

Chapter 15

Harry was woken abruptly by a loud, persistent knock on his bedroom door. With a groan, Dora buried her face in the crook of his neck and pulled the covers over her face.

“Get dressed and meet me in the kitchen,” Sirius called loudly. “I need to talk to you two.”

“It’s too early!” Dora yelled.

“It’s important!” Sirius yelled back. “You’ve got five minutes before I come back with a bucket of water!”

“I’m naked!” she barked before ripping the pillow out from under Harry’s head and using it to cover hers.

“Then I’ll send Marlene!” he shouted back.

“Harry’s naked, too!” came her muffled reply.

“I don’t care!” Sirius shouted. “Five minutes!”

“We better go see what he wants,” Harry said.

With a frustrated groan, Dora tossed the pillow to the other side of the bed, sighed, and sat up. Harry’s eyes raked over her naked body as she grumbled and got to her feet. Every time he looked at her, he noticed some subtle change in her appearance. He was positive it wasn’t conscious, and she probably didn’t even notice, but for him, it made every morning the most interesting game of ‘spot the difference’ he’d ever played.

“Quit staring at my ass and get dressed,” Dora said.

Grinning unrepentantly, Harry climbed out of bed and threw on some clothes. A couple of minutes later, they walked into the kitchen. Sirius, Marlene, Andi, and Ted sat at the kitchen table sipping coffee with serious looks on their faces. Jenna was there, too, but she looked just as out of the loop as Harry felt.

“Alright, what’s going on, Sirius?” Harry asked as he and Dora took their seats.

“I talked to Meredith this morning,” he replied. “Hogwarts has decided to host the Triwizard Tournament this year.”

“You woke me up for that?” Dora grumbled.

“Ilvermorny has been invited,” Sirius said. “The headmaster of Durmstrang is a former Death Eater who was exiled from magical Britain after the war. The Death Eaters aren’t too fond of him, either. He turned on them to save himself from Azkaban when he was caught and gave the Ministry a whole list of names. He’d be a fool to set foot back in Britain even if they let him. So, Durmstrang is out, and Ilvermorny is in.”

“The seventh years who want to go will be spending the entire year at Hogwarts,” Andi added. “Obviously, you’re an adult, and the decision is up to you, but I don’t like the idea of you going back alone. You know the problems we had getting away.”

Harry felt like a lead weight had dropped into his stomach. They’d only just started dating. If Dora were to leave for an entire year, they would likely not be together for much longer. He hated the idea of her leaving, but when she turned to look at him, all he could do was shrug. In the end, it was her decision.

“So, either I go to Hogwarts, or I spend a year with the whole seventh year dorm to myself?” Dora said. “Sounds lonely.”

Turning to Harry, she smiled and took his hand in hers.

“You think Professor Wilkinson will let you stay with me?” she asked, her eyes sparkling.

Grinning, Harry lunged forward and kissed her hard on the lips.

“You’re staying here?” Andi asked.

Breaking the kiss with a smile, Dora kept her eyes locked with Harry’s.

“I’m not going anywhere,” she replied.

“Oh, thank Merlin,” Andi burst out in relief and dropped her head onto the table.

Smiling, Ted rubbed her back gently.

“I’ll get started on breakfast,” Marlene said with a smile, getting to her feet.

~

A couple of hours later, Harry and the others were back in New York for the final duels of the tournament. They took a bit of time to explore the fair and play a few games. Eventually, they ended up at Harry’s favorite game, banishing rubber rings onto a wooden dowel. He was on the verge of winning a large stuffed and animated unicorn when a short, fat, purple bird suddenly appeared in front of him. The rubber ring bounced off its beak, causing it to squawk and tilt its head in confusion.

“The hell?” Harry asked.

“Aw, it’s so cute,” Jenna smiled.

She reached out to pet it, but just as her fingers were about to brush its feathers, the bird vanished. It reappeared a short distance away at the popcorn stand. As it filled its beak with popcorn, the woman running the stand picked up a wooden spoon and swung at it. The bird vanished before it could make contact and reappeared a few stalls down, causing a man to shout in surprise.

“Looks like the Diriclaws escaped,” Dora smirked, pointing toward the Ferris Wheel.

Harry looked up and laughed as a green Diriclaw Apparated from car to car. After a few hops, it ended up in the car the Delacours happened to be in. Before Fleur or Appoline could stop her, Gabrielle wrapped her arms around the bird and hugged it to her chest. It stayed surprisingly calm as it turned to her and chirped softly before vanishing again. Gabrielle pouted and dropped her arms sadly.

