turned dark to the sound of the distant rumble of thunder. Levina flew in circles, conjuring a storm that matched his emotions. The rain started to fall, biting into his skin as he followed her. Lightning flashed overhead, followed by crackling, rumbling thunder that reverberated in his chest.

Like it was planned, they both flew straight up through the roiling grey clouds. Harry's skin was soaked from the moisture in the air. Mixed with the wind, it left him cold and covered in goosebumps. He ignored the discomfort and continued upwards, running neck and neck with Levina until they broke through the top of the cloud.

The red light of the setting sun warmed his cold, damp body. For a moment, he closed his eyes and savored the relief. As his upward momentum came to an end, he hovered in the air, weightless, with Levina next to him, her wings spread wide. Just as he began to feel lightheaded from the lack of oxygen, they began to fall.

Harry pushed his broom into a plummeting dive, rapidly outpacing his companion. She cawed loudly behind him a moment before his sonic boom reflected off of the ground and back towards him just as he broke through the cloud layer. With only basic brakes and turning, he knew, at these speeds, his broom would struggle to slow down enough to pull up before he hit the ground.

So, he didn't bother to brake. Pulling straight up, he intentionally upset the broom, sending himself into a tumble. Fighting to point the nose straight up, the sudden spin and twists as he fought for control sent the blood rushing from his head. Muscles straining, Harry grunted and

manhandled the broom into doing what he wanted. Looking straight up at the darkening sky, he used his broom's greatest asset, power, to fight against gravity.

The force that the move exerted on his body pushed an involuntary grunt from his lips, but it worked. His momentum slowed far faster than it would have if he'd tried to brake. When he was going slow enough, he pitched forward and took off over the desert, his mind wandering.

Harry knew there was nothing he could do to stop what had already happened, but he could stop it from happening again. He was going to keep working on his broom like he wanted to, making designs that flew faster and higher than anyone had ever thought possible before. But he wasn't selling the design again. He was going to keep it for himself. It would be up to him to decide who got to use the designs and who didn't. Never again would he let a company or government use his work without him knowing exactly what it was for.

He knew he thought differently to most wizards. It wasn't his intelligence that helped him become the first to break the sound barrier on a broom; it was his ability to think audaciously. Staring out at the night sky, more audacious thoughts came to mind, more firsts that he could accomplish.

As the moon rose over the mountains in the distance, the most audacious idea came to mind. With a grin, he turned back and headed for home.

~

Three weeks later, Harry and his family Portkeyed to New York for the national dueling tournament. When he'd been told where it was, he thought they'd end up in some hidden part of Madison Square Garden that magicals kept to themselves. Instead, they ended up in a sprawling, grassy field in a rural area.

"Where are we?" Dora asked, wrinkling her nose at the smell of nearby cows. "I thought we were going to New York. Did you cast the spell right?"

“Of course I did,” Sirius said defensively, even as he looked around in confusion. “This is where the brochure told us to go. It’s not my fault they got it wrong.”

“We’re in the right place,” Andi said, rolling her eyes. “New York is more than just a city. We’re close to the border with Pennsylvania, near one of those Amish towns. Look.”

Pointing to a distant green banner, big white letters spelled out; *Welcome to the U-21 international Dueling Championships!*

Beyond that was what looked, to Harry, more like a state fair than a dueling tournament. There were rides, games, kiosks selling souvenirs, and way in the back, he could see a dirt field surrounded by a wooden fence and tiered benches. Sharing a look with Dora, he could tell she was as surprised as he was. When he’d envisioned the tournament, this wasn’t what he’d expected.

“I really wish I’d known this is what to expect when I packed,” Dora sighed. “I packed clothes for a city, not a farmers market.”

“Come on, Dora, this’ll be great,” Ted said excitedly. “Let’s go get you kids signed in.”

Harry shrugged and followed after him while Dora sighed and trudged along. In the end, he didn’t really care where the tournament took place. All that mattered to him was how he did in the rankings. After hearing about the situation with Russia, Harry was more determined than ever to prove himself.

As they were waiting in line to sign in for the tournament, a short, busty brunette and a slightly taller girl who looked a little younger than Harry approached them.

“Sirius?” she called softly.

Harry watched as his Godfather turned with his trademark lopsided grin, only to go slack-jawed when he set eyes on the woman.

“Marlene!?” he gasped, looking like he’d seen a ghost.

The woman smiled nervously and nodded, her eyes tearing up. Suddenly, Sirius lunged forward and hugged her tightly, a choked laugh escaping his mouth. Harry was shocked to see tears falling from his eyes.

“I thought you were dead,” he said thickly.

“I’m sorry,” Marlene mumbled into his chest. “We used a Vanishing Cabinet to escape before they burned down the house. When the Ministry declared us dead, my parents left for America, and I couldn’t leave them behind. I wanted to tell you, but with Nott still free, it was too dangerous.”

“It’s alright,” Sirius said, pulling back to hold her at arm’s length with a wide smile. “I’m just glad you survived. Merlin, Remus is going to flip when he sees you. You look just as beautiful as you did in school.”

“And you’re still a cad,” Marlene chuckled tearfully. “Oh, I’m sorry. Sirius, this is my daughter, Jenna. Sweetie, this is Sirius Black, a good friend of mine from my school days.”

“Hello,” Sirius said to the girl before turning back to Marlene with a smirk. “Married with a kid, look at you all grown up.”

“Divorced, actually,” she told him with a small smile. “I married a Muggle, and he didn’t take too well to learning about the magical world. What about you?”

“Oh, he’s still the same old reprobate,” Andi replied with a smile. “I’m Andromeda Tonks, Sirius’ cousin. This is my husband, Ted. Our daughter, Nymphadora-”

“Mom,” Dora whined. “It’s just Tonks.”

“And this is Harry,” Andi continued, ignoring the interruption.

“Hello,” Marlene said, a soft and sad smile on her face as she looked at Harry. “You look just like your father but with your mother’s eyes.”

“Marlene and your mum were best friends at Hogwarts,” Sirius smiled.

“Really?” Harry asked. “Could you tell me about her sometime? Every time I ask Sirius, he starts talking about what a nice ass she had.”

“I do not!” Sirius protested. “I only said that once.”

Marlene laughed while Harry and Dora were distracted with the signup sheet.

“So, what brings you here?” Sirius asked. “Jenna’s a bit young for the dueling tournament, isn’t she?”

“Oh, she’s not competing,” she told him. “We live just a few miles away. We come here every year to enjoy the fair and watch the duels.”

“You’re all set,” the wizard manning the table smiled, handing Harry and Dora their badges. “The tournament doesn’t start for another two hours, so feel free to explore until then. The officials will explain the rules before it starts. Good luck to both of you.”

“Thanks,” Dora beamed, her hair turning from green to a happy pink.

Harry followed after her as they rejoined their family and started to explore the fair. Bemusedly, he watched Sirius talking animatedly with Marlene. For years, he watched as his Godfather had been able to charm all sorts of women with his flirting. It was quite refreshing to watch Marlene laugh them off without so much as a blush.

About half an hour later, Remus managed to find them. His jaw hit the floor when Sirius re-introduced him to Marlene. While they had a short but emotional reunion, Sirius explained what had happened to her a bit more.

“Marlene was part of a resistance group during the war with me, Remus, and your parents,” he told them. “When we were responding to a Death Eater raid, she dueled and killed Thadeus Nott. His son, Titus, didn’t take that well. He put a price on her head, though we could never prove it. About a month later, we got word that her house had been destroyed by Fiendfyre. Nasty, dark magic. The place was reduced to nothing but a pile of ash by the time we got it under control. We assumed Marlene and her parents had been killed. It wouldn’t be the first time something like that had happened.”

“So, she let them think she was dead and went into hiding,” Harry nodded.

“What happened to Nott?” Dora asked.

“Nothing,” Sirius sighed, running a hand through his hair. “The bastard stayed out of Azkaban by claiming the Imperius Curse. If he knew she was still alive, he’d probably still be after her.”

After wandering around the fair, going on rides, playing games, and eating food, Harry and Dora eventually left to get ready for the tournament. There was a long and, in Harry's opinion, boring safety and rules lecture before they finally started the tournament. As he stepped out into the arena for his first match, he spotted his family cheering loudly. Even Jenna and Marlene joined in, Jenna clutching the giant stuffed Niffler that Sirius had won.

Harry's first match was over quickly. His ability to cast silently let him make quick work of the Indian witch he faced. It was a while before Dora had her first match of the day. She did well, but she didn't have nearly as easy of a time as he had. After a couple of minutes of slinging spells back and forth with the Chinese wizard she was competing against, Dora caught him with a Disarming Hex.

While Harry won all eight of his matches for the day, qualifying for the finals, Dora lost her third match against a Nigerian witch who didn't even use a wand. She was a bit upset at that, and as he tried to console her, Harry was also bound and determined to learn how to cast magic without a wand.

