

Return for Repairs

“Harry? Harry!”

Harry Potter shut his eyes and held his breath, listening with all his might.

“Harry James Potter, where are you?” His aunt’s voice had gone from actual calling to a tone of talking to herself, and Harry let his breath out in relief, missing the first part of whatever she said next. “...have you seen Harry?” he heard as his ears cleared.

“I saw him run outside,” his cousin answered, adding a few more bits to this initial explanation, but Harry had stopped listening at ‘outside.’ It guaranteed he wouldn’t be found any time soon.

And maybe when she does find me, she won’t be angry anymore. Or not hitting angry, anyway. Just yelling angry.

Though he was only four, Harry already had a complex and multi-layered system for classifying the various angers his relatives displayed. The lowest level was glaring angry. Moving up from there, you reached yelling angry, extra-chores angry, no-supper angry, and the highest level, hitting angry. Harry had only experienced it a few times in his life, generally for displays of what he’d heard referred to as ‘freakishness.’

But I don’t even know what I did. I just know I dropped the plate, and I didn’t want it to break—and it didn’t. It floated down to the floor, like it was a puff of cotton or a feather.

He’d looked up from the plate, sitting unbroken on the kitchen tiles, to the stunned faces of aunt and uncle, and he’d run as quickly as he could to the hiding place he’d found. It wasn’t perfect, but it would do. Especially with his cousin saying he’d gone outside.

Why would he say that? He saw me run past. He knows where I really went. Why did he lie?

“—our fault,” his uncle’s voice rang out clearly overhead, and Harry curled in on himself a little more, peering upwards as though he could see through the cellar ceiling and the floor of the kitchen above, where quick and impatient footsteps were now pacing. “We should have made it clearer to him from the beginning what the rules are here. We’ve failed somehow, it’s our fault, not his—”

“Or perhaps it’s neither of ours,” his aunt cut in. “Perhaps it’s *theirs* .” Her tone dripped anger, and Harry winced away, though he knew it wasn’t directed at him. “Those hideous excuses for people, though I say it as shouldn’t...”

“Hey!”

Harry whipped around. His cousin was on hands and knees between two stacks of boxes, grinning hugely. “Found you!” he crowed. “I knew you never went outside, I just said that to fool Mum!”

“You’re good,” Harry said, trying to decide whether he should smile back or try to act small and not worth hurting. Acting small won. “You fooled her real good.”

“Yeah, but it never lasts long.” The other boy crawled into the space beside Harry, taking up most of it, and looked around at the towers of boxes surrounding them. “How come you went and hid?”

Harry jerked his head towards the ceiling, where voices were rising in an angry duet.

His cousin scoffed. “They always yell,” he said. “They don’t mean anything by it. ‘Sides, they’re not angry at you. They’re angry at them.”

“Angry at them?” The idea went past madness and out the other side into a weird kind of sanity. “Because of... what I did?”

His cousin nodded, solemn as any judge. “They feel like they didn’t do a good enough job making you understand what you are,” he said. “What’s okay to do, and what’s not. So once they get done yelling, they’ll come find us, and—”

Harry gasped as a tingle passed through his body. His cousin shuddered, shaking his dark hair out of his face. “I hate when they do that,” he complained. “They could just call, they don’t have to use *magic* .”

“Boys?” came a deep, precise voice from somewhere in front of the boxes. The children so addressed froze.

“You can come out,” added a woman’s clear soprano, her posh accent not masking the deep concern in her tone. “Both of you.”

Harry and his cousin looked at each other for a moment, both indicating the little entryway to Harry’s hiding place with their index fingers. Then Harry swallowed, put his shoulders back, and crawled out from between the boxes. Danny followed him, dusting off his hands fastidiously as soon as he could stand up.

Why did you run away, Harry?" asked Uncle Russ, down on one knee to bring him more on a level with his son and his nephew. His black eyes, which could be cold and hard as stones, met Harry's green with nothing more than the honest question in them. "Were you afraid?"

Swallowing once more, Harry nodded.

"Danny, you must not lie," Aunt Cissy added from behind her husband, folding her arms at her son, who jutted his chin at her defiantly. "What if Harry had been hurt, or in trouble, and we couldn't find him because you had told us a fib?"