Suddenly, a group of organizers ran past, wands drawn. The Diriclaws sensed them coming and began Apparating away as fast as they could.

“I wonder how they got out,” Jenna said.

“I don’t know, but I hope they do this every year,” Harry grinned.

“As fun as this is, the tournament is going to start soon,” Dora reminded him.

“Hey, Potter!”

Harry turned back and looked at the man running the game he’d just been playing. With a smile, he grabbed the stuffed unicorn off the wall and tossed it to him.

“You would have won it anyways,” he shrugged. “Good luck in the tournament.”

“Thanks,” Harry said with a smile and a wave. “See you next year.”

Turning to Jenna, he handed her the unicorn. She tucked it under one arm and then hugged him tightly. Harry wrapped an arm around both girls’ shoulders, and they all walked towards the arena where the tournament was being held.

It turned out they needn’t have worried about the time. When they got there, the trapeze artists and tightrope walkers who performed in the evening were busy trying to corner the green Diriclaws on the tightrope, causing a delay in the tournament.

Looking around for an empty seat, Harry spotted Sirius, Marlene, and Andi already in the stands. He grabbed the girls by the hand and led them over.

“Hey, shouldn’t you be helping?” Harry asked with a smirk and gesturing over his shoulder to the tightrope.

“I’m off duty,” Sirius said, rolling his eyes. “Besides, this is hardly the sort of thing you call in the MIB to handle.”

“Any idea how they got loose?” Dora asked.

“From what the performers said, a little girl tried to take one of the Krups from the petting zoo for a walk. The workers were so busy trying to bring them back they forgot to close the latch when they left,” Ted explained with a chuckle. “If I had heard that a couple of decades ago, I would’ve thought they were talking about Nymphadora.”

Harry and Jenna chuckled while Dora rolled her eyes.

"It could've been Harry," she said. "He was just as bad as I was."

"No," Ted said, shaking his head. "Harry was far worse. He'd have found a way to ride one of the Occamy around until someone called the state Aurors."

"Don't give him ideas," Andi muttered.

"Bonjour."

Harry turned and smiled as Fleur took the seat next to him, with Apolline and Gabrielle sitting on the other side of her. Predictably, Sirius went all starry-eyed when his eyes landed on Apolline, prompting Marlene to roll her eyes and elbow him in the ribs. Dora, meanwhile, scooted closer to Harry and took his hand in hers possessively.

"Hey, Fleur," he said. "Looks like our duel is delayed for a bit."

They both glanced up at the tightrope, where two walkers were slowly approaching the Diriclaw from either end. How they expected to grab a bird while holding balancing poles, he had no idea.

"Not long, I 'ope," Fleur said. "I want to visit ze city before we leave."

"Are you looking forward to the Triwizard Tournament?" Dora asked.

"Oui," she smiled prettily. "Are you?"

"I'm not going," Dora told her.

"Oh," Fleur said, looking genuinely disappointed.

“Some of the families in England aren’t too fond of me living,” Harry explained with a shrug.

“I understand,” Fleur nodded. “But it would ‘ave been nice to know someone from anoizzer school.”

“I’ll tell my friends to say hi when they get to Hogwarts,” Dora said.

“Merci,” Fleur smiled.

“Careful!” a man yelled, drawing their attention back to the tightrope. “Don’t hurt it.”

The tightrope walkers were just a few feet from the Diriclaw, who looked oblivious to their approach as it gazed around the arena with large yellow eyes. Suddenly, one of the performers dropped his balancing pole and leapt at the bird. It vanished with a *pop* and reappeared on Gabrielle’s lap. The performer crashed into his partner, knocking them both from the tightrope. As they fell, they were quickly caught by a witch and wizard on the ground.

“I think he likes you,” Harry said to Gabrielle.

The little girl beamed as she hugged the bird to her chest. Apolline said something to her in French and then sighed when she responded.

“She wants to keep it,” Fleur said in response to their curious looks.

Gabrielle pouted and stroked the feathers of the Diriclaw, who’d settled comfortably in her lap while her mother continued to talk to her in French. After a moment, she sighed and sat back in her seat with her arms folded under her breasts.

“What am I going to do wiz you?” she asked, shaking her head.

“It could be worse,” Andi said consolingly. “Harry came home with a Thunderbird when he was eight.”

Apolline and Fleur turned to blink at him in surprise. Harry shrugged.