Once the tournament was finished for the day, Sirius invited everyone out to a celebratory dinner. It ended up being a raucous affair, filled with jokes, laughter, and humorous stories from the adults' days at Hogwarts. Jenna was a quiet and shy girl just a year younger than Harry, but she slowly opened up to him and Dora as the night wore on.

Throughout the meal, Harry couldn't help but notice the way Sirius and Marlene gravitated towards each other.

~

"Witches and wizards, it's time for the championship rounds!" the announcer yelled.

As the crowd cheered, the thin man with a curly black mustache, top hat, and bright red jacket grinned.

“First up, we have the under-sixteen championship bout,” he continued once the noise died down. “Let’s hear it for our two finalists! From Italy, we have Arturo Moretti, and representing the United States, we have Harry Potter!”

Harry stepped into the arena and stared at his opponent, a handsome second year with dark hair, hazel eyes, and a confident grin.

“And now, our special guest referee, a five-time former world dueling champion, Filius Flitwick!” the man announced.

Harry wasn’t sure why, but his family and Marlene cheered loudly. He thought the name might be familiar, but he couldn’t remember where he would have heard it from. A moment later, a tiny, smiling man walked out into the arena.

“Good day, gentlemen,” Flitwick squeaked happily. “Let’s keep this a clean fight, and good luck to both of you. Bow, retreat to your positions, and wait for my signal.”

Harry and Arturo bowed, walked back ten paces, then turned to face each other. Holding his wand aloft, Flitwick glanced at both of them. A heartbeat later, red sparks shot from his wand. Harry immediately circled to his right, out of the way of a shouted Disarming Hex, and began firing hexes as fast as he could.

“Protego!” Arturo yelled.

His shield formed solidly, but Harry grinned as he continued to rapidly fire disarmers, stunners, and leg-lockers. Quickly, Arturo’s shield started to flicker and die, just like the other opponents Harry had faced that managed to defend themselves. Unlike the others, however, when it did collapse, he got out of the way before Harry could end the match.

In the end, that did nothing more than prolong the inevitable. Harry was just too fast at casting, and Arturo, even as a second year, didn't know any spells that Harry couldn't deal with easily. After a bit of cat and mouse, he managed to corner Arturo and pelted his shield until it failed, and his wand was ripped from his hand.

"Stop!" Flitwick shouted surprisingly firmly.

He was so short and unobtrusive during the match that Harry had actually forgotten he was even there.

"Winner!" he yelled, pointing to Harry.

The crowd cheered, with Dora and Sirius being the loudest, whistling and stomping their feet.

"Let's give it up to both of our finalists for that impressive performance," the announcer said, walking over with a gold medal in his hands. "Witches and wizards, I give you your under-sixteen international dueling champion, Harry Potter!"

Bowing his head so the man could put the medal around his neck, Harry shook hands with Arturo and waved to the crowd, a grin on his face.

Chapter 8

(A/N: From this point forward, the MFBI will be renamed to the MIB, for Magical Investigation Bureau, and the MIB will be the MIA, for Magical Intelligence Agency. The Complete file has been changed to reflect this, but the individual chapters haven't just yet. I'll get to them at some point, hopefully soon. I think this will make more sense with the MIB being referred to as the Men in Black compared to what I previously wrote.)

Harry stumbled out of the floor and once again braced himself for a painful meeting with the concrete floor of the Washington D.C. Union Station. However, instead of meeting the unforgiving floor, he felt like he'd landed on a nice fluffy mattress. Peeking open first one eye and then the other, he pushed himself up, watching as the floor sank under his hands in a way that was indicative of a Spongify Charm. Looking up, he smiled at the tall, dark-skinned man standing over him, wand in hand.

"Thanks, Frank," Harry smiled.

"Good morning, Harry," Frank replied before turning his gaze back to the platform.

Grabbing his trunk, Harry moved out of the way just a moment before Dora stepped out of the Floo. She walked out perfectly fine and sent a small smirk in his direction when she spotted him dusting off his clothes. The moment she stepped on the Spongify Charm, she stumbled and windmilled her arms. With a squawk, she dropped her trunk and landed on her butt. Fortunately, she was still on the Charm when she did.

"Hey, Frank," Dora greeted him with a sigh. "I take it this was your handiwork?"

"It was," Frank said, reversing the Charm and helping her to her feet. "My apologies, Tonks."

"No problem," Dora smiled. "I'm used to falling. Oh, wait until you see Sirius. You're going to love this."

Harry snickered to himself as he grabbed a cart and loaded their trunks onto it. Ted stepped out of the Floo next, followed by Andi and, finally, Sirius. In contrast to his normally scruffy, unbothered appearance, he'd trimmed his goatee, his hair was moused back, and he smelled strongly of the cologne Dora and Harry had gotten him for Christmas several years ago. As far as they were aware, it was the first time he'd actually worn it.

Instead of his MIB suit, Sirius wore black slacks, a dress shirt, and a blazer. He'd deliberately taken the day off from work, and while he told the family that it was so he could see Harry and Dora off to school, they were convinced it was because he couldn't shut up about seeing Marlene again.

The two had been exchanging letters by owl every couple of days since they'd gotten back from the Dueling tournament. When the family owl, Archimedes, had gotten too exhausted to keep making the trip after two weeks of back and forth from Nevada to New York, Sirius managed to cajole Levina into delivering it for him. When Marlene notified him that his last letter had arrived soaked from a sudden thunderstorm that had knocked out power for several hours, he hadn't tried again. Instead, he went out and bought a short-eared owl that they'd named Plato. He was specifically bred to fly long distances.

Sirius tried to argue he'd gotten him to make the flights to Salem, but no one believed him.

"Morning, Frank," Sirius said, patting the larger man on the shoulder distractedly as he gazed around the platform.

"Good Morning," Frank said, arching an eyebrow over the top of the frame of his black sunglasses.

"We got here early. I don't think she's here yet," Dora told him.

"What? Who?" Sirius replied quickly, turning away from the platform. "I wasn't looking for anyone. I was just, you know, making sure there weren't any problems."

"Uh-huh, sure," Harry said, looking around his shoulder. "Oh, look, there she is. Hi Marlene!"

Sirius' head snapped around so fast his neck popped. As he looked around excitedly, Harry and Dora burst into laughter. Realizing he'd been played, Sirius folded his arms over his chest and grumbled softly to himself. With a chuckle, Ted clapped him on the shoulder and led him onto

the platform. The adults took seats and chatted with the other parents they knew while Harry and Dora went to catch up with their friends.

Harry had just greeted Amanda with a hug and an appreciative glance that earned him a wink when Dora elbowed him. At first, he thought she was just trying to get them to stop flirting, but then he noticed her nodding her chin towards the Floo. Following her gaze, he grinned as he watched Marlene and Jenna step onto the platform.

Sirius had spotted them as well. Standing up suddenly, he ran a hand through his hair, took a nervous breath, and plastered a roguish grin on his face. Grabbing Dora by the hand, Harry darted behind one of the pillars so they could listen in.

“Marlene!” Sirius yelled, smiling widely.

“Hello, Sirius,” Marlene greeted him with a smile as they met in the middle of the platform. “Look at you all cleaned up. What poor woman do you have your sights set on today?”

“Oh, no one,” Sirius said, running a hand through his hair again. “Just decided it was time to look a little more professional for work, you know? You look great, too, by the way. Hi, Jenna. Excited to start at Ilvermorny?”

Smiling shyly, Jenna nodded.

“She’s a bit nervous,” Marlene said, smiling softly at her daughter. “Are Harry and Tonks around? I was hoping to ask them if they’d show her around the school a bit when she gets there.”

“They should be around here somewhere,” Sirius said, looking over his shoulder.

Sharing a look, Harry and Dora shared a mischievous grin as they stepped out from around the pillar.

“We’re right here,” Dora said, grinning.

Walking up to Jenna, she wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

“Why don’t Harry and I introduce you to some of our friends while these two catch up?” she asked. “It’s been what, a whole three days since Sirius wrote her a letter. I bet he has so much new stuff to tell her.”

“That’s a great idea. Why don’t you two introduce her to your friends? Now,” Sirius said with a pointed look.

“Sure,” Dora grinned, leading Jenna away. “Oh, and Sirius just bought a special long-distance owl if you ever need to send a letter home. He’s really fast.”

Harry smirked as Sirius glared at the back of her head.

“Hey, Sirius, since you took the whole day off from work, could you ask the guy at the bookstore if they can order that dueling book for me, and I’ll pick it up on the first Salem visit?” he asked.

“Sure, kiddo,” Sirius said, pushing him away and blushing slightly as Marlene arched her brow.

Grinning, Harry walked away.

“So, this is to look more professional at work, is it?” Marlene asked just before he was out of earshot.

~

Two months into the school year, at half past two in the morning, Harry crept out of his bed. Dressed in all black, he silently unlocked his trunk, opened a hidden compartment in the back, and pulled out a sleek, polished black broom with a wristwatch strapped to the handle. Closing his trunk softly and locking it back up, he snuck down to the common room, peeking around the corner to make sure it was empty. When he saw no one, he pulled a black balaclava from his pocket and donned it before making his way over to the nearest window.

