

Harry grinned; even *Snape* thought of Seren Du as home, by now. “I can handle that, after all the laws I’ve read for Susan.” He was pretty confident he could write a contract without any loopholes.

“Then bring me the contract on Saturday. I’ll take care of the rest,” *Snape* assured, before pinching the bridge of his nose in frustration. “I’m not sure if Remus will be proud or disappointed that I’m aiding in your rule-breaking.”

A laugh burst from Harry’s throat. “It’s to piss off Umbridge, he’ll be delighted.” Sirius, too, would think it a fantastic idea.

*Snape* didn’t look entirely convinced, but he agreed all the same, then sent Harry off to Transfiguration, warning him to stay out of trouble for the next week.

“Really, it’s like he’s never *met* me,” Harry murmured to himself with a shake of his head, hands in his pockets as he walked. He couldn’t keep the grin off his face — his plan was all coming together.

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Sadly, his good mood only lasted as far as the end of lessons. After Herbology, Harry was walking across the grounds back to the castle with Neville and Hannah when a small white blob appeared in the sky, moving jerkily in Harry’s direction. Harry froze, heart leaping to his throat — it was Hedwig, and she was hurt.

The snowy owl flew awkwardly towards him, one wing set at a strange angle, a crumpled letter tight in her grasp. Instead of landing on Harry’s outstretched arm, she missed, flying with a soft thump straight into his chest.

“Sweet Helga!” Hannah exclaimed, hand flying to her mouth. “Is that your owl?”

“Is she okay?” Neville asked urgently. Harry ran gentle fingers over the malformed wing, heart clenching when Hedwig flinched visibly.

“I don’t know. I think it might be broken.” He eased the letter out of her claws. It was a thick one, still sealed, though that didn’t mean much with magic. When he looked, there was blood speckling the envelope. Panic flooded him — but there was no blood matting Hedwig’s white feathers.

There was, however, blood on her talons.

“I need to get her to Grubbly-Plank,” Harry said, looking up in the direction of Hagrid’s cabin. The woman may teach outside, but she lived in the castle, as far as he knew. To his relief, he could see her walking up from the edge of the forest.

Not waiting for Neville and Hannah, Harry tore off in her direction. “Professor! Professor!” She turned at his call, brow furrowing.

“Potter? What is it? What’ve you got there?”