“Nuts! Dragon roasted nuts, here!” a young man yelled, walking through the stands with a tray strapped to his chest.

“You got Butterbeer?” Harry asked.

“Yes, sir,” he nodded.

“I’ll take eight, two pumpkin juices, and a bag of nuts,” Harry said.

He paid the man, handed Jenna a pumpkin juice, passed out the Butterbeers to the other adults, and then gave Gabrielle the last pumpkin juice and the bag of nuts. The Diriclaw perked up at the smell. Grabbing a peanut from the bag, Harry fed it to the bird. Gabrielle giggled and started feeding it one at a time while he sat back with a smile.

Apolline sighed, “Now it won’t want to leave ‘er.”

Smiling unrepentantly, Harry toasted her with his Butterbeer and took a sip. Fleur chuckled while Dora shook her head at him fondly. As they waited for the tournament to get started, Jenna moved to sit next to Gabrielle so she could pet the Diriclaw. The bird tilted its head up and warbled when they scratched the feathers under its chin.

“Ah, there he is.”

A plump woman in a dark red robe smiled as she approached Gabrielle and Jenna.

“Thanks for taking care of him, girls,” she said kindly. “But I need to get him back to his cage now.”

Apolline quickly translated for Gabrielle. The little girl tried to argue but was shut down immediately by her mother. She looked on the verge of tears as she cradled the Diriclaw and handed it to the woman. The bird squawked loudly and disappeared, only to reappear back on Gabrielle’s lap an instant later. The woman stared at the Diriclaw in surprise while Gabrielle hugged it tightly and looked at her mother pleadingly. With a sigh, Apolline turned to the woman.

“Can we buy eet from you?” she asked.

The woman looked at her thoughtfully and pursed her lips.

“You have a place to keep him?” she asked. “Diriclaws needs a lot of room.”

“We have a vineyard een France,” Apolline told her.

Looking back at Gabrielle, the woman sighed and smiled.

“As long as you can promise me you’ll give him a good home, I’ll sell him to you,” she said.

“I promise she weel take very good care of ‘im,” Apolline promised.

The woman looked her over appraisingly for a moment and nodded.

“Ten Galleons,” she said.

While Apolline dug through her purse for her coins, Fleur smiled and spoke to her sister. Gabrielle squealed happily and hugged her mother, nearly causing her to drop her coins. Paying the woman, who gave the bird a farewell pat on the head and left, Apolline spoke to Gabrielle sternly.

“Ladies and gentlemen, witches and wizards!” The announcer called. “Now that the unexpected entertainment is over, it's time for the semi-finals of this year's International Dueling Tournament!”

The crowd cheered loudly, and Harry settled back in his seat, knowing there would be four duels before he and Fleur had theirs. First came the semi-finals for the under-sixteen bracket, which didn't take long. The duelists going into the finals were an Egyptian wizard and a witch from the Philippines. The semi-finals for the under-eighteen bracket took longer to finish. A Swedish witch won the first duel, while a wizard from Yemen won the second.

“Next up, the first semi-final for the under-twenty-one bracket, we have Harry Potter of the United States versus Fleur Delacour of France!” the announcer called.

“Good luck,” Sirius said, clapping his shoulder.

Smiling, Harry took one last sip of his Butterbeer, placed his thumb over the top, and then brought his bottle down sharply onto Sirius'.

“Git!” Sirius yelled.

The bottle began to foam rapidly as he snatched the bottle from the bench and placed his mouth over the top. He glared at Harry, who smirked and clapped him on the back as he got to his feet. Smiling at Fleur, the two of them made their way down to the arena.

“Kick is arse, Fleur!” Sirius yelled.

“Mr. Potter, Ms. Delacour, lovely to see you again,” Flitwick greeted them cheerfully. “Any questions before we begin?”

“I think we know how this works by now,” Harry replied while Fleur shook her head.

“Excellent,” Flitwick said. “Then bow, take your positions, and wait for my signal.”

Harry added a little flourish to his bow and gave Fleur a smile before turning around and walking ten steps away. He turned back around at the same time Fleur did. As their eyes met, the levity died rapidly. Harry’s muscles tensed, ready to react the moment Flitwick gave the signal to begin.

Red sparks burst overhead, and they started casting hexes and curses as fast as possible. Either Fleur had been holding back in their last duel, or she had gotten noticeably better over the last year. Her spells seemed to come fast and hit harder than he remembered. She was using a lot more area-affecting spells, too. Fortunately, Harry had studied up on those over the last year.