Harry was hit by a blast of winter air that made him shiver before mounting his broom. The built-in Protective Charms wrapped around him, blocking out the cold and wind as he flew outside, closing the window behind him with a casual flick of his wand. Practically invisible against the dark, moonless sky, he headed out towards the Atlantic at incredible speed. Staying low to the ground, he turned South as soon as he hit the coast.

He deliberately stayed under the sound barrier so he didn't give himself away too soon. It took him just under half an hour to fly the four hundred and sixty miles to his destination. Pulling up sharply, Harry turned west and accelerated, rattling windows in Delaware as he rapidly passed over the state. Just as he was nearing the center of Washington, D.C., two riders on Lockheed X-87 brooms rose rapidly to meet him. In moments, they were pacing him on either side.

“HALT!” one of them shouted, his voice carrying over the wind thanks to an Amplification Charm. “UNITED STATES AURORS! STOP NOW, OR YOU WILL BE FIRED UPON!”

Harry grinned under his balaclava. It was time to find out what his new broom was made of.

Leaning forward, he accelerated hard, forcing the Aurors to do the same. As they pushed the speeds higher, Harry glanced down at the watch he'd strapped to the handle of the broom. Rather than keep track of the time, this watch kept track of his speed. Michelle had helped him

design it, though he doubted she expected him to use it like this. The hour hand told him what Mach he was at, the minute hand the points, and the second hand marked his altitude in increments of one thousand.

He knew Lockheed had improved his design at least slightly as he watched their speeds increase to Mach two-point-five.

“YOU CAN’T OUTFLY US! STOP NOW!” the Auror shouted.

Smirking, Harry pushed his broom harder. As the X-87s started to buck and slow as they neared Mach three, he kept accelerating. He could have gone even faster, but he wasn’t done testing his broom quite yet. A red, sizzling, Stunning Hex sailed harmlessly over his shoulder as Harry pulled the nose up and started to climb rapidly. The Aurors followed, their hands too busy controlling their brooms to keep casting.

Higher and higher, they climbed, rocketing towards the low-lying cloud cover. As the second hand ticked closer to one on the watch face, denoting ten thousand feet, he glanced over his shoulder. One Auror had already pulled off, but the other was doggedly pursuing him. As they passed eleven thousand feet, the Auror began to shake his head, his broom weaving slightly in the air. Unfortunately for him, it looked like Lockheed hadn’t thought to incorporate a Bubblehead Charm into the shield.

Just as his watch ticked past twelve thousand feet, the Auror lost consciousness and fell from his broom. With a curse, Harry stopped and wheeled around to chase after him. He wanted to test his broom, not get an Auror killed. Diving down, he rapidly caught up to the man. Before he could reach out to grab him, the man’s body twisted and warped into nothingness.

Harry blinked in surprise before quickly realizing that he must have been wearing a protective talisman. Before he could contemplate the man’s safety further, another Stunning Hex flew over his head. In his dive, he’d gone low enough for the other Auror to catch up to him, and he’d brought five of his friends.

Deciding that it was time to leave, Harry turned East and pushed his broom to accelerate. The Aurors kept up for about a minute before he began to out-strip them. By the time he hit Mach three, they were nothing but specks in the distance. As he continued East, more riders rose to meet him. While his broom was more than fast enough to outrun them, he didn't want to get caught like that MIA agent by being too predictable.

Knowing he had an absolute altitude advantage, he climbed to thirty thousand feet to be safe and continued flying, pushing his broom towards Mach four. Harry reached the coast faster than he expected and smiled when he spotted a roiling grey cloud with flashes of lightning in the distance.

"Perfect," he said, smiling to himself.

Flying inside the cloud, he pulled straight up and stepped off his broom, holding it to the side with one hand. His momentum carried him up past forty-five thousand feet, giving him a glimpse of the top of the fluffy grey cloud and the calm, starlit sky above before he fell back down into the growing tempest.

After several seconds, Harry heard a warbling cry and turned over to face the ground as he smiled. A large, grey, shadowy figure dove under him before pulling up to meet his falling body. He landed lightly on Levina's back as she leveled out, a flash of lightning lighting her up for just a moment.

"Woo!" Harry whooped. "Nice catch! Let's go home, girl!"

With a thrill, Levina banked to the side and headed back to Salem.

~

"I'm sorry, sir," a young, bespeckled wizard said, looking up from the screen in front of him. "He's gone."

“What do you mean he’s gone?” a man in his late fifties asked, his forehead wrinkled in consternation.

“We lost him in the storm,” the young man replied. “There’s nothing on radar or the magic detector. I think the weather might be interfering with the signal. Aurors are on the way to investigate.”

“Alert me the moment they find anything,” the older man said, straightening up and smoothing out his suit. “I need to go brief the president.”

“Yes, sir,” the young man replied.

~

When the storm reached Salem, Harry gave Levina an affectionate pat on the neck and rolled off of her back. Falling through the air, he mounted his broom but didn’t actually begin flying until he was dangerously close to the ground. He flew straight back to the school and opened the common room window with a flick of his wand. No one was there to see as he landed almost silently and pulled off his balaclava. Grinning to himself, he crept up the stairs, put away his broom, and changed into his pajamas before crawling into bed.

The missed sleep he would suffer the next day was well worth the night he’d had. Maybe next time, the MIA wouldn’t be so quick to risk invading someone else’s airspace now that they knew someone could do it to them, too.

The next morning, Harry groggily made his way down to breakfast.

“Rough night?” Dora asked as he took the seat next to her.

"I got engrossed in my new dueling book," he muttered as an excuse. "I think I got three hours of sleep, maybe."

"At least you were studying for once," Michelle said, taking a bite of her toast.

"I study," Harry said defensively. "I just skip over the boring stuff."

Michelle shook her head and opened a book on Transfigurations, Harry's worst subject. He was sure she did it on purpose to tease him.

"Mr. Potter."

Turning, he found Professor Wilkinson standing behind him.

"Good morning, professor," Harry smiled.

"Good morning," the professor smiled. "I'm sorry to pull you away from your breakfast, but the Headmistress has asked to see you."

"Me?" Harry asked, desperately trying to hide his nervousness. "Do you know why?"

"Someone from the government wants to talk to you," Professor Wilkinson answered.

Nodding, Harry got to his feet, reminding himself that there was no way they could know it had been him on that broom for sure. The fact that they were asking to see him and not placing him

in cuffs was a pretty good indicator of that. He followed Professor Wilkinson through the school to Professor Turner's office.

As they entered, Harry found a witch and wizard waiting for him with the Headmistress. One was a severe-looking man with short, cropped hair that was greying around the temples. He wore Auror robes, had steel grey eyes, and a shrewd gaze. The woman was in her thirties with blonde hair and a substantial bust. Looking to be in her early thirties, she was quite pretty, and the crest on the breast of her robes marked her as a member of the Magical Congress.

"Good morning, Harry," Professor Turner smiled. "Thank you for coming. This is Mark Majors of the MIA and Congresswoman Natalie Powers. They wanted to talk to you about that broom of yours."

"Sure," Harry said, hiding his nervousness as he took a seat.

"Hello, Harry," Natalie said with a pretty smile. "First of all, I just want to congratulate you for making such an impressive broom at such a young age. It's really quite the accomplishment."

"Thanks," Harry said, though he felt like he was being talked down to.

"I'm sure you've heard about that incident we had with Russia last year," Natalie continued, crossing her legs and folding her hands in her lap. "Since one of our MIA agents was captured, Lockheed has been hard at work trying to improve the design you gave them. Unfortunately, they haven't had much luck. This morning, the president offered a one hundred thousand Galleon reward to any broom company that could make something better. As I'm sure you can understand, we want to continue to keep our agents safe. Normally, we wouldn't make this offer to a private citizen, but since you created the broom in the first place, I was able to convince the Secretary of State to let us make the same offer to you."

"A hundred grand to make a broom better than the one I made last year?" Harry asked incredulously.

“It would have to be better than the X-87,” Mark replied, meeting his gaze firmly. “This is no joke. We need a broom that can reach a minimum speed of Mach four and an altitude of thirty-five thousand feet.”

Harry rubbed his hand over his mouth to stop himself from grinning. They weren't here because they thought that broom rider from the night before was him. They thought Russia had reverse-engineered the broom they'd captured and made it better. Now, they were coming to him to essentially beat himself; they just didn't know it.

It was a good thing he hadn't pushed his new broom to the limit. He was more than capable of giving them a broom that could do what they wanted, and that still wouldn't beat his own. Better yet, they would fund research he'd already done on his own.

Somehow, Harry had unintentionally started an arms race for a broom that the US would be too scared to use again and that he'd already designed. If the government did try something stupid again, he'd just have to give them another scare. And, maybe next time, he wouldn't be so quick to fix their problem. He wasn't above using this opportunity to punish them for misusing his design in the first place, but he wasn't going to give them anything too good. He didn't trust them enough for that. Still, if he could use that money for his own private research...