"I think that's enough scolding for now, love," said Uncle Russ, turning to look at his wife. "Though your mother's quite right," he added to his son, fixing him with a chill glare. "You are never to lie to us. Is that clear?"

"Mm-hmm," Danny mumbled, staring at the floor.

"Good," said Aunt Cissy, coming forward to stroke her son's hair, then turning to her nephew. "Harry," she said gently, sitting down on one hip in a graceful swish of robes. "You have no reason to be afraid now. What you did with the plate was not wrong."

"No, it was very right," Uncle Russ seconded. "You performed accidental magic, Harry, and we couldn't be happier to see it."

Harry stared open-mouthed at his relatives. "You like it?" he said tentatively. "Uncle Vernon always said—"

"That it was freakish?" Uncle Russ finished. "That you should be punished for it, even when you had no idea what it was or how to stop it?"

"Yeah," Harry admitted, looking away as the memories tried to come out and make him forget what was happening to him now. *I don't have to pay attention to you*, he told them fiercely. *What I can do isn't wrong, it's right, and I don't ever have to go back to Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia and Dudley—*

The memories wouldn't listen. They cackled with glee and ran over what Harry was saying, and he was caught, pulled into them—he drowned in a stream of dirty looks, angry shouts, and greasy pans, his head spun and his stomach cramped up with hunger, he dodged swipe after swipe until finally he tried to run, but strong arms caught and held him tight—he couldn't help it, he cried out in fear, and lowered his head in expectation of the blow—

But it never came. Instead there was a voice speaking his name, calmly and without anger. "Harry. Harry. Harry, open your eyes."

Harry pulled in one shaky breath and obeyed. Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon were nowhere to be seen, nor was Dudley.

And he's too big to hide.

The thought made him smile, and Aunt Cissy returned the expression from where he could see her around what he realized must be Uncle Russ' shoulder. Danny, sitting against his mother, fanned a hand to say hello.

"You belong to us now, Harry," Uncle Russ said quietly, his chest vibrating with the words, so that Harry both felt and heard what he was being told, and it was impossible to disbelieve. "You will never return to the Dursleys. You have my word, as an Evans and your mother's twin brother, that I will fight with everything I have to keep you from going back to that place."

"I would hardly sit idle either," said Aunt Cissy, her smile broadening, and Danny balled up his fists and made quick punching motions at the air to indicate that he, too, would fight for his cousin. "You are safe here, Harry." Her hand stroked his hair, as gently as earlier she had stroked Danny's, as lovingly. "You do not need to be afraid anymore."

Not afraid. Harry considered this. It had been a long time since he had been not afraid. He wasn't sure he knew what it felt like.

But I can try.

He rested his head against Uncle Russ' chest and shut his eyes again, feeling Aunt Cissy's hand continuing to try to smooth his hair, though he knew it was just springing back again behind her fingers. "What if something happens to you?" he murmured, thinking of his own parents. "Would I go back to the Dursleys then?"

"Not at all," said Uncle Russ, swiveling his legs around so that Harry was sitting in his lap. "You have both a godfather and a godmother who would take you in. You will meet them soon; they are married and have daughters, one your age, one a year younger."

Aunt Cissy laughed. "Perhaps a note of clarification," she said. "Your godparents aren't married to one another, Harry—they are half-brother and -sister, and both of them are my cousins. Danny is special friends with your godmother's daughter Neenie. Perhaps you and your godfather's daughter Pearl will become friends."

Harry nodded sleepily, though most of the words were now going past his ears without entering. He'd heard something about girls, which might be a problem if they were the kind who squealed about everything and thought boys were icky.

But if they belong to Aunt Cissy's cousins, they'll probably be all right. And Danny's friends with one of them already, that's good too.

"I have other friends who'd help if we needed them," volunteered Danny, his voice seeming to come from a long way off. "Magic friends, kids who'll be in our year, or just below like Pearl, when we go away..."

Go away where? Harry wondered, but he wasn't interested enough to go to the trouble of asking. After all, it wasn't like he wouldn't get another chance. He was here to stay.

Cradled in his Uncle Russell's arms, listening to his Aunt Narcissa and his cousin Daniel detail all the people he would meet and the things he would learn in the next weeks and months and years, Harry Potter drifted off to sleep, the wounds in his heart finally starting to heal.