Suddenly, Harry spotted a minute opening. When he recognized the beginning of an Animation Charm, he used wandless magic to wrench her wand down while casting a Disarming Hex with his wand. To her credit, Fleur reacted seamlessly. Spinning gracefully out of the way of his hex, she canceled the charm that she’d cast at her own feet. The animated hay, which had just started crawling towards her like thousands of worms, stopped instantly. With narrowed eyes, she batted away his follow-up spell.

Harry could feel sweat dripping down his forehead as they continued to trade spells. When it came to offensive spells, Fleur was faster to the draw than he was, but his defense was nearly impenetrable. He’d spent long hours honing his shields and defensive tactics, unsure if he’d still be in a wheelchair. On the downside, her speed made it difficult to slip in attacks. Even when he did, they were more of a nuisance than anything. He just needed to find a way to unbalance her long enough to get off more than a spell or two at a time.

It was time to take a risk.

The next time Fleur tried to cast a hex, Harry again used his wandless magic to redirect the tip of her wand while casting a hex of his own. She was forced to defend, and it turned the tide for him to really start casting some offensive spells of his own. Despite casting as fast as he could, Fleur was still faster and could slip in the odd counter occasionally. Harry knew that if he used a shield, he'd be right back where he started, so he dodged everything she sent his way instead of blocking. There were several close calls where he felt spells speed past just millimeters from his skin, but he continued to press forward, looking for any opening that might end the duel.

That all worked great until Fleur used another Animation Charm that he couldn't dodge. Growling in frustration, he canceled the charm and backpedaled slightly as she rained down a rapid flurry of hexes and curses. As he defended, he cast his mind around for anything that might distract her long enough to give him the upper hand.

Then he noticed the hay and dirt piled around his feet from her repeated Animation Charms. With a grin, he thrust his left arm forward. A cloud of hay and loose dirt shot towards Fleur, who raised her arm to cover her eyes. Just before she was completely obscured from view, Harry wandlessly and grabbed her wand arm, holding it in place instead of redirecting the tip as he had before. At the same time, he unleashed a bright red Stunning Hex from his wand and watched in anticipation as it shot toward the spot where he knew Fleur was standing. The entire crowd gasped when it pierced the cloud of dust and fluttering hay.

And then Harry's wand was ripped from his hand.

He was so surprised by the Disarming Hex that hit him that he stumbled and fell on his back. Sitting up, he watched as the dust cleared, slowly revealing Fleur. She was crouched with one knee on the ground, her head just below the spot he'd cast his Stunning Hex at. A small, triumphant smirk sat on her lips as she held her wand aloft.

Her wand that now sat in her left hand.

"Stop!" Flitwick shouted. "Your winner, Fleur Delacour!"

The crowd erupted while Harry fell back with a groan and dropped his head painfully to the ground.

“Damn it,” he growled, slamming his fist down.

Getting his frustration under control, he sighed and climbed to his feet. As he walked back to the center of the arena, Fleur paused to retrieve his wand and handed it to him when they met.

“Great job,” Harry said, shaking her hand and taking his wand. “I guess I used that wandless trick one too many times.”

“Oui, but eet was close,” Fleur said, turning her head to the side. “You singed my ‘air.”

Harry snorted as he looked at the handful of shortened and burned hairs on the side of her head.

“Wonderfully done, both of you!” Flitwick said, excitedly bouncing on the balls of his feet. “I haven’t seen a duel like that in years!”

“Merci,” Fleur smiled.

Forcing a smile and giving the short man a respectful nod, Harry followed Fleur back to their seats.

“You were amazing,” Dora said, hugging him tightly.

Harry smiled as the others commented favorably on the duel despite his loss. Even Professor Wilkinson, who Harry hadn’t even noticed arrive, had little to say about it.

“Sometimes, you just need experience,” he said. “And in that, a loss will teach you far more than a win.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t like losing,” Harry grumbled, sipping his Butterbeer before turning to Fleur. “I still want another rematch, though.”

“You weel ‘ave to come to France,” Fleur shrugged. “I weel be too old to compete next year.”

“Deal,” Harry grinned. “I’ve always wanted to visit those topless beaches.”

Dora turned to glare at him, but he just continued to smile unrepentantly. Snorting, she smacked his chest lightly and laid her head on his shoulder.

“Perv,” she muttered.

“Yeah, but you still love me,” Harry said.

Smiling, Dora kissed his cheek as they settled in to watch the rest of the tournament.