“I think I could do that,” he said, working to keep a straight face.

Dora was going to freak out when he told her about this.

~

Harry and Dora sat in the Great Hall with their friends, talking about their plans for Christmas break. While the professors put up decorations in the background, Jenna and Michelle joined them. The two had become quite close friends over the past few months. As Harry greeted the

girls, Plato circled overhead and landed lightly on Dora's shoulder. A moment later, another owl landed in front of Jenna.

Dora gave Plato a treat before ripping open the letter. She skimmed it quickly before letting out a snort.

"What?" Harry asked.

"Well, Mom definitely thinks you're up to no good," Dora smirked. "She told me to keep an eye on you."

Amanda scoffed, "Keep an eye on him? You usually encourage him."

"Not always," Dora said, giving Harry a pointed look.

She'd been quite mad at him for a few days after he'd told her about his little nighttime game of cat and mouse with MIA Aurors. She'd gotten over it quickly, though, and shared a hearty laugh with him afterward when he finally got to tell her what happened in Professor Turner's office.

"Oh!" Dora exclaimed, a smirk twisting her lips. "And Sirius would like to know if either of us has a problem with Jenna and Marlene staying with us for Christmas."

"Really?" Harry asked, grabbing the letter. "There's no way they're not dating."

"I know, right?" Dora asked, then turned to Jenna and looked at her questioningly.

“My Mom asked the same thing,” Jenna said, handing her the letter she’d received.

“Oh yeah, they are definitely dating,” Dora said with a grin as she read it. “We need to come up with a way to mess with them.”

“Why?” Jenna asked.

“Because it’s fun,” Harry shrugged.

“And to punish them for not just telling us they’re dating,” Dora said. “I bet they’re waiting until we get home for break to tell us.”

“They probably didn’t want to tell you in a letter, so you had less time to think of a prank,” Amanda pointed out.

“Semantics,” Dora said, waving away the perfectly valid point.

“That’s not-” Michelle cut herself off when she noticed Dora’s smirk and pinched the bridge of her nose with a sigh.

~

A couple of weeks later, Harry, Dora, and Jenna stepped off of the Ilvermorny Express and onto the Union Station platform. While Harry gathered the trunks, the girls greeted their parents.

“How was school?” Marlene asked, hugging her daughter tightly.

"It was great!" Jenna smiled. "Harry showed me all around the school, told me about the classes and professors, and helped me make a few friends."

"That's wonderful," Marlene said, smiling softly.

As Harry approached with the cart loaded with all three trunks, he grinned at Sirius, who he noticed was standing suspiciously close to Marlene.

"Hey, kiddo," Sirius grinned, pulling him into a hug. "Stay out of trouble?"

"Define trouble," Harry grinned.

Chuckling, Sirius messed up his hair.

"Excuse me, Mr. Potter, Mr. Black?" A young man with a camera asked as he approached them cautiously. "I'm Ben Willer from Wizing Times. I'm doing a report on how you won the new broom contract. Would it be alright if I got a picture and maybe asked you a couple of questions?"

Sirius looked to Harry, who shrugged uncaringly.

"I think we can spare a couple of minutes," Sirius smiled.

"Great," Ben grinned, bobbling his camera nervously as he snatched it from around his neck.

Grinning, Sirius slung his arm over Harry's shoulders.

“Jenna said you helped her get settled at Ilvermorny,” he said softly. “Thanks for looking after her. I know it means a lot to Marlene.”

“No problem,” Harry grinned. “Jenna’s great. We really get along.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Sirius said, smiling happily.

“Smile,” Ben called, raising the camera to his eye.

“I’ve been thinking about asking her out,” Harry said.

The picture of Harry grinning while Sirius turned to him with a horrified look could be found on page six of the WIZARDING TIMES the next day, along with a small article about Harry.

~

Across the ocean, the small article was picked up and reprinted by the Daily Prophet. In a large manor, a man with greying, straw-colored hair, and pale blue eyes paused on the photo. His eyes blazed with fury as he stared at it. But he wasn’t looking at the Boy-Who-Lived. He was staring at the brunette in the background.

“Grunt!” he shouted.

With a pop, a small, emaciated, and terrified House Elf appeared next to him.

“Y-yes, Master?” he squeaked.

“Pack my things and take them to the house in America!” the man barked furiously.

“R-right away, M-master,” the elf said, bowing even as he shook fearfully.

He vanished with another pop, leaving Titius to fume silently as he stared at the picture in the paper. His chair scraped loudly across the wooden floor as he stood abruptly and hurled his teacup at the wall, where it shattered on impact.

“I’m going to kill that bitch,” he growled.

Chapter 9

Just a couple of days before the kids were set to return to school, Marlene and Jenna Floored home to pick up a few things they needed. While they were gone, Sirius, Andi, and Ted called Harry and Dora into the kitchen.

“What is this?” Dora asked. “Some kind of intervention. Harry hasn’t started huffing broom polish, has he?”

Harry rolled his eyes and poked her in the side as they took seats at the table.

“No, nothing like that,” Sirius said, looking uncharacteristically, well, serious. “I want to know what you two think about Marlene and Jenna moving in with us.”

Harry and Dora turned to look at each other and blinked.

“Five Galleons says she’s pregnant,” Harry said.

"You're on," Dora agreed, shaking his hand.

Ted covered his mouth and snorted while Sirius sputtered.

"She's not pregnant!" he exclaimed.

"She's not," Andi agreed. "I checked."

"Damn," Harry muttered.

Pulling five Galleons out of his pocket, he handed them to a smirking Dora.

"Can you two take this seriously for one minute?" Sirius asked exasperatedly.

Harry and Dora turned to look at each other and grinned.

"No," they replied in unison.

Sirius threw his hands in the air frustratedly while Ted and Andi laughed.

"You know this is your own fault, don't you?" Andi asked with a smirk.

Groaning, Sirius dropped his head onto the table with a dull *thud*.

"I know," he muttered pitifully.

"I take it by your lack of protest that neither of you mind Marlene or Jenna moving in with us?" Ted asked.

"Course not," Dora said.

"Not at all," Harry grinned.

~

The rest of the school year passed quietly, for the most part. Dora panicked slightly with her LAMPS coming up at the end of the year, but with help from her friends and Harry, she was more than prepared by the time they came around.

After heading home for the Summer, Harry and Dora started training in earnest for the upcoming U-21 International Dueling Tournament. Surprisingly, it was being held in the same place as it had been the year before.

"America gives the Tournament the most funding, so they get to choose the location," Andi explained when Harry asked curiously. "It's been held here since the nineteen-fifties. It doesn't get nearly as much international support as the World Dueling Tournament."

"It really is a shame," Ted added. "You'd think with how big the World Dueling Tournament is, there'd be more interest in up-and-coming talent."

Getting in line to sign up for the Tournament, Harry smirked when he watched Sirius' eye follow a stunning blonde who looked to be there with her equally stunning daughter. Rolling her eyes, Marlene elbowed him in the ribs.

"What!?" he hissed. "They're Veela! I can't help it!"

“I don’t mind you looking, but the drooling is a bit much,” Marlene smirked.

Harry and Dora laughed as Sirius raised his hand to his mouth. When he didn’t find any drool, he huffed good-naturedly and crossed his arms. When the people in front of them moved out of the way, Harry and Dora moved up to sign in.

“Sirius, look! There’s Filius!” Marlene said excitedly.

Harry looked over and spotted the diminutive man talking to Professor Wilkinson near the entrance to the dueling tent. As a group, they walked over and greeted the two men happily.

“Hello everyone, it’s lovely to see you again,” Flitwick said happily.

As Marlene bent over to hug him, Harry unashamedly gazed at her bum. Scowling, Sirius smacked his arm lightly.

“What?” Harry asked, shrugging his shoulders defensively.

“Will you stop checking out my girlfriend?” Sirius asked.

“It’s not my fault you bagged a hot one,” Harry said.

“Oh, stop it,” Marlene said, wrapping her arm around his waist. “If you’re allowed to look, then so is Harry.”

“I feel like I’ve just taken a Time-Turner back to the seventies,” Flitwick chuckled. “I remember you and James having many a similar argument at Hogwarts.”

“Oh no, James had nothing on Harry,” Marlene smiled. “James caused trouble. Harry causes international incidents.”

“That was only once,” Harry said defensively.

“I’d love to hear that story,” Flitwick grinned. “The Potters are known for being quite the handful. Minerva has told me some quite thrilling tales about your grandfather. Tell me, Boris, how do you deal with it?”

“I just try to direct his energy into something productive,” Professor Wilkinson smiled. “It’s certainly a challenge at times.”

“Oh, have we got some stories to tell you,” Sirius grinned.

