

— and then over his shoulder, Sirius saw Tonks go down to a bolt of blue light, and Bellatrix turn in Harry's direction. The animagus jumped to cover his godson's back, the pair of them moving together. Malfoy tried to circle around, veering closer to the Veil, trying to find some way to separate the pair of them. The whole room could've been falling to shit around them and Sirius wouldn't have noticed, *couldn't* let himself notice, *couldn't* stop to think about anything but Harry and their opponents. The only thing that mattered was protecting James' boy. His pup.

Bellatrix cackled and shot some poor quip at him, but Sirius could only laugh and return a spell; she'd been mad before Azkaban and she was even madder now, but Sirius didn't fear her anymore; the only thing he could feel was pity. She was flagging, too, with blood soaking one arm of her robe and the hem charred, and Sirius wondered if she'd had the privilege of duelling Harry Potter yet.

"No!" Harry shouted suddenly, and Sirius whipped around just in time to see Harry *bat a spell away with his bare hand*, sending it ricocheting back at Malfoy. The blond man was so surprised he didn't have time to dodge, getting hit right in the stomach with his own magic. It knocked him backwards — right into the middle of the stone archway.

Sirius felt the instant it happened; the voices behind the Veil — the whispers of the dead — grew louder in his ears for a single horrible moment, and the room's temperature dropped. Then, with a look of astonishment etched on his face, Lucius Malfoy was gone. Another victim of the magic that no one understood.

All of a sudden, an ear-splitting scream rent the air. Bellatrix was staring wide-eyed at the space her brother-in-law had just occupied, fury building on her face. "No!" she screeched, and Sirius moved to protect Harry from her retribution. But she wasn't going after him — she was running up the stairs, skirts flying. She was aiming for the door.

Sirius looked to Harry, who was grey in the face. His scar stood out a livid red on his forehead. "He's coming," Harry rasped, and then he was off.

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Watching Draco's father fall into the strange, whispering veil seemed to take an age. Harry wasn't worried at first, more concerned with what the hell kind of wandless, wordless shield he'd managed without realising. He was preparing for Malfoy to get up and keep going — but he didn't. As soon as he touched the weird curtain, he was fading, falling through it like a portal to another place. He was gone in a moment, no sign of him on the other side.

Harry didn't have time to think about it too hard — Bellatrix screamed with rage, and then Harry's scar burst to life. He knew immediately what had happened; she had called her Master for back-up.

"He's coming," he warned Sirius, sprinting up the stairs, giving only a cursory glance around the rest of the room. He wasn't worried, not really; they'd been doing pretty well even before the Order had shown up, and Harry just hoped between Tonks and Kingsley the Death Eaters they'd incapacitated would actually stay captured. Of course, some weren't just unconscious; Harry hadn't asked his friends to kill, would never ask that of them, but he himself had no