Harry sighed, knowing it was pointless to try and stop his Godfather. He’d spent far too long teasing him about Marlene to gain any leniency. Rather than stick around to listen to them laugh at his expense, Harry took Dora and Jenna to explore the fair. For a couple of hours, they went on rides, played games, and even managed to win a few prizes. He found he was quite good at a game where you had to banish small, red rubber rings onto a wooden dowel a few feet away.

Dora and Jenna were both clutching stuffed Hippogriffs by the time they left for the safety briefing. Afterward, they met the adults in the stands to watch the first matches get underway. Harry’s first match was the third of the day and pitted him against an Armenian witch with an affinity for the Bludgeoning Hex. After bocking it just a couple of times, his arm began to ache. Fortunately, he was able to end the match quickly after that. His ability to cast silently still offered him an insurmountable advantage.

“You won’t always be able to beat your opponents so easily,” Professor Wilkinson warned when he rejoined them in the stands. “I wish I’d been able to come last year. I’d have asked them to move you up to the under-eighteen bracket if I knew it was this easy for you.”

“Why didn’t you come last year?” Andi asked curiously.

“My sister was ill,” Professor Wilkinson replied before turning back to Harry. “Next year, we need to focus on technique and expanding your spell knowledge. It won’t matter if you can cast silently if your opponent uses a spell you’re unfamiliar with.”

“Very true,” Flitwick nodded. “I once dueled an Egyptian wizard in the semi-finals that nearly beat me because he used an obscure spell. It was only my intensive study of Charms that allowed me to deduce what the spell did and figure out a way to counter it.”

Dora left a few moments later to get ready for her first match. Her opponent was a German wizard who had placed well the year before but whom she hadn’t faced. It was clear from the outset that he outclassed her right from the beginning. Dora was forced to dodge, dive, and shield furiously just to stay in the match.

“Oh no,” Andi sighed. “She’s going to be so disappointed if she loses her first match.”

“It’s not over yet,” Flitwick smiled. “Look, he’s starting to tire.”

Harry watched closely as the German wizard slowed his intense pace, sweat dripping from his brow as he panted for air.

“He got too overconfident,” Flitwick pointed out. “He thought he could finish her quickly and used up too much of his energy. A rookie mistake, but one every duelist makes in their career.”

The German wizard continued to slow, his movements becoming gradually more sluggish, giving Dora a chance to fight back. While she was physically tired, her magic was as strong as ever. When she let out a barrage of Hexes and Curses, the German barely had the strength left to raise a shield. It took three spells before finally failing. Dora’s follow-up spells plowed through, leaving him tied up, tongue-tied, and petrified before he even hit the ground.

Grinning, Harry jumped to his feet and cheered, competing with Sirius to see who could be the loudest. Dora was ecstatic to have won, jumping up and down with a grin as her hand was raised.

"That was amazing," Harry said, hugging her tightly when she joined them in the stands.

"I can't believe I won," Dora grinned. "He came in third last year, and I didn't even make the top eight."

"Wonderfully done, Ms. Tonks," Flitwick smiled. "Never underestimate sheer determination. Even when facing a superior opponent, victory is always attainable if you want it bad enough."

"I might just have two champions this year," Professor Wilkinson grinned.

"Don't get used to it," Flitwick chuckled. "I may have a student of my own entering next year."

"Really?" Marlene asked. "Who?"

"Ah, that, my dear, will have to be a surprise," he smiled.

Harry and Dora had two more matches, both of which they won before the Tournament broke for lunch. As they ate, the Veela mother and daughter walked past, once again distracting Sirius.

"I see you've taken an interest in the French competition," Flitwick joked.

"More like the French opponent's mother," Marlene smiled, shaking her head.

"Do you know them?" Andi asked.

“Only in passing,” Flitwick replied. “Fleur Delacour is one of Beauxbatons’ most promising students.”

“Delacour?” Sirius asked. “I feel like I’ve heard that name before.”

Harry smirked and opened his mouth to speak, only to receive a kick in the shin from his Godfather. Dora snickered as he grunted and rubbed his leg under the table.

“Her parents, Apolline and Martin Delacour own one of the largest wineries in the Magical world,” Flitwick told him. “I’m afraid I don’t know much about her dueling outside of what we’ve seen today. I believe this is her first year competing.”

“She wasn’t here last year,” Dora said. “Sirius would’ve definitely noticed if she was.”

“Hey!” Sirius protested.

Smiling, Marlene patted his arm consolingly.

“If you’re done making fun of Sirius, we should get back to the Tournament,” Andi said, standing up.

“I need to go to the bathroom first,” Marlene said.

“Me too,” Harry added.

“We’ll meet you back in the tent,” Sirius said, kissing Marlene’s cheek.

Harry and Marlene stood and made their way down a small dirt path. At the end sat two large tents that housed the bathrooms. As Harry turned to go into the Men’s room, he glanced over

and noticed two men approaching Marlene from behind. They met her between the two tents, and he caught a flash of red before he saw her body go limp. Harry's adrenaline started to race as he drew his wand.

"Hey!" he shouted, chasing after them.

The men ignored him, continuing to drag Marlene between the tents and out of view. Harry pushed his way through the crowd, bumping into a man as he rounded the corner. He never saw the man raise his wand before his world went black.

~

"Harry," a voice hissed.

Someone was shaking him awake. Groggily, Harry blinked his eyes open and rolled over onto his back. He was in a small, dark basement with only a tiny window letting in light. Bars like a prison cell surrounded him, causing a moment of panic. Sitting up, he looked at Marlene's pale, worried face as he remembered what had led up to him being there.

"What happened?" he asked, getting to his feet. "Where are we?"

"I don't know," Marlene said, rubbing her arms. "I just woke up. The last thing I remember is going to the bathroom. Someone grabbed my arm, and then I woke up here."

"Yeah," Harry said, nodding his head. "Two men came up behind you and stunned you. I tried to stop them, but I guess there was more. I never even saw who stunned me."

Suddenly, a door opened, and they heard footsteps coming down the stairs. A moment later, a dark-haired, bearded man reached the bottom and smiled at them with yellowed, crooked teeth.

“Ah, you’re awake,” he said.

Harry immediately took note of the man’s British accent.

“What do you want?” Marlene asked.

“Nothin’ you can give me,” the man said.

Reaching up to a shelf along the wall, he pulled down a silver goblet. Harry’s heart leapt when he noticed his and Marlene’s wand sitting next to it. With a flick of his wand, he filled the goblet with water and handed it to Marlene.

“I don’t know what you did to piss off Nott, but he’s payin’ us a lot of gold to bring you to him,” the man chuckled.

“Nott?” Marlene gasped, her eyes going wide and her face losing what little color it had.

“Whatever he’s paying you, I’ll double it if you let us go,” Harry offered.

The man chuckled and shook his head.

“It’s more than my life’s worth to let you go,” he said. “Besides, Nott’s going to have to double his price once he finds out we have the girl *and* the Boy-Who-Lived. Just sit tight. You two aren’t going anywhere.”

“Wait!” Harry yelled as the man turned back towards the stairs and walked away. “A hundred thousand Galleons!”

The man paused halfway up the stairs and turned to him with a thoughtful look.

“Tempting,” he said, cocking his head. “But still not worth it.”

Harry’s heart sank as the man continued up the stairs and closed the door. The lock sounded abnormally loud as it clicked into place.

“I can’t believe he found me,” Marlene muttered, sinking to the floor. “I’m so sorry, Harry.”

“We can still get out of this,” Harry said, his desperation building. “Our wands are right there on that shelf.”

“How do we reach them?” Marlene asked dejectedly.

Harry didn’t reply. Licking his lips, he reached his arm through the bars as far as he could and focused with all his might on calling his wand to him. After watching Dora duel that witch last year that didn’t use a wand, he’d taken to reading up on the subject in his spare time. He knew the theory behind it, but he’d yet to actually try it himself.

Panic welled up inside of him as the seconds ticked by, and nothing happened. Nott was going to kill him. Kill them both. And there was nothing he could do about it.

Harry slammed his fist painfully into one of the bars and closed his eyes. He knew he had to calm down and focus if he was going to get out of there. Taking two calming breaths, he rubbed his fingertips together and opened his eyes. He focused solely on his wand, the need to have it in his hand becoming an all-consuming thought.

“Come on,” he whispered. “Come on.”

The wand twitched. Another spike of adrenaline surged through Harry’s system at the sight of his success. Focusing again, the wand twitched twice more before it rolled towards him and fell off of the shelf, landing on the cement floor a few feet away with a clatter.

Marlene gasped and looked to the stairs worriedly. Harry ignored his own fears and dropped to his knees as he continued to call the wand towards him. It trembled again and rolled across the floor as he reached out for it desperately.

Finally, he felt the wood touch his fingers, and he snatched it up off the floor, yanking it through the bars.

“You did it!” Marlene gasped quietly. “Can you unlock the door?”

Taking a deep breath to calm his racing heart, Harry nodded and aimed his wand at the lock.

“Alohomora,” he said.

The lock clicked open, and Marlene rushed forward to push open the door. The hinges squeaked loudly, causing both of them to freeze. They listened for the sound of running feet, but when none came, Marlene slipped through the gap and grabbed her wand from the shelf. Harry stepped outside of the cell and paused next to the stairs.

Slowly and carefully, he followed Marlene up to the top of the stairs, where they stopped and listened.

“You’re sure it’s him?” A deep male voice asked.

“Positive,” another man replied. “If you want both, it’s going to cost you triple.”

“Don’t be absurd. The boy’s not worth that much to me,” the first man replied. “I’ll give you an extra ten thousand.”

“For the Boy-Who-Lived?” a third voice scoffed.

Marlene backed away from the door and motioned for Harry to follow her as she crept back down the stairs.

“That’s Nott,” she said, pacing around as she fidgeted with her wand. “We either need to find another way out of here or try to ambush them as they come down the stairs.”

Looking back at Marlene, his eyes trailed over the other things in the basement. He’d been so focused on his wand that he hadn’t noticed until then that all of the potion ingredients were sitting on the shelf.

One of them, a pearly white powder, stuck out to him because of what he’d read about it in class.

Powdered Erumpent horn: Warning, extremely explosive. Handle with care.

“Check that window,” Harry said, pointing behind her.

As she turned around, he took the bottle and cupped it in his hand. The window was high and small but looked big enough for them to squeeze through. Opened the window with her wand, Marlene looked outside.

“Can you give me a boost, and I’ll levitate you from the other side?” she asked.

“Sure,” Harry said.

Pocketing the Powdered Erumpent Horn, he stepped up beside her and bent down with his hands cupped. When she stepped on his palms, Harry lifted her up to the window and kept pushing as she crawled outside. While she squirmed to fit her curvy figure through the small gap, he stepped back and walked over to one of the beams supporting the floor above.

Harry took the Powdered Erumpent Horn out of his pocket and stuck it to the beam. Mentally, he thanked Sirius for teaching him pranking spells as he set a Delayed Explosive Charm on the glass bottle. It was a Charm designed to make a small bang to surprise or distract. In this case, Harry had a much bigger surprise in store for the people who tried to kidnap them.

“Harry!” Marlene hissed. “Come on! What are you doing?”

Stowing his wand in his pocket, Harry turned to the window. With a running leap, he grabbed the edge of the windowsill and pulled himself up. Marlene grabbed his wrists and pulled, hauling him through until they both spilled onto the grass.

“Let’s go,” Marlene whispered.

Harry followed her as they walked towards a road visible a short distance away. They were in a fairly rural area, but the yard was well maintained, and there were very few trees to use as cover.

“They’re gone!” someone shouted from the house.

“Run!” Marlene said urgently.

She took off at a sprint, and Harry kept pace right behind her. Looking over his shoulder, he spotted one of the men from the Tournament wrenching the back door open. Harry skidded to a stop and grinned as he aimed his wand toward the house.

“Harry!” Marlene yelled, realizing he wasn’t behind her.

“Defodio!” he yelled.

The explosion was bigger than Harry was expecting. All of the windows shattered, the frame rattled, and the first floor heaved upwards before collapsing into the basement. The man in the doorway stumbled backward and disappeared out of sight. Marlene and Harry watched, stunned, as the house creaked and groaned a moment before it collapsed.

“Holy shit,” Harry laughed.

“Come on, we need to go,” Marlene said, grabbing his wrist.

Together, they took off running for the road. When he heard wood cracking behind him, Harry slowed and turned around, a smile still on his face. The breath was knocked out of his lungs as a spell hit him in the stomach and threw him onto his back. Sucking in a breath, the first thing he noticed was a worrying lack of pain. The second was the blood soaking through his shirt near his belly button.

Lifting his head, he saw a man with straw-colored hair marching toward him. His robes were torn and covered in white dust. With a scowl, his eyes gleaming maliciously, he strode across the lawn.

“Harry!” Marlene screamed.

She tried to run back to him, but in the few extra steps she’d taken, she had ended up outside the wards.

“No!” she yelled, trying to force her way through. “Nott, don’t you touch him! Take me! You can have me. Just let Harry go!”

Nott sneered at her. Raising his wand, Harry unleashed every curse and hex he could think of, but they were batted away like they were nothing.

“Crucio!” he shouted.

Harry screamed as the worst pain he'd ever experienced exploded through his body. Every inch of his skin felt like it was being stabbed over and over again by a thousand razor-sharp knives. It seemed to last hours before the curse was suddenly lifted. Harry barely had a moment to feel relief before his wand was ripped from his hand. Faintly, he could hear Marlene still screaming his name.

"Potter," Nott growled, standing over him. "I'm going to enjoy killing you."

Through his trembling from the curse and the fear surging through him, Harry spit on his robes.

"Go fuck yourself," he panted.

"Just for that, I'm going to make that bitch scream before she dies," Nott snarled.

Raising his wand, he aimed it at Harry's heart.

"Avada Kedav-"

His incantation was interrupted by the sound of the Wards shattering. A black blur slammed into Nott's chest and knocked him away so fast it looked like he'd vanished. Hearing a crash near the house, Harry lifted his head. Nott was pinned to a section of broken roof by a broom that protruded from his chest. Eyes wide and fearful, he gurgled as a thin line of blood leaked from the corner of his mouth. With a rattling gasp, he collapsed forward.

"Sirius!" Marlene shouted.

Harry tilted his head back and saw Sirius and Frank sprinting from the road.

"Marlene, are you alright?" Sirius asked worriedly.

"I'm fine, but Harry's hurt," she said, urging him to keep going.

"Don't worry, Healers are on the way," Sirius said, jogging over to Harry. "Frank, can you clear that house."

"There's two or three more inside," Harry said, leaning back to stare up at the sky as his godfather knelt next to him.

"Merlin," Sirius breathed as he looked him over. "I'm sorry, this is going to hurt, but I need to slow that bleeding."

Waving his wand, he conjured white bandages that wrapped around Harry's stomach.

"It doesn't hurt," Harry said, blinking back tears. "Sirius, I can't feel my legs."

Sirius froze, and Marlene gasped as she knelt down next to him and took his hand in hers.

"This is Agent Black. I need those fucking Healers now!" he barked into the badge on his lapel.

"It's okay, Harry," Marlene said, stroking his hair softly. "I'm sure they'll be able to patch you up."

Closing his eyes, Harry squeezed her hand as a tear slid down his cheek.

Sirius' leg bounced anxiously as he sat in a chair in the hallway, watching as Healers rushed in and out of Harry's room. They'd yet to hear word of how he was doing, and the wait was killing him. Next to him, Marlene clutched his hand tightly, tear streaks marring her pale cheeks.

When the elevator opened a short distance down the hall, his hand instinctively reached for his wand, but he relaxed when he recognized familiar faces. Dora stumbled in her rush to get out, her short, mousy brown hair whipping around her face as she looked up and down the hall. Spotting Sirius, she led her parents over to him. Jenna broke away from the group at a dead sprint the moment she spotted her mother and collapsed into her arms.

"I'm fine, sweetheart," Marlene whispered as her daughter cried. "I'm all right."

"Where's Harry?" Dora asked worriedly.

"The Healers are still treating him," Sirius said. "He'll live, but... It looked like Nott's spell hit his spine."

Dora covered her mouth, her eyes tearing up before she turned and buried her face in Andi's shoulder.

"Harry's tough," Ted said, rubbing her back. "He'll pull through just fine. You'll see."

"I'm so sorry," Marlene said, tears starting to fall from her eyes as she clutched Jenna like a lifeline. "This is all my fault."

"No, it's not," Sirius told her firmly. "It's--"

"Mr. Black?"

Sirius stopped mid-sentence and turned sharply. A tall, thin Healer with short, grey hair looked down at him with a clipboard in his hands. The man had a sharp, prominent jaw and a pair of square glasses covering his bright blue eyes.

“Yes,” Sirius said.

“I’m Healer Powell. I’ll be treating Harry,” he replied in a calm, soothing tone.

“How is he?” Sirius asked anxiously while getting to his feet.

“He’s in rough shape,” Healer Powell admitted. “The Piercing Hex lacerated his large intestine, but the bigger issue is that it shattered two of his vertebrae. I’m afraid there was no chance of healing them, so we’ve had to vanish the bones entirely. He’ll be in for a long night while they regrow.”

“What about his legs?” Sirius asked with a touch of impatience and hope in his voice. “Will he be able to walk after you have regrown the bones?”

“Unfortunately, that’s a little less certain,” Healer Powell replied. “The majority of people who undergo this kind of procedure do regain the ability to walk after a year or two. However, about a quarter of patients can take far longer to recover, and a small percentage never regain full use of their legs. I’m sorry, but it all depends on how he responds to the treatment.”

“Can we see him?” Dora asked.

“Of course,” the Healer said, stepping aside so she could rush into the room before turning back to Sirius. “We’ll do the best we can. If you have any more questions, just ask the nurse to call for me.”

“Thank you,” Sirius nodded.

Healer Powell walked past them down the hall while Sirius and the others made their way into the room. Harry lay on the bed staring up at the ceiling, his face abnormally serious. Dora had taken the chair next to his bed and watched him worriedly, clutching his hand in both of hers.

“Harry?” Sirius called.

Blinking, he turned his head and perked up.

“Sirius! It’s about time,” Harry said, lifting his head and staring at him with a penetrating gaze. “How did he find us?”

Sirius was disconcerted by the question and his Godson’s unusual behavior. Licking his lips, he plastered a smile on his face.

“Don’t worry about that right now. Just focus on-”

“Sirius,” Harry interrupted firmly, almost angrily. “How?”

Taking a look at the young man, he held his unwavering gaze for a long moment before sighing and reaching into his pocket.

“We found this near the bathrooms,” he said, handing it to Harry.

Holding the newspaper clipping in his hand, Harry stared at the picture of himself and Sirius that had been taken at Union Station. In the background, Marlene could be seen over Harry's shoulder, smiling and hugging Jenna.

"Damn it," Harry muttered, dropping his head back onto the pillow.

"I had a pretty good idea what happened when we found this, so I used our trackers to look for any signs of magic from you," Sirius explained. "Thank Merlin for Underage Tracking Charms."

"Harry?" Marlene called softly. "I'm so, so sorry."

"What? Why?" Harry asked sharply, his brow furrowed. "This isn't your fault."

"But he was after me," Marlene said miserably.

"They were after me, too. They just didn't know I'd be there," Harry told her.

"How did you two escape, anyway?" Sirius asked, hoping to change the subject.

"That was Harry," Marlene said, smiling at him softly. "He was brilliant. He used Wandless magic to summon his wand and unlock the cell they were holding us in. I grabbed my wand, and we crawled out of the window."

"When did you learn Wandless magic?" Andi asked, taking a seat next to her daughter.

"I started reading up on it after Dora dueled that Nigerian witch last year," Harry replied, his eyes focused back on the ceiling. "I need to get better at it, though. It barely worked."

“But you escaped,” Ted smiled. “That’s the important thing.”

Harry shrugged, his brow furrowed thoughtfully.

“And how did the house end up destroyed?” Sirius asked.

He noticed that even Marlene looked at Harry expectantly at that question.

“I saw some Powdered Erumpent Horn on a shelf,” he told them. “I thought it would make a good distraction if they found us missing. I stuck it to one of the support beams and set a ”

“I’d say it worked,” Sirius smirked. “You practically leveled the place.”

“Not well enough,” Harry grumbled. “Nott survived. He dueled me like I was a first-year. Just slapped everything I cast aside like it was nothing and hit me with a spell I didn’t even know how to stop.”

Growling angrily, he slammed his fist on the bed and then winced in pain from the sudden movement.

“Harry, you can’t expect to take on a fully qualified wizard, let alone a Death Eater like Nott at your age,” Andi said, trying to soothe his anger. “You’re still young.”

“I don’t care!” Harry yelled. “I’m not going to let those fuckers hurt me or my family ever again!”

Andi was taken aback by the sudden shouting. Despite his attitude towards authority, Harry had never raised his voice to her before. It was a relief for Sirius to finally understand what was bothering him so much. He knew Harry was feeling the same fear, anger, and frustration he had during the war.

“Excuse me.”

They all turned to the young, pretty brunette nurse in the doorway.

“I’m Harry’s nurse, Natalie. It’s time for his potion,” she said, holding up a bottle of Skele-grow.

With a flick of her wand, she raised Harry’s bed so that he was sitting up and moved to stand next to him. Pouring a measured portion into a goblet, she passed it to him with a smile.

“Once you take this, you’ll have to remain flat on your back and stay as still as possible,” Natalie warned him. “The bones won’t grow right if you move around too much.”

Sighing, Harry nodded and took a mouthful of the potion. With a grimace, he swallowed hard and shivered.

“Urgh, this tastes like Yeti piss,” he said.

“Harry!” Andi exclaimed scoldingly.

“Oh, it’s fine,” Natalie smiled. “I’ve heard a lot worse.”

Downing the rest of the potion as fast as he could, Harry laid back. The nurse reclined the bed back into a flat position and covered him with the blanket.

“I’ll come back in a couple of hours with your Pain Relief and Sleep Potions,” she told him.

“When can I get out of here?” Harry asked.

“The Healer will let you know once your bones are grown back,” Natalie replied.

Sighing, Harry laid back and stared at the ceiling.

~

The next morning, Healer Powell waved his wand over Harry while everyone waited anxiously.

“Well, everything looks good,” he proclaimed. “The bones regrew nicely, and the nerves look good.”

“Does that mean I can go?” Harry asked hopefully.

Healer Powell pocketed his wand and smiled.

“Yes, you can go,” he chuckled. “I’m going to send you home with some Strengthening Potions to help your muscles heal faster. There’s also a belt you’ll need to wear. It’s enchanted to vanish any bodily waste every few hours. I’ll go sign your paperwork and have them send up a wheelchair.”

“Does he need any sort of brace to protect his back?” Andi asked.

“No,” the Healer said, shaking his head. “The worst of the damage is repaired. It’s just a matter of the nerves rebuilding the connection to the brain right now. He’ll be fine as long as he doesn’t take any more curses to the spine.”

“We certainly don’t plan on anything like this happening again,” Andi said with a stern look in Harry’s direction.

“What?” Harry asked defensively. “It’s not like I planned for it to happen the first time either.”

Dora snickered while her mother rolled her eyes. Healer Powell smiled and made a note on his clipboard.

“Any other questions?” he asked.

When no one had any, he turned and left the room. While they waited for his discharge, Andi magicked him into a fresh set of clothes.

“That was a Switching Spell, right?” Harry asked, to which Andi nodded. “I’ll have to learn that soon.”

“I’ll teach you when we get home,” she smiled.

A few minutes later, Natalie returned, pushing a wheelchair into the room. Parking it next to the bed, she set the brakes. Sirius made to help him, but Harry waved him off. Scooting to the edge of the bed, he heaved himself into the seat using the arms of the chair for support. His legs fell uselessly from the bed and dangled until he situated them properly.

“You’re a pro at this already,” Natalie said.

Flashing him a pretty smile, she turned around and handed the discharge paperwork to Sirius for him to sign. Harry was at the perfect height to check out Natalie’s round bum in her crisp white uniform.

“Maybe this isn’t so bad after all,” he muttered with a smile.

“Perv,” Dora muttered back, smacking his arm lightly.

Harry turned to her, grinning and wiggling his eyebrows until she giggled at his antics. Once the paperwork was signed, she wheeled him out of the room as they followed Sirius toward the elevator.

“Time to head home,” Sirius sighed while pushing the button.

“Home?” Harry asked. “What about the tournament? If we get there soon, we can still catch the finals.”

“Aren’t you tired?” Andi asked.

“I’m fine,” Harry replied. “Besides, if I get tired, I’m sure I can find someplace to sit. Oh, look!”

Dora snorted as he gestured to his wheelchair. Andi gave him an unimpressed look, but her lips twitched when she shook her head.

“Harry, I think Marlene would like to get home, too,” Sirius said.

“It’s alright, Sirius,” she told him with a small smile. “Why don’t you go with Harry? I’ll take Jenna home. We’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure?” Sirius asked, his brow furrowed worriedly.

Nodding, Marlene whispered to him too softly for anyone else to hear. With a smile, Sirius turned and pressed a kiss to her lips.

“Alright,” he said. “Looks like we’re going back to the tournament.”

~

Harry received a round of applause when Dora wheeled him into the stands of the arena. Smiling and waving to the crowd, they got settled just as the final rounds were announced.

“Harry!” Professor Wilkinson yelled, squeezing his way through the stands to sit next to them. “I didn’t expect to see you back so soon. How are you?”

“I’m alright, but it looks like I’ll be sitting this one out,” he joked.

Snorting, Sirius shook his head and explained, in detail, how bad his injuries were. While Professor Wilkinson frowned and stared at him worriedly, Harry watched the under-sixteen championship match get underway. Flitwick was once again officiating as his final opponent from the year before, Arturo, faced off against a Brazilian witch. The match didn’t take long, nor was it very exciting, but Arturo won in the end. Harry clapped with everyone else as the Italian wizard bowed to have the medal placed around his neck.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Professor Wilkinson said. "If you need any special arrangements at school, please let me know."

"I'll be fine," Harry said, waving off his concern.

Down in the arena, Fleur Delacour of France and Laszlo Barta of Hungary took up their positions for the under-eighteen championship match. This match was much more exciting, in Harry's opinion. While not all of the spells they cast were silent, the majority were, and he recognized the majority of them. Watching the gorgeous blonde outpace the Hungarian, he wondered how he would do against her.

"Professor?" Harry called. "What would I need to do to win in a wheelchair?"

"At dueling?" Professor Wilkinson asked, blinking in surprise at the question. "Well, you'd need to really work on your defense. With your limited movement, your shields would have to be impenetrable. We'd also need to work on your speed. By necessity, you'd have to be on the defensive more than most. That will leave you very small windows to get on the offense. It would be difficult but not impossible."

"You did say it was a bit too easy for me," Harry smirked. "Now I have a challenge."

Professor Wilkinson laughed, "That's certainly one way of looking at it."

Eventually, Fleur cornered Laszlo and disarmed him. Smiling, she accepted her medal graciously and rejoined her mother in the stands.

"I'll be right back," Harry said.

Ignoring the questions being thrown his way, he wheeled himself into the aisle and started making his way around the stands circling the arena.

“Excuse me... Pardon me... Sorry,” he said as people were forced to lift their feet or stand to avoid having their feet run over by his wheels.

As he neared Fleur and her mother, a young girl looked up at him and gasped.

“Hey, Fleur,” Harry smiled. “Congrats on your win.”

“Merci,” she replied while the little girl chattered away rapidly in French.

“Listen, would you duel me after the tournament is over?” Harry asked.

“You weesh to duel me like zis?” she asked, eyeing his wheelchair dubiously.

“Yeah,” Harry shrugged. “I gotta test out the new wheels.”

“Why not duel ze boy ‘oo just won?” Fleur asked, nodding to Arturo.

“Because I beat him last year, and I know I can beat him again,” Harry replied. “I need a challenge.”

Fleur blinked and exchanged a glance with her mother.

“Eef you are sure,” she said with a shrug.

“Great,” Harry grinned. “I’ll ask Flitwick to referee after the last match.”

When Harry started to wheel himself away, the little girl got louder and looked at her mother pleadingly.

“Monsieur,” the woman called. “Would you mind giving my daughter an autograph? She is a big fan of the ‘Arry Potter books.”

“Sure,” Harry shrugged. “She knows those are fake, though, right?”

“Oui,” she smiled while pulling the latest book out of her purse. “But she still loves zem. Does your family write zem?”

“Oh, no,” Harry chuckled. “Some woman in England does. I just collect the royalty checks. What’s your daughter’s name?”

“Gabrielle,” the woman replied.

Taking the quill she handed him, Harry wrote,

To my biggest fan, Gabrielle. Love, Harry Potter

Smiling, he handed the book to the little girl. Her mother translated his words into French, causing her to squeal excitedly. With a beaming smile, she lunged forward and hugged him, nearly falling into his lap. Harry laughed and hugged her back.

“Merci,” Gabrielle said, smiling up at him.

“You’re welcome,” Harry said before turning to Fleur. “See you after the finals?”

She gave him a warm smile and nodded. Spinning his wheelchair around, Harry made his way back to his seat.

“Excuse me... Sorry... Nice shoes,” he said as people lifted their feet out of the way again.

As he parked his seat next to Dora, Sirius looked over at him and grinned knowingly.

“I’m guessing by that smile on your face you got yourself a hot date,” he said, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Date?” Harry asked, confused. “No, I asked her for a duel. What good would a date do me? My dick doesn’t work.”

“Harry!” Andi hissed scoldingly. “And you really shouldn’t be dueling less than an hour after you got out of hospital.”

“What am I supposed to do?” Harry asked. “Sit around and feel sorry for myself?”

When she didn’t answer, he turned his attention to the match taking place in the arena. He’d missed the finalist’s names, but they were both very skilled. The match was much faster-paced than the others he’d watched so far. Not a word was said as they slung complex and powerful spells at each other with terrifying speed. Privately, he vowed to himself that he would get to

that point. He wouldn't stop until there wasn't a witch or wizard in the world that would struggle to beat him in a duel.

After a fast and furious but short duel, a Romanian witch was crowned the under-twenty-one International Dueling champion. Harry barely waited for the applause to die down before he started wheeling himself towards the stairs.

"Harry!" Sirius yelled. "Slow down."

Harry ignored him and bounced down the steps. He frowned when his wheels had trouble finding traction on the straw-covered ground, but he eventually got going.

"Hey, Flitwick!" he yelled.

"Ah, Mr. Potter," Flitwick smiled. "It's good to see you back. You had all of us quite worried yesterday. I hope this injury is only temporary."

"Me too," Harry said. "Listen, I asked Fleur if she would duel me for a bit of fun. Would you referee for us?"

"Now?" Flitwick asked incredulously, looking from him to Sirius. "Are you sure you don't want to perhaps heal up first?"

"I'm as healed as I'm going to get for now," Harry said.

"You know, just because you can do something doesn't mean you should," Sirius said.

Harry and Flitwick both turned to look at him incredulously.

“Did I really just say that?” he asked, pointing to himself.

They nodded.

“Right, well, the Healer did say he would be fine as long as he didn’t take another curse to the spine,” Sirius said.

“I see,” Flitwick said thoughtfully. “He’ll have to have any protective gear approved before the next tournament, but since this is just an exhibition match, I can cast a localized Protective Charm.”

“Okay,” Sirius nodded. “Are you sure you want to do this, Harry?”

“I’m sure,” Harry said firmly.

“Fine. While you do that, I’m going to get a drink,” he said, grimacing. “Just saying those words left a bad taste in my mouth.”

As Sirius walked away, Harry turned to the stands and waved Fleur down. Walking down the steps gracefully, she stopped next to them expectantly.

“Ms. Delacour,” Flitwick smiled. “I’ll be casting a localized Protective Charm around Mr. Potter’s spine to ensure he doesn’t aggravate his injury. Other than that, all standard rules apply. Is that acceptable to you?”

"Of course," Fleur nodded.

"Good, why don't you go take up your position," he smiled.

When she turned to walk away, Harry took a moment to admire her round, swaying backside.

"You know, the view from down here isn't so bad," Harry quipped.

"No comment," Flitwick muttered from behind him as he cast the Protective Charm on his back.

Harry was certain he could hear the smirk in the man's voice.

"You're all set," he said a moment later, walking halfway between him and Fleur. "Duelists ready?"

Harry and Fleur nodded, their faces turning serious.

"On my mark," Flitwick called.

There was a pause, and people who had been getting ready to leave retook their seats. After several seconds, red sparks shot from Flitwick's wand. Harry went on the offensive immediately, casting as fast as he could at Fleur. She weathered the onslaught by twirling out of the way gracefully and shielding when needed. When she came to a sudden stop, Harry's aim went wide, giving her the opportunity to return fire. He raised a shield and found himself trapped on defense.

Harry blocked and parried as fast as he could, but he could never get a break long enough to get back on the offensive. Fleur was calm and patient as she probed for weaknesses, looking for a way past his guard. He knew it was only a matter of time until she succeeded, but he couldn't think of a way to turn the tables.

Simple spells gave way to more complex Curses, Hexes, and Charms as Fleur continued to cast rapidly. Harry raised a shield and leaned sideways out of instinct when she aimed a Bludgeoning Hex at his head. The spell hit hard, and with his weight unbalanced, Harry's wheelchair tipped over. Grunting as he hit the ground, he pushed himself into a seat position and continued to defend.

He gritted his teeth in frustration and fought to keep himself upright as her spells slammed forcefully against his shields. Watching as her wand twirled through the air effortlessly, a sudden idea came to mind. When the next spell knocked him flat on his back, Harry reached out with his free hand and tried to pull her wand out of her hand.

Fleur looked down at her wand when it refused to move. Looking at Harry with an expression that was a mix of confusion and consternation, her eyes widened when he raised his wand. He tried to cast the Disarming Charm, but only a handful of red sparks fell limply from the tip. With a burst of magic, Fleur ripped her wand free of his magic grip and sent her own Disarming Charm in return. Harry tried to shield, but he was too slow getting his half-working body into position and watched helplessly as his wand shot from his grip. Tumbling end over end, it landed in the dirt halfway between the two of them.

"Stop!" Flitwick yelled. "Winner, Fleur Delacour!"

Closing his eyes, Harry collapsed on his back, panting.

"Fuck," he grumbled.

While he took a moment to catch his breath, he heard footsteps rapidly approaching. Opening his eyes, he sat up as Sirius righted his wheelchair.

"You alright?" he asked worriedly.

"I'm fine," Harry muttered unhappily. "My pride broke my fall."

Sirius snorted and helped him back into his wheelchair. When he looked up, he spotted Fleur approaching him and smiled.

"Thanks for the duel, Fleur," he said, holding out his hand. "This wheelchair is even worse for dueling than I thought."

"Eet was my pleasure," Fleur smiled, shaking his hand. "You were very impressive. I look forward to dueling you again."

"Me too," Harry said.

"If you're done, can we go home so I can check on Marlene?" Sirius asked.

"You just don't want to get caught staring at Fleur's mom again," Harry smirked.

Sirius sighed and looked at him tiredly while Fleur covered her mouth and giggled.

"We're going," Sirius said, pushing him away.

"Bye, Fleur!" Harry yelled, waving over his shoulder.

“Au revoir,” Fleur called.